

The Courage to Create the Future

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“Many good, honest people gradually lose their professional trustworthiness because they allow themselves to become ‘obsolete’ ... in their choices and decisions.” -- Stephen R. Covey [1]

Recently, I was asked to support the sports medicine initiatives to accredit fitness professionals. I cannot say yes to the request and yes to exercise physiology. I cannot say yes to the future of my students and yes to non-exercise physiology students. It does not make sense. For one thing, it is inconsistent with straight thinking. For another thing, I cannot do it because it is wrong. What I have learned is that the future of exercise physiology does not exist within sports medicine, and there is no short cut to this understanding. It is the result of a decade of reflection. To create our own future, we must start from within the context of our own organization, not from where someone else is or even from where we have been.

ASEP exists for its members. Its only purpose is the professional development of exercise physiology. This includes the education of its members. Professionalism requires the study of “professional development”. Exercise physiologists can no longer escape this point. Moreover, it is no longer logical or right to continue within the sports medicine network of diverse professionals. Without going overboard, working to build our own profession is the obvious need today. Very simply, it is also a matter of integrity. Some get it. Others do not for fear of what it may mean to how they see themselves as exercise physiologists.

The problem of course is that a purely intellectual pursuit of one’s work on the backs of students makes no sense. This is however exactly the case with many college teachers. Their reality of placing research over the lack of accredited programs must be challenged. Research is important, but the education of students must come first. If exercise physiologists ignore this point and allow the research process to drive the college environment, they will soon realize that what they do and what they have become are not founded on a moral foundation. The failure to speak up is keeping many exercise physiologists from living a better professional life. To those who do not understand my position, I wish it were otherwise. To those who are comfortable with their place at work, I would hope that they would stop and think about the injustice to their students.

“Leaders in exercise physiology must learn to think for themselves. Taking responsibility is the true measure of success.” -- Tommy Boone

It is simply the truth, however painful. Doing nothing to improve the students' academic conditions is foolish and, most certainly, dangerous and non-heroic. It is better to ask what each of us can do for all members of exercise physiology; a sense of service is urgently needed. It is better to be courageous than to give up on what we can become and, in fact, it is the ultimate measure of each of us. Our destiny lies in serving our students and in our commitment at a level that is nothing but just and right. To not acknowledge this view is a coward's escape from the work that must be done to stop the educational waste of our non-accredited academic programs going nowhere.

"If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there." -- Anonymous

One road will get us where we need to go. That road is accreditation, but exercise physiologists are not engaging the ASEP accreditation steps as fast as they should. All a person can ask is why? Where is their moral compass? Academic majors that are not exercise physiology are totally unacceptable if students are encouraged to think they can graduate as exercise physiologists. They cannot compete successfully for jobs, titles, and financial stability. People may argue that this is not the academic exercise physiologist's problem. They are wrong. It is our problem, and it needs correcting. Acting upon this truth is a deep necessity for many reasons. Most importantly, when someone steals another's education by failing to ensure the quality of the education, that person is a thief even if he or she is a college teacher.

"Some observers look at the ASEP organization. Some followers join it. And some leaders take charge and lead it. Exercise physiology is your profession. What role do you want to play." -- Tommy Boone

College teachers are responsible to their students. This is true for medical professors and their students as it is true for physical therapy teachers and their students. The fact is that it is not true for students who believe they are going to be exercise physiologists while majoring in exercise science or personal training. We must deal with these differences in a logical and rational manner. They are not coincidence. They did not happen by chance. Instead, they resulted from rooting out the very real beliefs that are different from one another. This is one of several lessons we have failed to study or take serious in recent decades. No one should undertake an education to be a slave to its failures. And, it is increasingly acknowledged that this is exactly the case with kinesiology majors or one of a dozen other majors with a concentration in exercise science.

"You don't have to know baseball to grasp the difference between hardball and softball." – Thomas A. Stewart [2]

It is embarrassing to have reached this point of seemingly not knowing the difference between exercise science and exercise physiology. In times of stress, people may communicate through emotion and attitude. I am trying to exercise patience and share my feelings through words. Understandably, my words are at times a difficult perspective for some of my colleagues. This does not mean that I am indifferent to their feelings and their reality. Life is defined by many choices. I am hopeful that in time my written word will communicate the sense of concern my students face. Perhaps the power to distinguish between yesterday's thinking and what we must do to survive will be found in the selfless service of the leadership of

the American Society of Exercise Physiologists. They are doing everything possible to keep their promise to the ASEP members.

“Talk is general little more than just that. Doing something good is more than talk. It is all about courage.” -- Tommy Boone

It takes courage to question status quo. Too often we make light of honest and open judgments by individuals who see the need to change their reality. ASEP has taken the initiative. Its leadership is doing everything to make a difference. Members of the organization represent the true opportunity to bring about real and meaningful change from within each of us. ASEP is not about one person's philosophy. It is about what we must do together. Collectively, we must create our own future. Either we understand this point or we will fail to make a difference in a timely fashion. The future of exercise physiology depends on what we believe and what we do as exercise physiologists. It is a matter of justice. It is about integrity, and it is about playing hardball. Meaning, we must stop shying away from telling the truth about our competitors. There is nothing wrong with the Southwest Airlines advertisement: “We came. We saw. We kicked tail.” [2] Similarly, it would be naïve to think that our feelings, thoughts, and beliefs are not important as well. We need to kick some tail.

We cannot keep making the same mistakes. We must know our friends as well as our competitors. Personally, I'm tired of apologizing and making excuses for our academic side of the house. Parents are getting the message, too. They are asking important questions about job opportunities in exercise physiology. We must join together as a community of professionals with a commitment to change and improve exercise physiology. It is the only way to go forward into the future as professionals. We must learn to live by the principles of professionalism just as other healthcare professionals are doing. This thinking is inevitable. We can no longer avoid the fact that our students' education is inferior to physical therapy and nursing programs.

There is a point at which continuing with the past way of thinking ceases to be smart or valued. We are at a serious crossroad. None of us want to forget our past, but we know that our past thinking cannot control how we think today. Whatever we do to learn the value of a long-term perspective about the future, we do to exercise physiology and ourselves. This is relevant to the way we perceive our reality. No longer as exercise technicians or exercise specialists, we live with hope for a better future. We have something non-exercise physiologists do not have. We have our own specialized body of knowledge, standards of practice, code of ethics, accreditation, and board certification. The infrastructure is in place. It is much easier now to teach the professional development of exercise physiology than it was before ASEP.

“Exercise physiologists ought to learn from exercise physiologists.
But a fool at times tries to learn from non-exercise physiologists.” --
Tommy Boone

The ASEP leadership has been relentless in helping students. Look at what they have accomplished in six years. The ASEP home page is a discourse around a constellation of professional accomplishments. All elements of professionalism are connected. Our greatest strength is our conviction. Our greatest weapon is our commitment. No other organization or society can take from us our right to the ASEP vision or our caring, courage, and conviction to create and manage our own academic programs. All are important reasons why we were able to discover

ourselves in 1997. And, it is clear that we have the means that are necessary and appropriate for the professional improvement to communicate to others that we are a healthcare profession. From our faith, therefore, we seek to provide hope and strength to all exercise physiologists who are tired of suffering and confusion, and who are ready to communicate with others our drive for self-management.

“Success is not a secret. It is hard work and commitment.” --
Tommy Boone

The sports medicine future does not belong to those who are exercise physiologists. ASEP is the future of exercise physiology. To those who do not understand the priorities set by ASEP, there is the tension that must be resolved if exercise physiologists are to be brave, at peace with themselves, strong, and vibrant as a profession. Sometimes we call it a win/win solution whereby competing organizations feel good. This is not the case at the present time with sports medicine and ASEP. To achieve this would have required sports medicine to acknowledge the right of ASEP to exist. Unfortunately, the documented history of attempts to work together details the sports medicine view to dictate how ASEP should operate.

This failure to exercise the fundamentals of change has resulted in members of both organizations held almost as if they were prisoners of their own history. The only thing members of ASEP can offer sports medicine is our hope and our absolute expectation to do everything possible in defense of all exercise physiologists to their right and power on behalf of a problematic and starved education. ASEP is doing what it can with whatever resources available to it to hold up a better vision of the future for our students. The ASEP vision is worth fighting for, regardless of the prejudice. It was born out of necessity, and it will survive out of conviction and courage.

“Many exercise physiologists don’t know what to think about ASEP, but they know what they want – because they are tired of what they have got.” -- Tommy. Boone

Remember this: Be strong and know that if you are a member of ASEP you are doing the right thing. Don’t forget why you joined ASEP. Don’t let others think for you and, most certainly, don’t allow discouragements to get to you. Keep your mind tuned to the future. Nobody ever truly understands great ideas and new opportunities until after they are fixed and grounded in tradition, and ASEP is no different. Hence, when faced with the obvious alternatives (i.e., personal training, sports medicine, or strength and conditioning), it is such a pity not to choose the right one – ASEP! Through ASEP we can build our students’ self-esteem. We can inspire them to go for greatness in the healthcare field just as other professionals have encouraged their own students. We can help them understand that ASEP will never wither away. We will never be satisfied until we are able to help all our students compete more successfully with other healthcare students.

“If you heart is in it, the work is an act of love.” -- Tommy Boone

ASEP is the only way to find out our true potential in the world of healthcare. Moreover, even in its short existence, it has withstood the test of criticism. It has ventured closer to the center of “what is exercise physiology” than anything before it. Is the ASEP organization good for its members? Will students benefit directly from its initiatives? There are numerous ways to answer these questions. The aim in this editorial is to offer hope of success. Will the actions of ASEP benefit students? Of course

It will. Has the organization inflicted some challenges on other organizations? Yes, of course it has. How do you become a major organization without playing hardball? Therefore, be optimistic about our future. It is not impossible to change it. We have done just that since we have assumed accountability for what we are and what we want to be as exercise physiologists.

This is an unalterable fact. It is also our peace even though some exercise physiologists under the guidance of sports medicine don't get it. Why they don't it is still a troubling issue for me. But, what is obvious is that their lowballing has failed to deconstruct ASEP.

"Knowledge, passion, and conviction are everything." – Tommy Boone

I've been told that knowledge and passion can devastate a competitor. I have come to believe that this is true while trying to understand the day-to-day decisions of other academic teachers. I want to know their concerns and how they think. After all, I'm a college teacher too. What I've come to believe is that no profession can prosper until it learns to care for its young. We cannot avoid the challenge of becoming professional exercise physiologists and we should not try by holding on to our past thinking. I firmly believe that we are our most endangered species if we don't look to ASEP for guidance. A friend of mine said it best: "The only solution is ASEP." She also said, "If the college teachers would wake up to their students' distress, and if they would reach out to the ASEP infrastructure, then none of our struggles is insurmountable." The choice today is no longer between our past and the future. It is entirely about "today" and how we individually and collectively seek to provide hope and strength to all those who seek exercise physiology as a healthcare profession.

"It is not the organization per se. It is the leadership in the organization." -- Tommy Boone

Understandably, none of us individually is in a position to change the world of exercise physiology without help from others or to change the entire face of academics without help from the college professors, but we are able to do certain important things as long as we wake up to the reason (i.e., as long as we put foundations under our academic thinking, and as long as we proclaim before the world that we are fully in charge of our profession). Ultimately we must learn to think as exercise physiologists to behave as exercise physiologists. Some sports medicine exercise physiologists might recoil, if not squirm, at this basic point. As we learn to unleash our strengths and force for change, others will learn to leave us alone. Admittedly, it is a strangely paradoxical situation. Yet, it is clearly something special for those who celebrate in knowing their state of mind. This mental balancing act is critical to professionalism. It is taking responsibility for our students so that we can end up where we want to be. My optimism rests in my belief that we will do the right thing for the right reason.

"When we start acknowledging our problems, we will overcome them." -- Tommy Boone

References

1. Covey, S.R. (1992). *Principle-Centered Leadership*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
2. Stewart, T.A. (2004). *Winning Attitudes*. From the Editor. *Harvard Business Review*. 82:4:10.