

Leadership

Encouraging the Change Process

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

Professor and Chair

Department of Exercise Physiology

The College of St. Scholastica

Duluth, MN 55811

We do not accept things as they are, but rather
anticipate things as they can be.

– Warren Bennis

Why are so few exercise physiologists talking about leadership today? Could it be that so few want to be leaders? Or, perhaps, exercise physiologists do not have the desire to be effective leaders. Whatever the reason may be, there is a crisis of leadership in exercise physiology. Good leaders understand that leadership is more than doing research. It is about selfless service [1] to exercise physiology. So in a nutshell, to be an ASEP exercise physiologist is to communicate the ASEP vision [2] of where exercise physiology needs to go:

1. To be recognized as the leading professional organization of American scholars and practitioners in the study and application of exercise physiology to fitness, health promotion, rehabilitation, and sports training.
2. The Society is dedicated to unifying all exercise physiologists in the United States and worldwide to promote and support the study, practice, teaching, research, and development of the exercise physiology profession.
3. Through proactive and creative leadership, the Society empowers its members to serve the public good by making an academically sound difference in the application of exercise physiology concepts and insights.

To ensure that the ASEP vision becomes reality, exercise physiologists must continually improve upon their thinking about professionalism and professional development. Nothing about today is the same as it was 10 or 20 years ago. The 21st century is a new age. Making sound and timely decisions on behalf of all exercise physiologists is imperative. Thus, a sense of professional responsibility must be learned and developed. Setting the “example” is not easy, although it is critical to convincing colleagues to join ASEP. Then, ultimately, by setting high standards of practice, professional values empower exercise physiologists who embrace a shared expectation and self-image.

The Choice is Clear

Either exercise physiologists forget the old ideas or they don't. John Maynard Keynes said it similarly, “The hardest thing is not to get people to accept new ideas; it is to get them to forget old ones.” That is the key point, isn't it? During the 20th century the focus was on performing good research. In the 21st century the focus is on

professionalism. Exercise physiologists are living on the cusp of the transition between two ages. The 21st century ASEP view of exercise physiology is substantially different from the sports medicine view. Hence, today's view of exercise physiology is a radical shift from what it was 30 or 40 years ago.

Change is always letting go and taking on a new perspective. It isn't staying the same for sure. Exercise physiologists must be willing to leave some things behind them so they can embrace their future. Think for a moment about the following questions:

1. Will exercise physiologists become the architect of change within their own profession?
2. Will they become advocates of their professional organization?
3. Will they continue to allow the hierarchy within sports medicine to influence exercise physiology?
4. Will they accept themselves, acknowledge their problems, and rely on their own intellect and skills?
5. Will they accept that exercise science is a broken record and that sports medicine has no business acting like an exercise physiology organization?

Exercise physiologists need answers to these questions. They need to sell the ASEP vision, and they need to declare to others they know where they are going. Members need the big picture. They need confidence in leaders, especially in leaders who are committed to the work of the professional organization.

While the behavior of the ASEP leaders exemplifies their commitment to sustain the ASEP organization, and to facilitate the professionalism of exercise physiology, where are the academic leaders in exercise physiology?

Why aren't they influenced by the needs of their students for job security, promotion, raises, and approval of their colleagues? Is it because the gatekeepers [3] are professors and they have a secure job with good salary and work conditions? Is it because they are not working in gyms and rehabilitation programs?

Perhaps, not until the professors take the time to evaluate the non-doctorate jobs will they understand the problems students face at graduation. This is why leaders are important to any profession. Conditions that seem of little importance to professors might actually be extremely important to others. Leaders understand this point. Among other qualities that help to define leaders, they have empathy for others and, therefore, are poised to develop ways to improve the conditions, which begs the question: "When was the last time a professor called to ask about job conditions?" Of course the answer is "never." Not in my nearly 40 years of college teaching have I heard of a professor calling recent graduate students to get their reaction to the job and/or if he or she could do anything to make the work conditions better.

Key Point

Leaders can become victims of their own success, which can keep them trapped in a past way of thinking. As a result, they often define reality by outdated measures.

ASEP is a Vision for Change

Leaders can help the change process by changing the employees' attitude towards exercise physiologists. Change does not have to be a complicated or a disruptive process. It does not have to be feared if there are leaders to help along the way. The idea that "we are in this together" assumes that there are leaders to help with every step. It assumes that there are professors and others who are passionate about the ASEP organization and professional development. It assumes "shared power" for all the obvious reasons. Exercise physiologists need leaders to help with unlearning the old habits of sports medicine, but where are they?

1. Do they think the ASEP organization is going to destabilize exercise physiology?
2. Do they fear their security will be lost?
3. Do they fear that they will not understand the new exercise physiology?
4. Do they fear change because it is likely to influence their social networks, self-respect, personal rewards, and career?

Whatever the reason may be, professional development and job enrichment requires change. It adds depth, control, accountability, and enlargement upon what exercise physiologists do in the public sector. This is why those who avoid change should be identified and encouraged to change, however long it may take. Otherwise, they will always be in the position of delaying the inevitable. Remember, everything the ASEP leaders are doing today represents change that is a journey of decades, not a few years. This understanding helps those who are leading, especially when the change process seems to have come to a stop. Remember, it is the outcome that the ASEP leaders are interested in achieving. In time, all exercise physiologists will be Board Certified professionals, and in time they will understand their Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice.

Nothing about this thinking is easy. Everyone is always inclined to fight change. This is also why exercise physiology needs more leaders. There must be growth in thinking like a healthcare professional and therefore, in the self-actualization of every exercise physiologist to embrace the ASEP organization. Ask yourself this question: "What is it that exercise physiologists do today that will have profound consequences that will reach far into the 21st century?" It is within this thinking and the struggle that exercise physiologists must enter the uncharted depths of leadership. No longer is it logical that exercise physiologists fail to set aside adequate time to acknowledging that change begins with leaders themselves.

Major Tasks of 21st Century EPCs

The major tasks of the 21st century academic exercise physiologist are to deconstruct the barriers and structures of the sports medicine way of thinking. They must alert their students to the simple fact that exercise science is not exercise physiology, and the implications of changing how they think. They must establish an academic safety net by updating related majors and/or concentrations to an accredited exercise physiology status. They must demonstrate their personal and professional engagement and support of the

ASEP organization to create and celebrate sooner rather than later the reality of a unified professionalism in exercise physiology. The reality is this:

Leadership begins with thinking and talking about issues and concerns that define the need to act.

In face of the fact that everyone is overextended emotionally and physically, exercise physiologists must think about committing themselves to the ASEP organization. This is why it is important to write about exercise physiology professionalism. Communication is imperative if exercise physiologists are to understand the need for a balance between research and professional development. Discovering what is important to the success of students who major in exercise physiology is the first step to authentic leadership. Otherwise, what is the point? Far too many students graduate without the motivation and discipline to stay in the field. They fail to see what is needed to be successful. But, of course, students are not to blame. They are inspired by the integrated application of exercise physiology to mind-body health, rehabilitation, and athletics.

This is why most students believe the problem is with their professors! They believe college teachers are responsible for maintaining a big view of the world, that teachers are responsible for discerning the challenges and obstacles, and facilitating the transition to a

new way of thinking. This is also the current thinking of the ASEP leadership. Foremost among these points is the concept that the faculty is in charge or, ultimately, they should be.

Key Point

Time is an essential constituent of the change process. Today, action in one academic setting has an effect tomorrow or next year in another university somewhere across the U.S.

College teachers have the ability to inspire students. They know how to stretch, challenge, and help their students to learn. All they need to do is discern the challenges and the chaos that centers directly upon the exercise science

degree. In fact, it is more than reasonable to conclude that a good teacher is one who sees and understands the need for change and who is more than willing to discern the direction of the change. Translating this thought just for a moment, can anyone actually believe exercise physiology can grow as a healthcare profession from within the generic organization of ACSM? No, of course not, undergraduate students at St. Scholastica in Duluth, MN understand this point. They know it is vital to adapt to the ASEP perspective. They get the ASEP leaders are simply describing the change in a way that allows for the professional development of exercise physiologists.

Teacher-Student Relationship

After all, what is the “minimum weekly professional requirement” for the average professor? Is it enough to do a good job of teaching? How about research or service? Is that all we can expect from professors? Those who have personal and/or professional

interests in something other than caring for students (i.e., helping them secure financially and professionally credible careers) are not leaders. In this new era of healthcare professions, leaders understand the undercurrents and signposts of credibility. They know their students cannot be successful in the public sector without a credible professional organization. They know that over dependence on a generic organization will only prevent them and their students from changing. Call it intuitive or whatever, it is simple rational thought that defines the path of change.

Of course, there are many goals for attending college. One, in particular, given the high tuition costs today, is that the student's education should play a big role in getting a credible job after graduation. Furthermore, while there are no 100% promises of getting a great job after getting college degree, the academic major should certainly facilitate and not distract from a new and positive life after college. Presently, the exercise science and related degrees are keeping recent graduates from getting good jobs. That's the simple truth of the matter. Hence, when professors fail to tell the truth about academic majors such as "exercise science" or "sports sciences," the students' euphoria and their parents' expectations are illusory.

The ASEP leaders keep their eyes fixed on the work of professionalism. They understand that the refusal of the gatekeepers to support ASEP just makes the change process longer. That's why they are focused on the journey of a new profession. It is this pursuit of the "right thinking" that comforts them in building the ASEP infrastructure of change.

By now it is obvious that professors who want to lead must be honest and trustworthy when talking about academic majors. This view is not just the right thing to do, it is rightfully believed at work in all professions. It is how members of the professions shape the trends and thinking that influences who they are and what they do. Understandably, this kind of thinking is new, if not radical, for exercise physiologists who teach exercise science courses. Most think of themselves as researchers. Some think of themselves as "physiologists." Here again, such thinking is disturbing for obvious reasons.

Distractions Don't Help

It is unfortunate that many non-academics, especially those who work in cardiac rehabilitation, think that they have the qualifications to define the primary responsibilities of college professors. They know who they are. Not only is the 21st century a great time for them to understand that exercise physiology is more than cardiac rehabilitation, the growth of a profession is endless. That's why the ASEP leadership has developed a comprehensive definition of exercise physiology. The good old days are gone. Why not refer to the ASEP Internet Home Page and read the definition?

Members of both views represent a network of colleagues that continually speak against the matters of professionalism communicated by the leadership of the American Society of Exercise Physiologists. Their disagreements are often difficult to take and provide little to no direction in future discussions. The ASEP leaders continue to do what they

can by nurturing and keeping an open dialogue to draw more into the ASEP community of exercise physiologists.

Contemporary thinking about the professionalism of exercise physiology outstrips the continued talk about fitness professionals and personal trainers. Evidence of making a difference in the lives of students cannot be determined by accrediting non-career driven degrees. Fortunately, because the sports medicine network is outside of the meaningful changes that have taken place in exercise physiology since the founding of the ASEP organization its influence is less engaging than it used to be. Many non-doctorate exercise physiologists are no longer comfortable with the comments and behaviors of some non-ASEP academic gatekeepers. They understand that the continued pursuit of research at the expense of developing a credible profession is driven by behavior (if not a vision) that doesn't benefit the whole of exercise physiology. Students also understand the problems that associate with would-be leaders. This is why they trust the ASEP leadership and believe their work is an authentic effort to commit to a positive and shared development of exercise physiology. This growing sense of exercise physiologists coming to terms with ASEP is expected. Others are realizing that it comes from the heart of the ASEP leaders.

John's Story

This successful building of the infrastructure of professional development does not mean that the "crisis of leadership" within exercise physiology is no longer a problem. The crisis is real, and it will be for decades to come. In some sense, this is healthy and energetic way of changing. However, the leaders are quick to point out that the responsibility for professionalism and authenticity belongs to every exercise physiologist. This is exactly why this article is important. John, for example, a recent graduate of a major university with a degree in exercise science, spoke recently of his feelings about the deception and emotional impact of failed leadership at his University.

When I think about my earliest contacts with faculty members in the Department of Exercise Science, I remember being very excited. As you might imagine, I was a freshmen on campus. Everything was new and exciting. I met with the Chair of the Department first. Then, I met with an exercise physiologist. I asked about jobs and salaries. Everyone I talked to had good things to say about the major. I was convinced that the degree was as good as majoring in physical therapy or nursing. It was not until after graduation that I realized I had made a mistake. Even though I had done an internship, there were no jobs from which I could make enough money to pay my college loans. My parents were not happy. I was not happy. All I could think about was the conversations I had with the Department Chair and the faculty. It never occurred to me that I was given misinformation.

After speaking with John (and, frankly, countless others like him), I rededicated myself to a deeper reflection and specificity about exercise physiology. His goals at graduation were never realized. His parents' opinion of the University and the exercise physiology faculty is dramatically different from what it was years earlier. They believe the exercise physiologists failed to pay faithful attention to their son's questions. Ironically, the parents are professional counselors. With good reason, they are not comfortable with the communication between their son and the faculty. As an exercise physiologist, I agree with the parents. Had the Chair of the Department of Exercise Science and/or the exercise physiologists communicated an accurate view of the job opportunities with a degree in exercise science, John would have selected a different major.

Key Point

Academic gatekeepers need to get out of the sports medicine foxhole and support ASEP.

Because John believed he was given the correct information, he did not stop to think about career options until after he graduated. This is not an uncommon result. In fact, it is happening all across the United States. The Chair and faculty have a responsibility to the students. Both failed John and his parents, which raises ethical concerns. Regardless of

how the reader may feel about this point of view, those who represent the University system are expected to tell the truth. At no time can their behavior or communication with students be less than ethical. This view should not come as a surprise to anyone. Other professionals are held to the same standards. They, too, understand the need to do the right thing for the right reason. This is why the Chairperson and the exercise physiologist should have communicated the truth about the exercise science degree.

Leadership is Essential

There is a growing feeling that the root of professionalism is founded in trustworthiness. The ability to relate to others with truth and honesty is imperative. As strange as it might sound, some academics do not get it. If only the faculty understood the importance of looking beyond their own self-interests, they could help students obtain better careers in health, fitness, rehabilitation, and athletics. This is not news, but somehow too many academics have forgotten the reason students go to college. Those who do get it have the foresight to explore academic and career opportunities that lead to progress in exercise physiology. Academic gatekeepers need to get out of the sports medicine foxhole and support ASEP. Leadership is what the ASEP leaders and members do together for the collective good of all exercise physiologists [4].

Professors should help students understand the key role professional organizations play in transformational change. ***They should help students understand that it is okay to challenge the status quo, create new thinking, and challenge the basic assumptions about sports medicine. They should help students grasp the new career possibilities in the public sector, not the same old, stale, and lifeless jobs in gyms.*** But, none of this in many academic settings is the case today. The failure to declare something better is in itself a statement of the faculty's lack of understanding that the "old way" of sports medicine is no longer right for exercise physiology.

Unfortunately, when the gatekeepers have become accustomed to their system of operating, the system itself begins to support their behaviors, likes, and dislikes. The system therefore draws their energy and desire away from the change that is so desperately needed. Also, this outcome stems from the fact that doctorate programs fail to communicate a shared history, steps, and/or understanding of professional development. Hence, only a few members of the academy are willing to commit to this understanding, which is a problem for two reasons. First, it suggests a huge lack of awareness that should have been self-evident among college professionals. Second, it requires a level of thinking that goes beyond the sports medicine way of thinking that, again, should be self-evident among exercise physiologists. To continue to ignore these points, to disregard the fundamentals of professionalism, and fail to appreciate its importance is a crisis in leadership.

Academic Accountability

Listen to another graduate's comments about her exercise science degree: "Instead of exercise physiologists declaring they will develop a credible academic degree in exercise physiology that is accredited by the professional organization of exercise physiologists, they continue with the exercise science degree. Instead of having financial value and respect, the degree is meaningless. Instead of benefiting from 4 years of college, I wasted my time and money. Someone should be held accountable." The Chairperson, faculty, and the University administrators should be held accountable. The lack of leadership is a compelling reason for declaring an academic crisis. Those in charge must be able to envision a future with credibility and hope, or otherwise what is the point of the academic degree? This is why the ASEP leaders know where they are going. They are defining the future and the changes necessary to realize it:

They see academic degrees in exercise physiology that are accredited by The Center of Exercise Physiology. They see exercise physiology faculty who are members of the American Society of Exercise Physiologists. They see credible and financially viable careers in exercise physiology. They see exercise physiologists as board certified healthcare professionals who are held accountable to a code of ethics and standards of practice. In addition to existing careers in health, fitness, rehabilitation, and athletics, they see exercise physiologists as owners of healthcare clinics. They see exercise physiologists engaged in the use of exercise as therapy in the prevention or postponement of mind-body conditions that shorten life or its quality.

Sustaining the Change

It is clear that the founding of the ASEP organization resulted from deeply personal concerns for students and exercise physiology. This is a large difference between sports medicine and ASEP. The former was conceived for entirely different reasons. That is

why the ASEP organization and its leaders should be embraced and trusted. Their willingness to define exercise physiology and to ask other exercise physiologists to get involved in the ASEP organization is a declaration of their commitment. Naturally, they knew there would be reservations. And, they knew that there would be mistakes made along the way. But, clearly, anyone who takes the time to study the challenges of developing a new organization and a new way of thinking about exercise physiology knows that it is not an easy task or without mistakes. Few leaders will have all the details worked out at the beginning, which is why the following comments by a member of the ASEP Board of Directors are important:

Last week, I spoke to a college class about the American Society of Exercise Physiologists. The students were respectful of my comments as were the faculty in attendance. I talked about why it is important to change from exercise science to exercise physiology degree-programs, and that the ASEP leaders were not infallible. Mistakes do happen, but that the leadership is committed to the professional development of exercise physiologists. I also talked about values, respect, and trust between students and the faculty. As change-agents, we have not only learned from others but have a deep passion to ensure the professional success of our students. I expressed concerns regarding, “Who’s in charge of exercise physiology, the gatekeepers or the ASEP leadership?” and “Those who share the values and feelings of the ASEP leadership need to get involved; commitment from students, teachers, and administrators is imperative. Each one of us is an agent of change. This means each one of us must measure up to the work that is ahead. We can expect to share small changes, failures, strategies, and new knowledge and, when all is said and done, we will come out on top.

Membership is Critical

There is a head at the body of exercise physiology, and it is the American Society of Exercise Physiologists. However, I think a colleague’s comment during a recent phone call makes a lot of sense. He said, “The simple truth is that the head needs a body that is strong and committed. Without members, the head is just a symbol.” His comment rings a note of truth, thus raising the question however hard it is to imagine: “What does it take to succeed in getting a larger body of committed members?” To put it another way, where are the leaders outside of the ASEP organization on behalf of exercise physiology? What are they waiting for? Is it strength to confront the setbacks and challenges? Is it the lack of passion or hope that they can make a difference? Yet, regardless of size, age, and position, each person can make a difference. The path of leadership begins with a

vision, then, an allegiance to a professional organization, and thus the basics of change is then well underway.

The crisis can be confronted with self-discovery and time to learn. No one is in position to dictate how exercise physiologists will succeed. All anyone can do is to give to others what he or she knows has worked along the way. Of course encouragement from those who have assumed leadership positions is always helpful, too. Everyone should know that to change how colleagues think and feel about who they are and what they do requires courage and conviction. Here, it is critical that members promote their interaction with each other. That they spend time resolving issues and concerns, and that come to respect each others likes and dislikes as well as they ways of enhancing the professionalism of exercise physiology. Understanding these basic elements of leadership and interactive behaviors of professionals is important to leading others and inspiring trust in the profession. What is true for leaders also is that they must accept that they are leaders, and that they are responsible for creating their own professional existence. Warren Bennis [5] said it best:

“...we have the means within us to free ourselves from the constraints of the past, which locks us into imposed roles and attitudes. By examining and understanding the past, we can move into the future unencumbered by it. *We become free to express ourselves, rather than endlessly trying to prove ourselves.*”

Dare to Think Differently!

Just the idea of becoming free to express our desires is a huge mental obstacle for people. Exercise physiologists are no different when it comes to the likelihood of making a mistake along with the difficulty of sharing. No one wants to be accused of having made the wrong decision. As a result, it is always safer not to do anything or it seems that this is better approach. Here again, Bennis has a great response to this point. He says that leaders with whom he talked to “...believe in the necessity of mistakes, they see them as virtually synonymous with growth and progress.” This means that making mistakes is a normal byproduct of growth. No one should be compelled not to work on behalf of the ASEP organization out of fear of failure. If something does not work, then try something else. Letting the leader inside of you emerge is part of the failure-to-success story that is always new and changing.

Unless exercise physiologists are willing to step up to the plate and take some hits from colleagues and unless they are willing to take risks on behalf of exercise physiology as a healthcare profession, they will not be leaders. However, this will not stop those who dare to think differently. And, yet even with their help, the lack of everyone getting involved will prolong meeting new challenges in exercise physiology. Again, it will not stop change that is relentlessly driven by passion, reason, flexibility, and strategic thinking. It will not stop the ASEP leaders from pursuing the ASEP vision and market

niche. In other words, the gatekeepers cannot stop the ASEP leaders from realizing the dream of equality for exercise physiology students and professionals. They are not controlled by the likelihood of making errors, but instead understand that failure is part of the growth process.

Key Point

A leader is one who sees more than others see, who sees farther than others see, and who sees before others do.

-- LeRoy Elms

As Terry Pearce [6] said, leaders "...inspire us with possibility." Leaders understand the three stages of truth, as said by the German philosopher Schopenhauer: First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is opposed. Third, it is accepted as being self-evident. This thinking applies equally as well to leadership. First, most people do not think they have it in them to be a leader. Second, when confronted with the need to create their future, they do not get involved. Third, the "new reality" is accepted. Coming to terms with one's passion is an inner experience that starts with an inspiring idea, thoughts, and feelings. Leadership is therefore all about discovering what matters and the willingness to stand for something.

ASEP Gives EPCs a Voice

It is no surprise that ASEP exists for its members. Although a person can be a member of ASEP who isn't an exercise physiologist, it is the hope and expectation of the ASEP leadership that the majority of the members in the future will be Board Certified exercise physiologists. In resolving the identity-based conflict of who is an exercise physiologist, it is believed by the ASEP leaders that there is a firm foundation from which to build a profession. Evidenced-based practice by healthcare professionals needs a voice that is built on integrity. ASEP represents a convergence of interactions within which members function and operate in a continuously positive manner.

As members live the ASEP reality, they have the opportunity to stretch themselves without fear of consequences. They are encouraged to coach their colleagues to be members, to encourage new thinking and strategies, and to lead the way to a professional state of mind. This matrix of mental existence is acknowledged as important in the preparation of a new professional environment that nourishes professionalism and new healthcare relationships. In short, it is the opportunity for change that all exercise physiologists should cherish and support. This collective mindfulness is at the core of the change process. As Oliver Wendell Holmes said, "Man's mind stretched to a new idea never returns to its original dimensions."

Holmes is right. The ASEP leaders can never return to where they were. Their minds are stretched and they understand what their hearts feel is consistent with their reality. They now see things as they are and as they should be. This is as it should be. After all, as Myles Munroe [7] said in *The Principles of Power of Vision*, "Your life is the sum total of the decisions you make every day."

Final Word

Confucius said, “To know what is right and not to do it is the worst cowardice.” Why not as the Nike slogan says, “Just do it.” It is an attitude that can make a huge difference in the future of exercise physiology. It may require energy, self-discipline, and trust both in yourself and that of your colleagues. Perhaps, not every person is up to the challenge. All is asked of anyone is to give it your very best. The critical issue is to develop an awareness of who you are, what you want to be, and why.

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