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In Support of ASEP

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"The future is not the result of choices among alternative paths offered; It is a place that is created. Created first in the mind and will. Created next in activity. The future is not some place we are going to, but one we are creating. The paths to it are not found, but made and the activity of making them changes both the maker and the destiny." -- Anonymous (1987)

THIS IS AN ARTICLE FOR YOU if you are struggling to remain faithful to your dreams. William Boone, who is both an exercise physiologist and political scientist, has asked more than on one occasion, "Why is it that so many exercise physiologists do not belong to ASEP?" He feels that they must not have heard of ASEP. His discussion with me was personal and to the point. It was an attempt to make ASEP more palatable for those who are struggling with it.

This article, in its own modest way, tries to do something similar, namely, to be a guide of sorts for those who have not been exposed to the vision, goals, and objectives of ASEP in a way that makes it palatable. Without question, there are many good, sincere exercise physiologists today who could contribute to its continued development as the professional organization of exercise physiologists. If they were also to help make the steps of professionalism a little clearer and a little more acceptable, it might help others who are struggling with joining ASEP.

Admittedly, it is not easy task to take up a challenge of another but it is forever the right of the person in rhythm with h/her dreams to pursue the dreams. When something is great, people are driven and, perhaps, even obsessed with the boundless opportunities of unquenchable reflective thinking. Every time, time-after-time, something new with fresh energy and demands for access and journeys to new hope drives our unrest. Today is no different from years ago, when misunderstandings were equally as difficult to work through. Hence, what we do with that unquenchable thirst is extremely important. Instead of falling apart, we need to channel our collective energy into an integrated, healthy response to help others start the journey of professionalism.

Looking at where we are, we need every member of ASEP, with no exception, to tirelessly afford the opportunity of intellectual freedom to all good-hearted, driven exercise physiologists. On the surface, this sounds easy. But, clearly it isn't easy for many exercise physiologists continue in their old mode of thinking. Their energy towards ASEP is superficially discussed while their choice of an organization and their commitment is elsewhere. We can see from all of this that professionalism is about what we do with our time, thinking, and personal beliefs. It is about desire and hope that gives energy and direction to finding our future.

It is for this reason, on any given day, it is utterly critical that exercise physiologists stand up to the challenge and encourage all others to unite and to grow in a restless discontent with anything other than total willingness to sacrifice for unity. The struggle in coming together is more unique today than a decade ago. As well, what is meant by "professionalism" is a new, raw idea compared to yesterday's obsession with publishing. Exercise physiologists without the doctorate degree are a new group of professionals who are equally as sophisticated. Rejection isn't taken lightly with them and, generally speaking, they are spontaneously filled with optimism, joy, and energy about exercise physiology.

When they are neglected, the power, hope, and the future of exercise physiology are wasted. The truth is that exercise physiology is a family of professionals. The only reason we aren't where we should be is because we are naïve and underestimate our collective strength and control over our future. This is especially true when it comes to our distractions. I heard it said that, "I've decided that I'm too full of sports medicine to ever be truly committed to ASEP. I love serving on different committees and like presenting my research at the meetings. I can't serve ASEP and sports medicine. I'm just too committed to sports medicine, too much history, and too much rooted in years of believing in sports medicine and what it offers exercise physiologists."

Such thinking is divorced from reality. Exercise physiologists who underwrite sports medicine isn't just torn between sports medicine and ASEP, but has failed in understanding the distinction between the two organizations. There isn't anything wrong with belonging to sports medicine. Moreover, there isn't anything wrong with the ASEP renaissance. What is happening is the legitimate search for and obedience to recovering the essence of an equal passion for exercise physiology that has been afforded sports medicine for several decades. ASEP, as we shall see, is equally about freedom and feelings that emphasizes a community of exercise physiology partnership. It is a national non-profit professional organization, founded in 1997 in Minnesota to set academic standards and to provide leadership in the professional development of exercise physiology.

It is time that we make a distinction that can be helpful to us as we try to find some order and balance in all of this. I understand that this is something that is difficult for our age to hear. We want what we think is our rightful result of years of dedication to sports medicine. What we don't understand is that sports medicine is nonnegotiable. It is divorced from exercise physiology, what we stand for, our hope, and our self-understanding. The central mystery within all of this is the "commandments" from sports medicine, even from their letters to the

ASEP National Office, that the sports medicine community is dedicated to sports medicine. If you are a member of sports medicine, then everything is for sports medicine. It is as if the organization itself is more important than the members.

Conversely, the key to understanding ASEP is that the organization exists for the members. It is designed to benefit its members via better paying jobs with more respect. ASEP members have created the “first-ever” national certification for exercise physiologists and, through state association memberships, will help to facilitate licensure. The ASEP perspective on exercise physiology experience to help all exercise physiologists become success in their work, regardless of their academic degree status. We might well want to remember this at those times when the two organizations are compared. To belong to ASEP is to be loyal to many things, not just to professionalism. To belong to ASEP is to want exercise physiologists who will inspire us to be the very best we can be and to live up to the ASEP Code of Ethics. To belong to ASEP, the only exercise physiology organization in the United States with leadership in the “how to” accredit academic institutions, is to understand that we must create our own form of existence. After all, the very process of defining who we are and what we do can only be achieved by having the guts to take risks, correct mistakes, and make right decisions. Decision that are right, sustainable, and durable. The wrong decision is time wasted.

The ASEP idea for exercise physiologists is to move to a professional-based thinking and communication. It is time that the defining idea, unification, is acted on and believed in, and that we move to a global understanding of professionalism as a seamlessly thread that connects all exercise physiologists. It is time that we go on the offensive with the guts and courage to be competitive, and yet understand and respect the competition. It is time to understand “What is our business?” that is, “What is our purpose?” In short, our purpose is three-fold: (1) the advancement and improvement of exercise physiology; (2) to be a forum for leadership and exchange of information to stimulate discussion and

collaboration among exercise physiologists; and (3) to set the standards for exercise physiologists.

Standing up for what we believe is a major decision. But we must lead not only by consensus, but with heart as well. An organization without heart and the right vision can't realize the right passion. ASEP is an organization of exercise physiologists with passion for professionalism. It is an organization of exercise physiologists who believe in themselves, and that they individually and collectively can and will get the problem solved, no matter what. It is an organization designed to help us become what we believe is right for us, which is defined by the ASEP vision: (1) 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; (2) to unify all exercise physiologists in the United States to promote and support the study, practice, teaching, research, and development of the exercise physiology profession; and (3) through proactive and creative leadership, the Society empowers its members to serve the public good by making an academically sound difference in the application of exercise physiology concepts and insights.

ASEP exercise physiologists are by example what is important: "...that exercise physiology will be a profession, and exercise physiologists will be the standard by which other healthcare practitioners will measure their performance." Our hallmarks will be innovation, courage, and initiative to respond to change and to create job opportunities in the public sector. Yet, many have been told that "The idea of creating a new organization is a waste of time. It can't be done. Non-PhD exercise physiologists simply don't have what it takes. No one will pay any attention to them." What these individuals don't realize is that such statements are exactly the stimulus for new leadership. Hence, the net result of someone who says, "it can't be done" is emotional leverage to finding a way. As a result, ASEP members have a vision for exercise physiology; one that is lasting, global,

and professional. They understand that “you don’t have to beat the horse to run faster.” Sometimes all that is needed is the right strategy, one that everyone can understand. The single biggest criterion for success, as an exercise physiologist, is to unify and openly support ASEP as their organization of choice.

ASEP’s web presence is changing the mind-set of how exercise physiology is viewed,. Members understand that ASEP is designed to answer the questions: “Who is an exercise physiologist, and what do they do?” ASEP is about leadership, and about persuading all exercise physiologists to its vision. Members now have a choice in communicating their beliefs and hopes, which they haven’t had with other organizations. They now have the opportunity to build a new exercise physiology by working with other exercise physiologists they can trust. Members understand that ASEP is “The force that drives us forward even when our motive, intellect, and character are questioned. It is the vision of something better for all exercise physiologists. The idea that we have the right to our own future. It is inspirational, right, and motivational, especially the desire and rive to rule over our destiny.”

Passion is important. It is everything! Believing you are doing the right thing is critical to new opportunities for all exercise physiologists. Passion and believing can take ASEP members to a place they want to be. Nothing matters more than writing, thinking, and spreading the good news about exercise physiology professionalism. It is a sound idea. It is worth the effort and the joy of moving us in one direction. It is the work of one person talking to another person; both willing to learn, adapt, and who are flexible in their thinking. One person who is willing to pay the price when asked, “what is best for the exercise physiologist?” and, yet another person who is willing to dream and let the dream make both of them.

Passion is about believing, hope, and possibilities. It is about wanting something better for all exercise physiologists, such as “a collective unity of professionals

who comprise a profession.” Passion is about believing that exercise physiology is a profession, particularly if a profession is defined “...by its intellectual level, responsibility and accountability, specialized body of knowledge, activities that serve the public, a code of ethics, a strong identity and commitment to professionalism supported by an organization that oversees a scope of practice,” then without question, exercise physiology is a profession. Sure there are many problems yet to be resolved. Most of our programs are a hybrid mixture of courses from diverse departments rather than an academic degree in exercise physiology. This lack of uniformity in curriculum from one college to the next remains unresolved today, except for the “bachelor of exercise physiology” degree that fulfills the criteria that defines it as a professional degree. Clearly, the rationale for the ASEP accreditation document is to stress the importance of an agreed upon set of courses and laboratory experiences that are considered imperative for the development of the profession.

In summary, exercise physiologists must evolve from yesterday’s thinking to the 21st Century view of reality. Credentialing for exercise physiologists is imperative. Without it, there is no way to ensure competency. With sound credentials, there is also little reason to expect the public sector to acknowledge exercise physiology as a profession. There is hope. The establishment of the American Society of Exercise Physiologists is the “one” most important defining characteristic of a profession. The door is now open with one voice to represent the beliefs, concerns, and needs of all exercise physiologists. In numbers there is strength, the power to create, and to make a difference. Our biggest need, however, is leadership at the grassroots level. Leaders who understand that things can and will go wrong, but are driven to finding out why and then doggedly pressing on. Leaders who are bold, have a plan, fire in their belly; who understand the goals and objectives of the ASEP organization, who can get started and who can follow through with action; those who are persistent and determined.

The door is open! Consider the following 5 ways to get your colleagues involved in supporting ASEP: (1) Start an ongoing list of "names". Contact each person on the list, and explain the benefits of ASEP. (2) If you don't already have a file-folder on "who is doing what in the field", start one. Identify the individuals you feel could help ASEP. Write them a letter and ask if they could help ASEP help non-PhD exercise physiologists. (3) Post a large logo of ASEP at your work place, and attach a question every week to it. For example, "What is professionalism?" "Do you know that ASEP members have their own Code of Conduct?" (4) Keep a supply of reasons, perhaps, on individual cards that you could hand out to your students, colleagues you work with, and others who might have a need for professionalism. (5) Check to see if other organizations you belong to are willing to let you present a talk on exercise physiology professionalism and ASEP.

Are you ready to begin? ASEP is for YOU! That's right, you, your profession, and it can help make your life easier during the transition period when you are adjusting to a new job, to new ideas about professionalism, and when starting your own personal business in exercise physiology. Remember though, it is true that the future of exercise physiology rests with you. It can be and, in most cases, is the profession of choice for many of us. There are many rewards and, yet there are frustrations too. Often you may feel like you want to cry, but you will laugh too. You will share a lot of your expertise with all kinds of people; some will not appreciate your talents, experiences, and intellect. Most will share in your passion for the human body. They will understand your motivation, and they will want to learn from you.