The Vision of ASEP Stewardship
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Do not follow where the path may lead. Go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.
-- Anonymous

What is a vision? A vision is what keeps people on track and moving in the same direction. Thus, it is a map of where the nonprofit organization is going. As R. W. Dosick [1] said, "Vision is more than what you see. Vision is opening your eyes -- and your mind's eye, as well -- to that inner place where you see and foresee, where you dream and imagine and create. ... You could be satisfied with the status quo. You could be content to leave things as they are. You could choose not to 'rock the boat,' 'upset the apple cart,' or 'make waves.' You could repeat the sad and dangerous words, so often heard: 'But we've always done it this way.' But then you and your business would probably not improve, not progress, not prosper."

The ASEP Vision [2] is the greatest gift that can be given to exercise physiologists. It generates hope, provides endurance, and motivates the discouraged. No matter how difficult, the essence of the ASEP vision is to see the future. It answers three important questions:

- **What the Organization Wants to Be?** 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.

- **What the Organization Wants to Accomplish?** ASEP is dedicated to unifying exercise physiologists in the United States and worldwide to promote and support the study, practice, teaching, research, and development of the exercise physiology profession.
• **Whom the Organization Wants to Serve?** 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.

As Daniel Yankelovich [3] said, “A vision in this sense is a word picture of what life would be like if we were able to stop or reverse an undesirable condition.” Let us imagine if the academic exercise physiologists could just learn to think without being influenced by sports medicine’s failed rhetoric, they would learn to work together to build their own profession of exercise physiology. The stewardship ethics vision in this article builds on the vision of Board Certified Exercise Physiologists as healthcare professionals. The reasons for this thinking are compelling.

The ASEP vision statement provides a clear indication of what the “mission” is and, therefore, sets the “goals and objectives” of what the organizations aspires to reach. For example, the ASEP Mission [4] states that the **American Society of Exercise Physiologists**, the professional organization representing and promoting the profession of exercise physiology, is committed to the professional development of exercise physiology, its advancement, and the credibility of exercise physiologists. The statement is based on the following definitions.

**Exercise Physiology** [4] is the identification of physiological mechanisms underlying physical activity, the comprehensive delivery of treatment services concerned with the analysis, improvement, and maintenance of health and fitness, rehabilitation of heart disease and other diseases and/or disabilities, and the professional guidance and counsel of athletes and others interested in athletics, sports training, and human adaptability to acute and chronic exercise. **Exercise Physiologist** [4] is a healthcare professional who either has an academic degree in exercise physiology or who is certified by ASEP to practice exercise physiology [via the Exercise Physiologist Certified exam (EPC)], or who has a doctorate degree with an academic degree or emphasis in exercise physiology from an accredited college or university.

The ASEP organization is important for many reasons. In particular, it is responsible for promoting the professional development of exercise physiology [5]. Hence, implicit within the ASEP web pages is the notion that exercise physiology is a healthcare profession.
The bulk of the epidemiologic evidence and the scientific papers by exercise physiologists support the health benefits of regular exercise. Moreover, it is clear that an active lifestyle protects from many diseases. Now, with the ASEP Board Certification as the gold standard for exercise physiologists, the supervision, safety, and care of clients are increasingly evident throughout the public sector.

The ASEP Goals and Objectives [6] describe actions that are taken by the National Office, Board of Directors, and Committees. There are a number of goals, each describing a desired future condition toward which efforts are directed to increase membership, accreditation, board certification, and advertisements. Accomplishing the goals help to define ASEP as a successful organization. Goals challenge those responsible for achieving them focused on the success of ASEP and away from distractive activities that often result in draining resources and accomplish little. The ASEP Goals support the ASEP mission statement:

1. Implement an advertisement component to the ASEP web pages that customers will want to post their exercise physiology-related advertisements.
2. Create a well-designed, easy to navigate, and interactive electronic book for those interested in sitting for the ASEP Board Certification.
3. Set up a recognition, identification, and distribution system within ASEP to help the public locate Board Certified Exercise Physiologists.
4. Establish a partnership program with other organizations that generates increased potential for new membership exposure and recognition for ASEP.
5. Put in place a management structure that is able to accomplish the business of ASEP conferences and workshops efficiently and profitably.

If you are an exercise physiologist, you might be surprised to read the following list. For the ASEP members, this is part of the 21st century thinking that underpins the infrastructure of professional development. After all, professionalism is critical to society's acceptance of exercise physiologists as healthcare professionals. Also, in much the same way that Bob Dylan was thinking when he said, "You don't need a weather man to know which way the wind blows." -- ASEP leaders believe that exercise physiologists don't need a doctorate degree to know that Albert Einstein was right: "The significant problems we face cannot be
solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them.” Hence, the **ASEP Objectives** are:

1. To provide a powerful, unified forum and opportunity for exercise physiologists to present and discuss current research in exercise physiology.
2. To promote and encourage the exchange of ideas and information regarding all phases of exercise physiology.
3. To promote advancement of teaching and research in exercise physiology within the academic environment.
4. To encourage implement undergraduate and graduate education programs to meet the diverse interests and career opportunities in exercise physiology, regardless of age, gender, race or disability.
5. To promote the growth and application of the highest quality research and professional application of exercise physiology in health promotion, disease prevention, rehabilitation, and sport fitness and training.
6. To promote development and exchange of scientific information between ASEP and other professional organizations with an interest in exercise physiology.
7. To set the agenda, determine the direction, and make the decisions about the future of the exercise physiology profession.
8. To be a dynamic and action-oriented clearinghouse for questions regarding the exercise physiology profession.
9. To increase visibility and enhance the image of the exercise physiology profession.
10. To represent exercise physiologists whose professional work is mainly clinical, and to help ensure that federal agencies and legislators understand their work and needs of the clinical professional.
11. To participate in the development and implementation of public policies and procedures concerned with exercise physiology.
12. To make a commitment to quality and integrity in exercise physiology through adherence to the Society’s **Code of Ethics**.
13. To facilitate and promote positive public policy and professional, ethical behavior by providing ongoing peer review and quality assurance programs via the accreditation of the exercise physiology (science) academic programs.
14. To expand federal and private funding of exercise physiology research and training.

The significance of the ASEP Code of Ethics [7] is that both students and professionals in the study and application of exercise physiology to health, fitness, exercise, preventive and rehabilitative services can turn to it for guidance in professional conduct. Adherence to the Code is expected, and is based on the belief that exercise physiologists are self-regulated, critical thinkers who are accountable and responsible for their high quality competence in the practice and the delivery of exercise physiology concepts, ideas, and services.

1. Exercise physiologists should accurately communicate and provide health and fitness, educational, preventive, rehabilitative, and/or research services equitably to all individuals regardless of social or economic status, age, gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, disability, diverse values, attitudes, or opinions.

2. Exercise physiologists should be responsible and accountable for individual non-medical judgments and decisions about health and fitness, preventive, rehabilitative, educational, and/or research services.

3. Exercise physiologists should maintain high quality professional competence through continued study of the latest laboratory techniques and research in preventive and rehabilitative services.

4. Exercise physiologists are expected to conduct health and fitness, preventive, rehabilitative, educational, research, and other scholarly activities in accordance with recognized legal, scientific, ethical, and professional standards.

5. Exercise physiologists should respect and protect the privacy, rights, and dignity of all individuals by not disclosing health and fitness, rehabilitative, and/or research information unless required by law or when confidentiality jeopardizes the health and safety of others.

6. Exercise physiologists are expected to call attention to unprofessional health and fitness, preventive, rehabilitative, educational, and/or research services that result from incompetent, unethical, or illegal professional behavior.

7. Exercise physiologists should contribute to the ongoing development and integrity of the profession by being responsive to, mutually supportive, and accurately
communicating academic and other qualifications to colleagues and associates in the health and fitness, preventive, rehabilitative, educational and/or research services and programs.

8. Exercise physiologists should participate in the profession's efforts to establish high quality services by avoiding conflicts of interest and endorsement of products in the health and fitness, preventive, and/or rehabilitative services and programs.

9. Exercise physiologists should participate in and encourage critical discourse to reflect the collective knowledge and practice within the exercise physiology profession to protect the public from misinformation, incompetence, and unethical acts.

10. Exercise physiologists should provide health and fitness, preventive, rehabilitative, and/or educational interventions grounded in a theoretical framework supported by research that enables a healthy lifestyle through choice.

**What is Stewardship?**

Stewardship is an ethic that embodies responsible planning and management of resources. It is the responsibility that ASEP leaders have in managing their impacts on the profession of exercise physiology. As leaders, they are responsible for improving the reputation of ASEP among consumers. Perhaps not so obvious, professional stewardship comes at a cost. It requires a large emotional investment. Stewardship in exercise physiology has a number of potential benefits. Collectively, it increases career opportunities, protects the undergraduate exercise physiology degree and improves credibility in the profession.

The giving of one’s time and talents is essential to promoting professional development in exercise physiology and helping the community of exercise physiologists. It means that you care for and share the same concerns for the profession whether you are a college teacher, a non-doctorate exercise physiologist who owns his own business [8], or you work in a hospital setting; a good steward gives back to the profession. It means stepping up to the plate when no one else wants to do so. Professional stewardship is an important part of ASEP’s work. The leadership believes it is a key benefit.

*Freedom, morality, and the human dignity of the individual consists precisely in this; that he does good not because he is forced to do so, but because he freely conceives it, wants it, and loves it.*

*—Mikhail Bakunin (1814-1876) Philosopher*
for all exercise physiologists. By maintaining a nationally established set of professional standards for Board Certified Exercise Physiologists based on a solid scientific education and hands-on laboratory experiences, ASEP helps to ensure that exercise physiology will be recognized as a healthcare profession in the United States and around the world.

In conclusion, the power of the collective stewardship of professionalism in exercise physiology is real. The opportunity of stewardship means the “management” of exercise physiology for the benefit of its members and society. The ASEP leaders do not own exercise physiology. They are simply doing what they think is best for exercise physiology, and they believe the most pressing needs are professionalism and credibility. That is why they developed early on rather than later the professional documents that represent the backbone of all professional organizations. They believe that the documents (i.e., vision and mission statements, accreditation and certification guidelines, and professional standards) address the problems in exercise physiology. The documents help to protect students and the community of exercise physiologists from future instances of repeating the failed rhetoric of yesterday’s thinking.

References
