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The ASEP Point of View: Be Different

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The first principle of a winning strategy is to be different.

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BY NOW, IT IS PROBABLY CLEAR as to how ASEP exercise physiologists think about exercise physiology is very different from traditional exercise physiology. While traditional exercise physiology is concerned with describing the influence of a treatment variable on various dependent variables and publishing research papers, ASEP is interested in how the scientific knowledge that has already been generated can be applied to clients and patients alike to increase their health and well-being. Founded on the foundational principles of professionalism, ASEP is interested in exercise medicine more than how to run faster or jump higher. If you were to summarize all the work of the ASEP leadership in one phrase, it would be that “credibility requires professionalism.”

If you apply just a little bit of thinking to getting a college degree, you will very likely end up with very little. To be a success requires more than getting just any degree. It requires a knowledge of various career opportunities and preparation that allows for achievement and positive results. Yet, most students and their college teachers lack the mental vividness of what is necessary in order to increase behaviors that will transform the college graduate. By “transform,” the ASEP leadership believes professionalism drives specific thoughts, actions, and feelings that produce specific results. For example, it is common knowledge that physical therapy students are required to take college

courses that teacher about professionalism and the importance of professional development. By contrast, students of exercise science or one of the 40 similar undergraduate degree programs do not take professionalism courses in college.

It should be clear to the reader that if students or the collective members of an academic department repeat the same thoughts that created the conditions they find themselves in, then, they will get exactly the same results year after year. As they say, “It isn’t calculus.” Hence, it is obvious (or should be) that if academic exercise physiologists want to change the fact that the majority of their exercise science students are without a job months after they graduate, then, they need to change their thoughts and actions about “what is a credible college degree.” In short, the mental maps that influence college teachers can be updated by learning to think differently. For example, does the exercise science degree produce exercise scientists? If so, where are jobs for graduates with an undergraduate degree? Who is an exercise physiologist? Is it anyone with a degree that is related to exercise physiology? Or, is it only the person who has a doctorate degree? In view of these questions, it is a strange experience indeed to realize that until ASEP was founded in 1997, there was no formal definition of “who is an exercise physiologist.”

Okay, so what is the problem? The bottom line is that when exercise physiologists (the academic types in particular) are introduced to something new and different, they try to either avoid it or convert it into what is common thinking at the time. The ASEP exercise physiology principles are different from the thinking of sports medicine. They represent a new way to think about exercise physiology. They are also proven to help students find credible career opportunities because they are taken from the foundational thinking of the established healthcare professions. Hence, acknowledging the ASEP code of ethics, academic accreditation, board certification, and standards of practice can lead to new and profound ways of promoting both the success of college graduates and the profession of exercise physiology. This thinking is also consistent with the work of other professional healthcare organizations and societies.

Holding that thought in mind, what kind of degree is exercise science? Is it a degree that identities with a profession and, if so, what is it? Is exercise science essentially a physical education degree without the activity and coaching courses? Perhaps you’d like to say, “It’s just an undergraduate degree. Real jobs require a

master's degree or even a doctorate degree, so get serious.” The ASEP response is to such a foolish statement is that, regardless of whether it old-fashion thinking or whatever, “When students (and their parents) identify a college to attend and a degree program to major in, they are expecting the degree to produce increased career opportunities with the expectation of financial stability and healthcare benefits.” This thinking has not changed for decades and there is no reason that it should, regardless of the business mentality of academic institutions to keep students in degree programs as long as possible. No one should have to go back to college time after time to get yet another degree that “should” works! Instead, earning multiple degrees should be for other reasons that go beyond financial survival.

It should come as no surprise that the ASEP leadership is upbeat about changing meaningless degree programs to meaningful degree programs. Exercise physiologists may think the effort and dedication to professionalism in exercise physiology isn't as important as publishing a research paper, but they are wrong. It should come as no surprise that many people resist discovering what is really important. But, the reality is that the undergraduate college degree should be structured to achieve success. Why not step out of the circle of misplaced thinking that “...this undergraduate degree will increase your chances to being accepted in graduate school...” to finding yourself promoting the here and now? That's what the ASEP exercise physiologists have done. They understand just how miserable life gets without a job, without money to pay the bills, and without the confidence to carry on. They understand that if you want something different, then it is necessary to do something different. New thinking is at the heart of the change process. It is all about new thoughts, actions, and feelings, and it is about dreams and desires of something better.

The question is this: “If you are doing what doesn't work, why not change it?” That's the ASEP point of view. The ASEP website is not complicated or super engaging. Rather, it is acting on the expectation of a credible college degree to help students to succeed in the public sector. Put another way, it is time to put the past out to pasture. There is a better way to educate and provide for students who have the desire to be exercise physiologists. So, why not put the pedal to the metal and get with the program of change? After all, how loud must the ASEP leadership be to get the message out?

The ASEP members see the problems, and they want to be part of the answers to solving the difficulties and producing a new language of measurable changes according to the principles of professionalism. Remember, what is valued about exercise physiology by all exercise physiologists can only be enhanced by committing to fulfilling the ASEP vision.

The ASEP vision generates hope, provides endurance, and motivates the discouraged. No matter how difficult, the essence of the vision is 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, 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, and to serve the public good by making an academically sound difference in the application of exercise physiology concepts and insights as exercise medicine (1).

Exercise physiologists at all educational levels are responsible for creating change in their professional arenas, whether that is in the clinical area, education, administration, business, or research. Personal attention, role modeling, precepting, and mentoring are all critical to sharing values, career goals, and other matters of importance, particularly academic accreditation, board certification, and standards of professional practice. In so doing, exercise physiologists are destined to advance in the direction of their dreams. They will be recognized as a credible healthcare professional, which is certainly different from the present-day version of an exercise specialist, personal trainer, or fitness instructor. They will have opportunities to serve their clients in diverse career venues and practices. This kind of responsibility requires a credible certification that reflects professionalism, protects the public, strengthens the profession, and unifies the members and who they are.

All of this has been done with other organizations and professions, so there is 100% no reason why exercise physiologists can't do it too. All exercise physiologists need to do when non-believers say, "ASEP is really small by comparison to ACSM" is simply share the feeling that the ASEP experience is something within you that is important. It has nothing to do with size or other organizations. The journey is personal as it unfolds

with passion that keeps the energy flowing to accomplish amazing things by recognizing what is valued and embraced. These are just a few of the driving principles of the ASEP exercise physiology experience. Why not join this incredible experience? Why not nurture your commitment to the ASEP mission? In doing so, you will learn that it becomes integral to knowing who you are, how you will practice exercise physiology, and express your inner feelings regarding aligning yourself with the ASEP 21st century perspective. In closing, read what Goethe had to say about achieving your goals: “Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it.”

References

1. *American Society of Exercise Physiologists*. (2013). ASEP Vision. (Online). <http://www.asep.org/>