**Making a Difference One EPC at a Time**

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Do not wait for leaders; do it alone, person to person.  ~Mother Teresa

When asked, “What is it about ASEP that you like?” It is not uncommon to hear that the organization is *making a difference.* It doesn’t matter if it is one EPC or 20 EPCs or, for that matter, the accreditation of one exercise physiology program a year or every five years. The fact remains that ASEP is helping each EPC with credibility standards, as is true with the recent accreditation of the West Liberty University exercise physiology major [1].

The leaders of all professional organizations want to believe their work counts for something.  The problem that leaders and others encounter is that they often think that if they are going to be successful, then they must influence the lives of many people. Consider the story of the Starfish by Lloyd Fritmeier [2], a leadership coach and strategic advisor with The Starfish Partnership:

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| A boy was walking down the beach in Mexico when he saw a man throwing something out into the ocean.  He asked him what he was doing, and the man said, “I’m throwing these starfish back into the water, because they’ll die if they stay on the beach.” The boy looked at the thousands of starfish on the beach and said, “There are too many to throw back…what kind of difference can you possibly make?” The man picked one up, threw it way out into the ocean, watched it sink into the water, and said, “Made a difference for that one!” |

So, in a nutshell, ASEP is all about making a difference one student at a time.  It isn’t complicated, but it is important. When the ASEP leaders make a difference in the life of a student who is otherwise part of the failed rhetoric of sports medicine [3], it makes a difference for that one person and for those who care enough to try.

In 1998, Laura Hess [4] said, “Change begins with you. If your life isn't what you want it to be, do something about it. You have the power to create change for yourself as well as impacting others….Decide you want to make a difference….Begin one person at a time. Buildings are built one brick at a time. Books are read one word at a time. The world is changed one person at a time, one moment at a time, one spirit at a time.”

Initially, there were a lot of people who saw the opportunity with ASEP to speak up. The following is a list that represents the exercise physiologists who were responsible for the development of the Exercise Physiologist Certified [5] examination. They became the "first-ever" Certified Exercise Physiologists [6] in the United States. Unfortunately, only a few continue to support the work of the ASEP organization. Why is that? What changed?

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Another question is “Who is to blame? The answer is that it is a combination of many factors. People change their minds and agendas all the time. It isn’t just that they decided to stop supporting ASEP. But, of course, this is usually the reason for the smile on the faces of those who can’t stand to think that a small organization or a new leadership can make a difference.

The respect that should be given to those who try to “make a difference” is still insufficiently developed in many people. This has led to and still continues to lead to a great coarseness and carelessness in human interaction and behavior. It is so easy for them to say, “It’s impossible.” “It can’t be done.” “Don’t even try. It is ridiculous.”

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| No matter who you are, where you are, what you do, or what you have, you can change the world and make a difference.  Typically, we only hear about the “Heavy Hitters,” the billionaires and celebrities, the Nobel Prize winners and the captains of industry.  However, those are not the only people who make a difference.   Even just one person can make a difference [7]. |

Have you ever encountered those kinds of reactions? Anyone who sets out to change “what is” to “what can be” will encounter people who believe they have “the gift of criticism” and “a ministry of discouragement!” In fact, a person can be rather overwhelmed by the criticisms on one hand and the immensity of the task on the other. That’s why it is easy to be discouraged by the never-ending work, failures, and opposition.

Why try? Most people give up after a little effort. They tend to think that because the effort they made (perhaps, writing an article or presenting at a meeting) can’t contribute much, might as well not contribute at all. After all, it is rather easy to convince yourself that you are just one person and you can’t really make a difference. Imagine this: what if no one ever took the initiative to think differently. That would be a very scary place to live.

Shane Paulson [8] said recently, “I may be one person, but I **can** (and I am) making a difference! Why, because I am an exercise physiologist and I refuse to sit by and do nothing. After all, we can’t just wait for change to happen. We have to be the change.” But, there is more! After more than a decade of work towards the professional development of exercise physiology, it is clear that organizations are also political entities. They have a momentum of their own that will not change until the members undergo a transformation. Personal (and professional) values and how people treat others with a different mindset are extremely important in our everyday lives.

Janis F. Kearney [9] said it best: “…amazing thing about life is that it takes just one person in our lives to make a dramatic change. Just one person can touch our lives in irrevocable ways and nothing is ever the same. …it doesn't have to be a genius or a rich man or the most popular person in the world….but, it does have to be someone with that fire in their belly, and the courage to never stop….It has to be someone who believes very, very deeply and who never lets up, and never changes to appease a group or friends or even a boss. It has to be someone who just never stops being who they are….”

ONE PERSON who is truly passionate about his or her mission CAN MAKE a difference.

**--** Dove of Oneness

How many times have you heard the expression, “I want to leave the world a little better place for being here?” Probably most of us have, but ultimately only a few have it within themselves to stay the course. Drs. Robert Robergs, Frank Wyatt, Dale Wagner, and others are such professionals. Their extraordinary selfless choice to support ASEP year after year without reservation is worth highlighting. They have let others know how they think about ASEP, and they understand that change is a process that takes place across decades. They are making a difference. Students and others need to be encouraged to recognize the strength of character of the ASEP leadership, and the fact that they continue to make it part of their philosophy of life.

In closing, "As you go along," Lowenstein [11] said in 1966, "you build a life . . . in which you do many different kinds of things. But it all has a common denominator that gives it some sense, some direction -- the sense that your total activity is going to make a better situation for people to live in. . . . The question should be, is it worth trying to do, not can it be done? . . . You don't just set goals and when you reach them, find that they equal happiness. . . . Within the quest itself, much of the fullness of life exists."

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