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**Leading Change in Exercise
Physiology**

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The most difficult emotion of many associated with ASEP is the nature of understanding change. The vast number of issues that must be address is rather complex. It can take a person's breath away, given the daring theme of leading change while anticipating and dealing with the emotional reactions that come from those who want to keep exercise physiology as it has been for decades.

Members of ASEP have a lot to be excited about. They have created a powerful infrastructure on the Internet. ASEP is an organization to be contented with. Aside from its impressive web site and the first-ever electronic journals of exercise physiology, it is the first professional organization established on behalf the emerging profession of exercise physiology. Members are marching to their own beat while capturing the hearts of those who live the complexity and myriad of names and conditions that have distracted them from making the best of their dreams.

The lack of a discernible beginning hits the hardest when young professionals who realize that the public sector has a limited idea of exercise physiology. It is also unsettling to college students who find that the public sector isn't willing to pay them what they feel they are worth. Hence, it is unfortunate that 50 years ago exercise physiologists did not foresee the seeds of the academic chaos that would come from the lack of professional planning. And, perhaps, part of the reason they didn't see the big picture was because they were physical educators. The professors were not exercise physiologists, as we think of the emerging profession today. The college professors were interested in acquiring a better understanding of the physiology of sports and the value of exercise in developing a better lifestyle free from disease. Frankly, they had no idea of the potential for exercise physiologists as equal partners with physical educators and/or other professionals. After all, they were professional physical educators first, which is still the case for many exercise physiologists today. They still don't see exercise physiology as an emerging profession with its own scientific body of knowledge and rights associated with a profession. Maybe, the physical educator turned exercise physiologist isn't the best professional to lead from within the inattentive crowd of diverse college educators, each a social and political equal, and every last one bent on demonstrating their academic area of study is equally important if not more important.

My experience after many years of college teaching is that faculty members have always resisted efforts to bring about change, even when it is in their own best interest. It can't be

commanded because it simply increases the resistance to change. Manipulation isn't good as it leads to all sorts of problems. In the end, change is a function of leaders with a vision to transcend "what is" to "what can be". If the effort survives, their vision becomes the vision of the members because it encompasses their needs and aspirations. ASEP is built on a vision that its members will embrace it.

It is ironic that many of the exercise physiologists who disagree with the existence of ASEP are likely to be among the most vocal just a few decades ago in rejecting the physical education tradition for the right to teach exercise physiology. Indeed, the current need to treat people with respect and therefore the need to act might not be that different. It isn't a question of imposing one's will on others, it is about consulting with them and acknowledging their wants and needs. It is about treating all exercise physiologists with respect, even those who believe that ASEP is the way of the future.

In reviewing the recently updated ASEP Directory of Membership, it is both inspiring and troubling. The inspiration comes from the fact that ASEP is 300+ strong after three years in existence. The membership is split down the middle with 150 PhDs and 150 members as students and/or bachelor or master prepared. The diverse membership suggests that significant steps have been taken in overcoming resistance to change. Increasingly, the members are taking over and are leading the transformation. And, of course they understand it is inevitable that they will encounter those who disagree with the existence of ASEP. This doesn't mean

that they will stop or give up in bringing about constructive change. From their perspective, the question is: "When will the die-hards stop ignoring the warning signs and move to accept the ASEP thinking as the next logical change in the transformation of exercise physiology from an occupation to a profession?"

It is always interesting and predictable, although a distraction for sure, that anytime something new is proposed, the integrity of those responsible is questioned. It is therefore all too human to resist change by looking for imperfections in the leaders. This is a troubling observation, but those who are inspired with hope press on. They refuse to crack or quit when publicly rejected, even by would-be friends. The change that is necessary to realize the ASEP ideas, principles, and visions is already reality because its leadership and its members have never lost sight of what is morally right. James O'Toole said, "This is where moral courage comes in. We all know what is right. But it is the leaders among us who behave in the right way no matter what others might say."

ASEP leaders and members encourage all exercise physiologists to believe that it is possible to create a new profession; one composed of exercise physiologists. ASEP is the beginning of the emerging profession. It is founded on keeping its finger on the pulse of all exercise physiologists, particularly their passion for professionalism and their right to a profession versus an occupation. The members understand that the ASEP organization is about ideas and hope for a better future with better jobs with respect for what they do. Organizations

without ideas and hope are about power, and the empowerment of its leaders.

Members of a dozen ASEP committees have demonstrated a commitment to the moral principle of respect for others. They have kept faith with their purpose, that is, to believe in and act on behalf of all ASEP members. Everyone ought to know that the singular purpose of the organization is to help each exercise physiologist reach his/her own highest potential. It is about sharing leadership, respecting different opinions, and building cohesion within the emerging profession. In short, it is about enabling exercise physiologists to define their reality by knowing what they want and why they want it.

We can't let other exercise physiologists who don't understand what we want define what we are. ASEP exercise physiologists have their own "vision statement" and a "set of goals and objectives" that are considered fundamental to defining their leadership in healthcare community and related public sector jobs. They also have the right to their own professional organization, and the right to be treated with dignity and respect. All of this, especially the final point, is important and needs reinforcement. Everyone has the right and the duty to participate in leading change in his or her profession. They also have the right to understand the source of resistance to change among both leaders and followers of competing organizations.

Let's be clear about this: Although there is resistance to ASEP's existence, it doesn't make the status quo right and yet the burden of proof is always with those who wish to alter course. The latter

point is critical to organizational success, and is a challenge since change requires a huge degree of dedication. However, perhaps even harder than dedicating one's time and effort is the fact that the members of the status quo must admit everyone has the basic right to his or her views about most subjects. Hence, is it possible that members of the new exercise physiology are right? Do they have the right to dare to challenge the prevailing conventions? Perhaps it isn't enough to be right.

Being right is important, but it may not be enough! ASEP is founded on right thinking, but it is not enough if exercise physiologists don't realize that the timing is right. Now is the time to speak of our success and to share our organizational culture with other exercise physiologists and other professionals. Now is the time to share our dreams and to help others overcome their natural resistance to change. Everyone needs to understand that resistance is just resistance. It doesn't mean that progress isn't being made. Members of ASEP have taken the time to listen to exercise physiologists who work outside of the academic setting. They have respect for what they do, and have developed a national certification to give them credibility.

So why is there obvious resistance to change from exercise physiologists within sports medicine to exercise physiology of an exercise physiology organization? The answer is complicated but, in short, it is a simple function of not looking close enough at what exercise physiology has become. There are too many shared assumptions under the traditional view that have a lot of inertia. The assumptions are reinforced

with groupthink. Too few academic exercise physiologists are willing to risk their tenure and promotion on a new organization, and so it comes down to self-preservation. Others simply believe that what they have is right and no one has the right to mess with it. Many of these individuals have worked extremely hard on behalf of their organization and they don't want anyone to disturb it. Point in fact, though, they also have a lot of their ego and the definition of themselves tied up in the organization. So, to admit that the organization isn't right for exercise physiologists means admitting in some way they may have been wrong in their previous thinking. Understandably, the traditional view and the work of exercise physiologists on its behalf have merit and should be respected. Accordingly, however, we must remember that what ASEP members are doing has merit and deserves respect as well. Therefore, however dumbfounded non-ASEP members may think of the organization, its leaders, and its members, they shouldn't dismiss the right of individuals to oppose what they no longer accept as the best path to developing professionalism or their right to have faith in new ideas and values even should others disagree strongly.

The facts are obvious: Leading change requires imagination and hard work. It also requires an understanding that the feelings of those who resist change will be tight and, at times, improper and also wrong. They are likely to make unfavorable comments about individuals and their personalities rather than ideologies. In time, as is the case with most things, differences will be worked out. Meantime, on behalf of those who don't agree with the position of ASEP,

they should acknowledge the right of all exercise physiologists to try and maintain the continuity of their organization consistent with their beliefs. We all know that we have friends on both sides of the question to change or to resist change. For certain, no one in ASEP is interested in imposing his or her will on the members of other organizations. No one is telling anyone that he or she must change or what to think and do. The roots of ASEP are founded solely in the individual's right to argue his or her case before others.

So, in summary, the biggest challenge before ASEP members in leading change in exercise physiology is doing it without imposing their will on others. This doesn't mean that the members can't be passionate about their beliefs. Passion is important but so is compassion. Everyone has to act and decide how to lead change, and everyone should recognize that there will be conflict and tension until a balance is reached between the members of the different organizations. Keeping these thoughts in mind, our work within ASEP should be based on responsible thinking that is tolerant of the rights of others. In the end, the pieces will come together. Something meaningful will have happened, and we will be proud for staying the course.

References

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