The Need for New Thinking in Exercise Physiology
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The NEED FOR new thinking in exercise physiology today isn’t obvious, although it should be. When you examine the downstream negatives of the exercise science major, numerous problems are evident. Professors fleeing from personal and professional responsibility to the students of dozens of degree programs that graduate fitness instructors come immediately to mind. The students’ complexities and anxieties in finding a credible job in fitness are sobering to some exercise physiologists [1], but remain as a drunken stupor in those who continue to hold on to yesterday’s thinking.

It is strange to witness such a mix of unchanging and rigid personalities who presently indulge themselves in the idea of doing more research at the expense of their students’ education for a career. Their compulsive need to attend meetings where they find themselves alongside their copies has grown old. The freshman teachers who just finished the PhD degree, yes, those who are convinced of their Einstein qualities, lecture as if they were Moses. Unaccomplished yet full of themselves, they stand as a classical Roman figure before the wide-eyed students. Clearly, they are a product of a system of failed leadership [2] and worn-out rhetoric. But more than that, while they may actually show signs of being successful at publishing another research paper and posting it on their wall so everyone can see their greatness, they provide little real help to students who are obedient to their verbal commands.
Fears, irritations, and deep-seated issues and problems drive the unchanging, stiff-backed souls. Acts of their own creation, behavior, and failing to understand their role in helping others to take the lead in exercise as medicine, they remain fixed in their negativism and cynicism towards anyone or anything that desires to change present-day thinking. If only they would take a serious look in the mirror, but that would be asking too much. Problems and failures on the backs of their students have carefully designed the path they have taken to feel better, regardless of the consequences to others (even parents). It is an obvious act of selfishness if not the weakness of heart to stand on one’s own two feet. Such individuals are typical of those who never played high school football because their tiny injuries scared them.

Why not take a serious look at college degrees and healthcare? Credible professional healthcare professionals are not trainers or fitness instructors. Such thinking is the legacy of failing to think beyond the historical physical education-sports medicine indulgence in the “I’m okay forget you mentality.” Professional development is simply not possible without a full appraisal of what has to change in academia. Those who get the ASEP 21st century reality are doing what they can to ensure their professional transformation [3]. They understand that if they think as credible healthcare professionals and start acting the same, it is just a matter of time before they achieve their thinking. They get that there will be mistakes, failures, and setbacks, but they also understand they can achieve their dreams if they work and believe and keep the right attitude.

On the other hand, as is so often the case, those who are average, status quo types, they will always be such even though they work at convincing themselves otherwise. It is easy to be unimpressed with their notion of teaching, especially when it is so evident of their lack of an engaging education and concern for students and exercise physiology. After all, they have confused the act of teaching with standing in front of their students while reading lecture notes. What will they have achieved at the end of the year? Very little, and yet while they fear to try what they could do, their course is set much like that of a person wanting to
commit suicide. It is more than a little embarrassing when one understands their fears, biases, and desires at the expense of practical and necessary change in the students’ education.

To help connect students to a credible career where they can financially make it, raise a family, buy a home, and pay back student loans, it is imperative that exercise physiologists rock the boat. Working at Bob’s Gym for $12 or $14 an hour or part-time in cardiac rehab without health benefits is not a career. It is the failure to see the big picture. True success begins with the willingness to make mistakes. It begins with passionate work that is systematic, orderly, and harmonious. It is consistent with the steps taken by others over their decades of professional development, and it is defined by the willingness to be an uncommon educator. Unfortunately, there are simply too many exercise physiologists who find satisfaction in their commonness or, if you, their “second best” status and the same with their students.

Why aren’t exercise physiologists looking to the future? Why aren’t they challenging themselves to become the ultimate healthcare professional? Why not join the American Society of Exercise Physiologists [4] and become a change agent for all those around you who will benefit? Why not slice right to the heart of the problem? That is, sports medicine and exercise science is not exercise physiology [5]. If exercise physiologists don’t find the time to unite as members of the profession of exercise physiology, then, “exercise as medicine” will be lost to physical therapy and sports medicine. The future of exercise physiology depends on you to determine clearly and comprehensively the role of professionalism and ethical thinking in exercise physiology. Do you have the courage and conviction to think not only with your head, but also with your heart? Do you recognize the need to express what is wrong with exercise physiology and why it must change?

George Bernard Shaw said, “Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything.” This is a sobering statement, especially for exercise physiologists. It must be true that many people
outright fear change. The thought of updating the curriculum, dealing with ethics and standards of practice, and professionalism issues can evoke pictures of little time to do research or, perhaps, better yet, talk about doing research. Maybe they are worried about what others may think of them, or the fear of losing the edge they have to build their personal careers. No wonder there is resistance to change. Until they realize that all exercise physiologists are responsible for seeing and feeling the need for collective action, status quo is their comfortable and path of least resistance.

Exercise physiologists should read *Managing Transitions* by William Bridges [6]. He said, “Before you can begin something new, you have to end what used to be. Before you can learn a new way of doing things, you have to unlearn the old way. Before you can become a different kind of person, you must let go of your old identity. So beginnings depend on endings. The problem is, people don’t like endings.” His point is this: To become a different kind of an exercise physiologist requires fully understanding the big picture of exercise as medicine and exercise physiologists as healthcare professionals. This thinking can’t be that complicated. And yet, it is apparent that as pygmies, they doubt their right to change and therefore they remain as little people. In sum, they don’t get it or as Rick Maurer [7] said, “They don’t *feel* it.

The failure to feel what is right today versus yesterday is directly linked to exercise physiologists operating by “old thinking.” As stated on the website of *The World Centre for New Thinking* [8], “New thinking includes the thinking that concerns the future. It includes constructive and creative thinking. You can seek the truth about the past but you cannot have truth about the future. Yet our whole culture of thinking is about analysis, truth, logic and argument. These are all about the past. New thinking is about the future. The quality of our future will depend directly on the quality of our thinking.” New thinking is an essential ingredient of designing the way forward in the professionalism of exercise physiology.
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