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Advancing the Profession of Exercise Physiology

Questioning Popular Thinking

Tommy Boone, PhD, MPH, MAM, MBA
Board Certified Exercise Physiologist
Fellow, American Society of Exercise Physiologists
Professor, Department of Exercise Physiology
The College of St. Scholastica
Duluth, MN 55811

Popular thinking offers false hope. When people blindly follow a trend, they're not doing their own thinking.

-- John C. Maxwell [1]

The problem with popular thinking, such as being a member of the American College of Sports Medicine, is that it is simply too common. It is the expected behavior of someone who does so without thinking. Unpopular thinking is unexpected behavior, and it requires thinking. The problem is that many people are flat out lazy. They like what is common, and they aren't interested in doing what is difficult. For example, if you want to be a member of the American Society of Exercise Physiologists, start preparing yourself for unpopular thinking. It is not easy to do what most people don't do, and yet it is the only way to a hopeful future for the exercise physiologist.

As an exercise physiologist, the idea of supporting a generic organization and not a professional organization offers false hope. Then, why are so many people willing to join and support generic organizations? The answer is simple: It is the safe and secure thing to do. What is popular is often believed to be right. What is

Most people are more comfortable with old problems than with new solutions.

-- Author Unknown

safe is also easy, especially when it is believed that everyone is doing the same thing. So, it must be okay. The problem is that popular thinking is often the wrong behavior. Popular thinking said that if you aren't white, you do not deserve rights, yet people know that such thinking is wrong. Popular thinking kept women from voting, yet unpopular people corrected such thinking.

Safety in numbers doesn't mean anything when it is the wrong thinking. For example, just because ACSM is a 20,000 plus membership doesn't make it the right organization for exercise physiologists (however popular). Yet thousands of academic exercise physiologists follow the path to ACSM every year. Why, because it is safe, popular, and the status quo. Doing so, however, ends up having negative effects on the growth and maturity of exercise physiology as a profession of healthcare practitioners. It dampens the interest in doing those things necessary to ensure the professionalism of exercise physiology,

such as becoming a member of ASEP and helping with the building of its professional infrastructure.

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| <p>Don't think you're on the right road just because it's a well-beaten path. -- Author Unknown</p> |
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It is time to put the past behind us. It is time to get on with a new 21st century view of exercise physiology. Of course the ASEP organization is new, but is okay. It is especially

when it makes sense. Yes, building anything takes time. Why not nurture ASEP? Why not give up the popular way to think for and support the unpopular since it is a worthwhile and meaningful endeavor? Doing so is uplifting, and certainly something beyond average. Anyone can join a big organization and float along as if everything is okay. Instead, why not do something extraordinary, something uncommon, if not unpopular? That way however unpopular you may be you will be a leader and not a follower.

Yes, there will be challenges when choosing to think as an exercise physiologist. The path of professionalism in exercise physiology isn't an easy one at all. This is true for the other professions, and as such is the nature of the professionalization process. Members of nursing, physical therapy and other healthcare professions are thinking of what is best for their profession, not what is

popular. This may mean doing things expressly for ASEP that are unpopular, such as writing an article about the challenges of being an exercise physiologist without having a doctorate degree or working alongside a colleague in a fitness facility who has a weekend warrior certification and a degree in accounting. Are you willing to go against what is popular?

Unpopular thinking, giving support to a small professional organization, is often misunderstood, yet it isn't hard to get the point with a little straight thinking. The bottom line is that all professionals must have the opportunity to belong to their own professional organization. Most healthcare professionals will tell you that it is required. So the next time you are asked about ASEP, why not share the message? Ask yourself this question: Do you think that it is possible for physical therapists to be where they are today without their professional organization, the American Physical Therapy Association? They understand the need for the APTA, and it needs them. Likewise, the ASEP organization needs exercise physiologists. It is that simple, and it is the power of unpopular thinking to do the right thing for the right reason.

Do not follow where the path may lead. Go, instead, where there is no path and leave a trail.
-- Ralph Waldo Emerson

Sports medicine is not exercise physiology! It is time to stop repeating the same old behaviors. They don't work for all exercise physiologists, especially the non-doctorate exercise physiologists. It therefore time to challenge the status quo and to get on with the unpopular thinking of building a strong foundation under the ASEP organization. That is why it is important to challenge the popular way of thinking, analyze it for what it is, and try something new. You can do that by joining ASEP and driving the message home to your friends and colleagues that exercise physiologists need their own code of ethics [2], accreditation guidelines [3], board certification [4], and standards of professional practice [5]. However unpopular such thinking might be, you can get in on the ground level and help change exercise physiology for the better.

It is time to support a different organization. It is time to go against what is safe, easy, and popular. It is time to embrace the unpopular thinking and learn how to make a difference. It is time to take your mind to another level of how to be the very best exercise physiologist possible, while also allowing yourself (if necessary) to feel uncomfortable along the way. Taking the safe and easy path isn't always the right or even the most exciting path. So, why not become an ASEP member, go to an ASEP meeting, or write an ASEP Board Member and ask how you can help with the building and support of the ASEP organization? Why not share your talents, energy, and resources with other exercise physiologists? Why not?



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