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**Be a Doer and Take Charge of Your Future**

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Learn to believe in your future as an exercise physiologist. Don’t let anyone say otherwise, regardless of talent, position, or training. You are in control of your destiny. Be courageous, take risks, and speak up. Commit yourself to action.

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**OES ANYONE REALLY BELIEVE** that change is easy? While there is magic in taking bold steps into the future, it comes with a price. Inside each and every one of us is an understanding of this point. All of us want to believe in new possibilities, but the truth is many people are afraid of trying. Like those who make negative comments about the sport of football because they were afraid to give it a try.

As I look at my life today, I can’t help but feel incredibly grateful that I played high school football. My own life has been full of sports, from football, baseball, and track, to college gymnastics. Being an athlete was important then, and I suppose it still is today. Perhaps, that is why I wrote two books regarding the integrity of sports: *Is Sports Nutrition For Sale?* [1] and *Basic Issues in Sports Ethics* [2]. Writing the books helps me to feel better about sports knowing that it may help athletes to learn about themselves without depending on sports supplements and/or drugs.

As one might expect, over the years, my interests have changed from personal participation in sports to the unending task of learning how to think. It isn’t as easy as you might believe. In the middle to late 1980s, while teaching at the University of Southern Mississippi (Hattiesburg, MS), I couldn’t stop thinking not only about why doctorate prepared exercise physiology colleagues knew so little about human anatomy.

Why can’t PhD exercise physiologists teach gross anatomy? Why don’t they understand the role anatomy plays in physiology? Of course somewhere deep inside I knew the answer. There is little to no emphasis placed on anatomy (or, as more commonly known, kinesiology) beyond the undergraduate degree. Master students in exercise science or, if they are lucky, exercise physiology study instead the clinical aspects of graded exercise testing and/or ECG. The PhD student is told to think about grants and research at the cellular level.

So few people have any idea just how skewed up the continuum of academic degrees are, from exercise science to kinesiology to sports sciences to human performance and so forth. Think about it. There are over 40 different degrees at the undergraduate level, as though they are timely or even meaningful. The truth is this: Most college graduates of these degree programs find themselves without meaningful employment after college [3].

Then, finally, they understand that the horrible little voice deep inside of them was telling them for 4 or more years: *Hello, wake up. This degree is going no where. There are no exercise science jobs. There are no human performance jobs. The tuition dollars are being spent on a defective product. Don’t you get it yet? Why weren’t you smart enough to have figured out what was going on?* For years I remember thinking, *Students aren’t thinking ahead. They aren’t planning on the kind of the job or salary they want.* I remember thinking (and still do today): *Why aren’t all of these jobless degree programs merged and empowered as one degree, such as exercise physiology?*

Many college teachers are in a state of denial about the problem they are promoting. Exercise science majors are denied the same rights others have taken for granted for decades. It isn’t necessarily prejudice or discrimination that is the problem. It is simply that the kinds of jobs the departments of exercise science, kinesiology, and human performance advertise on the Internet aren’t credible. The list of “reasons” for thinking this way goes on and on.

As a college teacher of 40 years, I can think of no logical reason why a student should pay hard earned tuition dollars for an non-exercise physiology degree (i.e., thinking is it sufficient to be an exercise physiologist). Instinctively, some parents get this point. While chair of a Department of Exercise Physiology for 1993-94 to 2008-2009, I found myself answering very difficult questions from parents. *Will my son be able to find a good paying job when he graduates?*

The truth is that frequently after meeting with parents and their children that I found myself headed out my office looking for answers. I just couldn’t be a party to the mess any longer. At times, I considered finding employment in another field of work. I felt sick that the exercise physiology majors from The College of St. Scholastica could not expect to locate a real job after college. By real, I mean something a lot more financially stable and rewarding than working in Bob Gym’s or part-time in cardiac rehab.

The last thing I wanted to do was to be party to a $60,000 tuition loan after college or worse yet $100,000 in tuition loans, and yet students from CSS are doing just that. That is why a few years after taking the chair position (and after changing the exercise science major to an exercise physiology major) I got involved in the first-ever professional organization of exercise physiologists (ASEP). Every profession has a driving force behind it; one that is encouraged, created, and discovered by the members themselves. It is an amazingly simple concept, but equally as challenging as rethinking academic majors.

In the late 1990 I began to immerse myself in all the thinking of what it means to be a healthcare professional. I started reading everything I could find on a code of ethics, board certification, accreditation, standards of practice, and much more. After writing many books on the subject [4-10], my willingness to do everything I can continues unabated. The issue now is simply one of doing the right thing (regardless of whether I make a mistake from time to time or not). It is the only choice I have, and I think it is the right choice. So sharing my passion for exercise physiology as a healthcare profession is what I do.

Yes, there are obstacles. Yes, once again, I have made some mistakes. Only those who are afraid to try avoid making errors while doing too much work or trying to be the best you can be for everyone. While people, friends, and colleagues have tried to oppress me and my beliefs, ultimately, I have climbed over most of them and I continue to push through others. There is always a way, just like in sports and athletics. If you are willing to pay the price, if you are committed, there is a sense of certainty that prevails (regardless of the old beliefs, the failure to think straight, or the ugly personalities that pop up from time to time). I am committed and others are committed to a life-changing academic experience for college students who want to be exercise physiologists.

However, it is also true that too few exercise physiologists are taking advantage of what is available at their fingertips. As a group, those with the doctorate degree (in particular) may well be decades behind colleagues in other healthcare professions. It is time that they get with the program, but it is unlikely to be just around the corner. While the ASEP leaders humbly offer themselves, their services, and their beliefs to help with the professionalization of exercise physiology, they understand that it isn’t going to happen as fast as they would like it to? Yet, often, they find themselves asking the question: *Why not stop being scared to move beyond your comfort zone?* Others have done it. Exercise physiologists can, too.

Exercise physiologists can create their own world of healthcare options. Or, they can stay in a world shaped by the power, politics, and greed of others and their plan for exercise physiology. Yet, the question remains: *Why not create and give shape to the world of exercise physiology as a healthcare profession.* Of course research is important. There isn’t any question about that, but research per se will not pay the bills or the tuition loans for all the non-doctorate graduates who think they are exercise physiologists. Success is the ability to correctly define exercise and their role in *exercise as medicine* and, then, fulfill society’s needs with scientific-based exercise prescriptions.

That kind of thinking is power, and it is almost a sure reality of being short-lived. Meaning, if exercise physiologists (and I actually mean, ASEP board certified exercise physiologists) don’t step up to the plate and get involved in ASEP, the established healthcare professionals will steal exercise out from under *exercise* physiologists. This isn’t hard to grasp at all. It is being done now by physical therapists. Power should be a matter of academic birthright, and not who has the largest organization and/or financial resources. It should be driven by academic excellence, but to this day there remains much that must be done before the exercise physiology faculty of related programs will get the message.

The message is to the point and simple. The new class of ASEP exercise physiologists should take effective measures and actions to define exercise as medicine as a direct correlate to their scientific knowledge base. Here, the key to power lies in taking the same path other healthcare professionals have done for decades while defining what needs to be defined from the exercise physiologist’s perspective. What is great about this point is that, for the most part, all of us have easy access to information and steps taken by others. It isn’t complicated, and it is in every library or bookstore. It is on the Internet. All the information exercise physiologists need to move successfully into the 21st century is easily accessible.

“But,” yes, “but,” all too often I have witnessed exercise physiologists turning a blind eye to the good news, turning their backs to the “gift” that is linked to their social and economic potential. Critical to failing to see what they should see is the failure to communicate with each other. There is more to a profession than another research paper, and there is more to being a professional than another sports medicine meeting. Mastering the opportunity to assess *what is* versus *what should be is* critical to realizing our own reality and that of our students.

To this very day, exercise physiologists have failed to get this point. That is why they haven’t changed in 60+ years. Still making an impact on yet another research paper, but failing to see the pain of their students or the direction for success. Why not take a minute and think about the number of college graduates who must go back to school to find the job they thought they would have with an exercise science degree? Forget for a moment that you may have a doctorate degree and that you are being paid rather well along with health benefits, think about your students and their aspirations. It is not a secret as to how they feel.

Here’s the point: It takes effort to build a profession. Not many people are up to it. It is deliberate. It is hard work, and it requires taking specific types of actions, often without support or all the information you would like to have. The great news is that others have done it and continue to do it. To produce a state of professionalism that undergirds the scope of exercise physiology is an all inspiring work. Many colleagues are not cut out to do it, just as they very likely stayed away from certain sports (you know -- bad knees and so forth). Oh, you may say: This is hard to swallow.

Get real. Slavery is behind us. Democracy is important, right? Most people would agree, right? And, frankly, it is the case when sanity and clear-heads prevail. Yes, it is true that history illustrates the opposite, often without reason and, therefore, we continue to learn from last week’s activities or, if you will, the behavior of others. The thing that is important is to never give up…even when the calculated activity of friends and colleagues around the world are blind to what is otherwise common knowledge. In some respect, it isn’t much different from a football contest when the coach says, “Never give up to cocky little people who are at best average.” Or, it might be the same as a friend who says: “Think outside the box. Don’t turn and run. Fight back in your own professional way. It is the fundamental and simple reason that people become a success.”

Too many people, some are family members, others are friends and even colleagues, keep on doing what hasn’t worked for years. Why, either because they haven’t taken the time to see the reality of their mistakes or they are scared of the work it takes to change. Giving up is easy. Staying the course is the test of a person’s character and guts [12]. Too often during the past 12 years, I have seen people buy into the wrong action, the wrong path, the wrong idea, or they have supported the wrong person for fear of what might happen if they showed some backbone.

As a young person in high school, my father taught me that success is not something that happens when you are backing down or running. Often, he would say: If you really want to play football, forget about being small. Believe you can play, and you will. Belief is everything. Yes, he was something. He was born in 1890, and had three college degrees by 1919. A short time later, as a lawyer, he became a state senator of Louisiana. Yes, we are all proud of our parents (or, at least, we should be).

My father spoke of the need to share with others, to communicate ideas, and to pull people together for a common cause. And yet, regardless of how hard he tired or that he wanted change, it was a challenge for him. For years I have asked myself, *Why?* All I can say is that life is a full of twists and turns. My father would say, *Too often we find ourselves in a camp of indifference or among cowards.*  History is full of examples of this thinking. It is uncommon to run across a man or woman who is willing to make a difference. It is not enough to think a new idea. A person has to have the backbone to make a difference. To make a difference requires that a person takes action! It is fundamentally at the core of getting anything done.

As a college teacher, I talk about such thinking in my psychophysiology course. At times, I find myself on the edge of lecturing to my students. By lecturing, I mean stretching my neck, saying things I would rather not have to say, expressing my feelings, and exposing my personal thoughts just to get a sense of commitment. I do this because of the feeling that many students are frozen in another world, often completely unaware of the value of their education. I know that many of them are scared to death thinking that they might be asked to express an opinion much less stand for something. Their success is defined as surviving yet another day without having to stand for anything.

If only they would study the movements, speech, and ideas of those who want to keep things as they have been for decades. If only my students would listen to their hearts, they would benefit tremendously as would those they will assume responsibility for. So, why not try this? Step back, breathe deeply, open your eyes, and think positive thoughts about your future and that of exercise physiology? Whatever it is you will do, it is certain that you will do it consistent with your perception of the world. You have the power and the freedom at your fingertips to be the person you want to be, but you must act.

Let me ask you a question: When did you start thinking for yourself? Or, have you ever once decided to start thinking for yourself? The difference is what lies within you. Learning to think is a good thing. Your emotions and state of mind shapes your actions. Life doesn’t have to be a game of chance. Think about being in control and learning what is important to be in control. Be confident in your ability to be successful (assuming you are willing to work and find a way to be successful).

When face with the crisis of should I join ASEP or not, recognize that joining ASEP is the natural order of events. It breaks down the old and allows for change to take place. How? By others observing your desire to clutch to a new reality; one that is of the mind that drives the change process. It is no different from any other birth of excellence. It begins with the first step. Yes, a bold step that you understand deep inside is necessary for all the right reasons. Finally, in time, there comes the belief along with the feeling that you can control your own future!

All my life this kind of thinking has been important to me. As a high school football player, I learned to believe that succeed is possible at 118 pounds. I learned to get rid of the limiting beliefs, especially those of the opposing team. Remember, another way to think of organizations big or small other than ASEP is “as opposing teams.” It is in fact the only way to first allow and then encourage the rethinking of your beliefs. Why not think about it?

What is your strength? What is the one factor that is absolutely important to securing your success? The answer, of course, is the power of your belief system. That is what keeps you on track. Your belief system must be that it is okay to make mistakes. Honestly, if you think about it for a moment, who hasn’t made their share of mistakes? The problem is that too few individuals, especially those who profess to be perfect, understand the gravity of their mistakes,

The bottom line is this: Why not take responsibility and move on. This thinking is important because there is no way you can get everyone on the same page. Too often, even your own success will work against you when it comes down to certain people. That is life. You can’t please everybody, and spending your life trying makes very little sense. Acknowledging that they have been crossed out of the learning experience (if not your success story), they promote and share viewpoints that most ethical people would take serious issue with. And yet, the overwhelming majority (much less the one who should get it) seldom gets the truth of their mistakes.

While it isn’t necessary (or, perhaps, even possible) to understand all the issues, factors, and challenges involved in the change process, it is a long-standing belief among most people educated on the subject that reasonable intelligence must be exercised. In other words, the secret of change is standing up for your beliefs and, then taking action. It is nothing more than a synergistic coming together of mind and experiences. Achieving desired outcomes is on one hand the willingness to fail on behalf of others and, on the other, it is as simple as changing beliefs and doing the right things.

Why not start learning to master your own mind? Why not get in control of your own future? Why not? Look around you. Are physical therapists without their own professional organization? No, well then, how about the dietitians? Are they without their own professional organization? No. Are massage therapists without their own professional organization? No, honestly! What about those who are interested in strength and conditioning? What about lawyers, doctors, CPAs, and electricians?

As sad as it is, exercise physiologists may be the final ripple in the pond of stupidity. Others are laughing at exercise physiologists, especially the academic types who are expected to know better. Failing to transition as they should have from physical education to exercise physiology, they surrendered to titles like kinesiology, exercise science, human performance, sports sciences, and dozens of other such titles.

By now if the reader is getting the point of this article, he/she must be concerned about the prevailing view of exercise physiology. Will it survive? From the ASEP point of view, there isn’t any question that it will survive. In fact, the ASEP leadership believes that the board certified exercise physiologists will become the recognized healthcare professionals responsible for “exercise as medicine.” They believe exercise physiologists will learn to start their own healthcare business. Yes, they will even learn to integrate spirituality counseling with the exercise prescription [4].

Now at this point you may be thinking, *I’m not really sure what you just said. I don’t know of any exercise physiologists who own a healthcare business, but it would be great if it was possible.* The key to becoming something great is to start thinking that way today. Start by envisioning yourself in your own facility hiring other board certified exercise physiologists. You must see and feel the reality of what you are thinking. Why not mentally internalize your future reality? Not everything can be solved by others. At times it is necessary to take the bull by the horns to create a particular result.

*The bottom line is this:* If you believe you have what it takes, then you have it. Of course you can start your own business. Develop your own strategy for financial success in order to capitalize on new found opportunities. That is exactly what some ASEP entrepreneurs have done. For example, take a look at *LynLake Fitness* [12] and *Ahrens Exercise Physiology* [13]. Both facilities are located in Minneapolis. They are owned by ASEP Board Certified Exercise Physiologists who supervise scientific cardio and VO2 max testing, provide for anaerobic and weight training guidelines, individual and group exercises, nutrition plans and metabolism assessments, along with lifestyle coaching, and much more.

The key to getting started in your own business is to *Just Do It*. Yes, of course do so only after following a period of time for strategy and appropriate planning. This is exactly what Beth Huschle did. As an entrepreneur, she founded *SmartFITT* [14] in Bagley, MN. Beth states that: “SmartFITT LLC is an exercise physiology based company that strives to enhance people’s lives through exercise.  Scientific measurements allow Board Certified Exercise Physiologists to develop personalized exercise programs unique to your body’s needs.  SmartFITT is an acronym for Scientifically Measured Assessment Results Targeting Frequency Intensity Time and Type.  Frequency, intensity, time and type are the four components of an exercise program.  SmartFITT exercise programs are based on scientifically measured assessment results.” Services include long term care, disease prevention, weight loss, and athletic performance.

What about money? Can you make it after college working for a little money? The answer is no. Once you discover that college is about getting a credible education and, then, finding a job with a good salary, you can figure out why this article is important. Think of a good paying salary as the critical stepping stone to success after college even should your professors fail to get this point. Do so anyway, and keep the dream of financial success alive. Maintain your EPC credential and stay credible as a healthcare practitioner.

Stop thinking of yourself as a second class citizen or as a loser! Start today to think beyond your nose or your immediate interests. As an example, how many students of exercise science and related degree programs know what they can expect from an average salary as a fitness worker, personal trainer, or group exercise instructor? Well, if you are a student or a parent of a student considering exercise science as a college major, there is an excellent way of getting the information you need.

Go the “Fitness Workers” in the *Occupation Outlook Handbook, 2010-11 Edition* on the United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics [15]. It contains (a) nature of the work, (b) training, other qualifications, and advancement, (c) employment, (d) job outlook, and (e) earnings. As an example, under “earnings,” one finds out the following:

“Median annual wages of fitness trainers and aerobics instructors in May 2008 were $29,210. The middle 50 percent earned between $19,610 and $44,420. The bottom 10 percent earned less than $16,120, while the top 10 percent earned $60,760 or more. These figures do not include the earnings of the self-employed. Earnings of successful self-employed personal trainers can be much higher. Median annual wages in the industries employing the largest numbers of fitness workers in May 2008 were as follows:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| General medical and surgical hospitals | $32,140 |
| Fitness and recreational sports centers | 30,610 |
| Local government | 30,200 |
| Civic and social organizations | 25,110 |
| Other schools and instruction | 24,230 |

Because many fitness workers work part time, they often do not receive benefits such as health insurance or retirement plans from their employers. They are able to use fitness facilities at no cost, however.”

Now, compare the salary range for physical therapists [16]. “Median annual wages of physical therapists were $72,790 in May 2008. The middle 50 percent earned between $60,300 and $85,540. The lowest 10 percent earned less than $50,350, and the highest 10 percent earned more than $104,350.” Median annual wages in the industries employing the largest numbers of physical therapists in May 2008 were:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Home health care services | $77,630 |
| Nursing care facilities | 76,680 |
| General medical and surgical hospitals | 73,270 |
| Offices of physicians | 72,790 |
| Offices of other health practitioners | 71,400 |

Think of it this way: $30,000 a year versus $75,000 a year is an important reason to decide on the right academic major. In fact, increasingly, a number of ASEP board certified exercise physiologists believe that entrepreneurship is the best steps toward securing the security necessary to survive financially. They feel entrepreneurship enables them to generate the salary they believe it important to cushion themselves against financial problems.

Why spend good money for a college degree that isn’t going to generate a decent annual salary? It doesn’t make sense. So, why not start college by making an inventory of your dreams, the salary you want to make, and the chances of being successful? Then, get the specifics, find someone who can help you, and design (or identify) your ideal academic major. Be a doer, take charge, and take action to avoid the classic outcome of indifference and failure.

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