

We Must Begin To See Differently

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

“Getting down and dirty!” Is it what I think or is it worst?

Human beings have inexorably altered the human race. We have talked and done things to essentially everyone sufficiently so that each person is alien to even the person next to you. Disrupted thoughts, unnatural tension, and cycles of excessive this and that have left most people contaminated with meaningless ideas, feelings, and gestures.

These far-reaching changes have spurred scores of young and old alike to examine the irony of human interaction. Many live only in so far as they can plan and devise emotional management strategies to lessen their damage. It is without question a global change in the hearts of men and women of all ages. But, where is the truth in it? Where is the linkage between being altered and the belowground responses between human beings?

When an old man dies, it is a whole library which burns.

African proverb

It is true that when an old man dies or is pushed to the side, a lifetime of ideas, information, and experiences are tossed to the wind. A library of a lifetime is wasted! But, as is so commonly heard, “That’s life.” What if the philosophers could convince you of a different point of view; one to help mitigate the impacts of failed friendships? Indeed, it sounds simplistic. But, what if a more holistic understanding of the

consequences of one's actions could help mitigate the impacts of failed rhetoric?

What if is always a big question? There remains much uncertainty, however, about how people think and why. Is it in response to short-term rewards or is it the fast-cycling of negative emotions that must be released? While more work remains to be done to fully elucidate the effects of "others on others" – coming to an understanding of the events is imperative.

In fact, it is becoming clear that both short-term gain and long-term expectations have significant consequences for the mind and body ecosystem. Specifically, the flux of emotions, often stimulated by the

The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.

Edmund Burke

release and turnover of daily events and past decisions defines the cascade of inevitable uncertainty. The reason of which is clear. Evidence of the same is also emerging that strongly links actions with failure to act.

William Jennings Bryan said, "Destiny is not a choice, it is a chance. It is not a thing to be waited for, it is a thing to be achieved." In short, the root of the exercise physiologist's problem is the failure to act and to stay the course! Bryan's quote begs the question: Where are the men (and women) who are free enough to say what they believe and courageous enough to dedicate themselves, regardless of the consequences? Where? Why is it they are "doing nothing?"

The fact of the matter is that it is okay to live your dreams. Yes, it is okay to "see differently." It is okay to do what you believe is right, and then, yes, to live out the consequences. It is human to not know all there is to know about something. Some people, if not most, are always searching (mostly in despair), and yet they fail to get this point. Their imperfection is part of the price they pay for being human.

As Winston Churchill said, "Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts." Take it from me it is a great feeling to know what it is to have a friend, to receive a gift from a

stranger, and to feel the touch of a loved one. All human beings should ask themselves, "What's it all about?" and, then, keep on keeping on regardless of what so-called friends think. Such is the test of life and the unique communion with the power of hope.

After all, part of doing anything, especially making decisions that influence others is doing so based on the best evidence one can gather at the moment. Much of life, if not life itself, is a calculated risk; one that is done to understand the prudent path. Like anyone else, trying to make the right choices, there is always the possibility of paying a big price for those without faith.

Yet, doing so is the ultimate expression of faith in possibilities. It is the freedom and faithfulness necessary to stand with one's decisions that counts. But, unfortunately, not all men (or women) are grounded in the power of hope. Thus, without it, they are terrified by anything new or uncertain. The challenge to think differently, that is, specifically, to "see exercise physiology differently" is simply too difficult. The way of the lone individual trying desperately to lead the change process becomes too dominating and/or uncomfortable, thus inviting the weak of heart to devote themselves to their mindless insensitivities.

The dedicated life is
the life worth living.
You must give with
your whole heart.
Annie Dillard

Taken as a whole, such individuals disclose the profile of the character of one who lives under the fear of change. Often, this character is marked by the fear of going unnoticed. No one desires to be invisible. Everyone desires attention. Indifference is a killer. So, the bottom line is this: why do friends and colleagues mistreat others while believing they have the right to do so? Is it simply because it is their desire to be recognized that drives their actions against others.

If only they had hope and a vision with substance. Then, the goodness of life would be self-evident to them and their kind. Regardless of whatever the events may be, they would know that there is always a "happy ending" regardless of the work or failure. Hope is central to finding meaning in life and fulfilling one's vision. But, those without hope, that is, friends and/or colleagues who live day by day without

the confidence that life is good, they are often blinded by the necessity to fault others. It is a sad series of events, especially in terms of the damage they do.

It is never too late to be who you might have been.

George Eliot

So, here is the question: What do you love about exercise physiology? Are you, as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe said, "...shaped and fashioned by what [you] love." If not, why not? Isn't it time to become filled with desire and passion for exercise physiology as a healthcare

The most pathetic person in the world is someone who has sight, but no vision.

Helen Keller

profession? If not, why not? Here is a question that needs an answer: Why aren't there "actual" exercise physiology majors in the majority of the colleges and universities throughout the United States? Why is it that a college graduate with an academic major in exercise science and "maybe" a concentration in exercise physiology can call him- or herself an exercise physiologist?

It makes no sense whatsoever. Certainly, it is well-known that a student who graduates with a major in biology cannot refer to himself as a physical therapist or a medical doctor. And yet, unfortunately, this problem is widespread, and it exists within the failed transitional thinking of physical educators who have the desire to be exercise physiologists. It is sad, indeed, especially since much of the problem is generated by the academic exercise physiologists.

It is terribly important to get things right from the beginning. Yet, even then, there is no guarantee that the future will turn out as expected unless the right path is taken. This is simply the product of a normal part of everyday thinking and living. Eleanor Roosevelt said it best, "The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dream." But, here again, it is absolutely imperative that the dream makes sense. Let me ask you this question: Does it make sense to pay big tuition bucks for a meaningless degree? The only answer should be an obvious "NO." A college degree should be all about increasing the

likelihood of finding a credible and financially sound career in the public sector. Hence, it should be obvious that students and their parents cannot afford to be asleep at the wheel of their education.

The opportunity that God sends does not wake up him who is asleep.

Senegalese proverb

It is pastime that those who are rightfully exercise physiologists must stand up and get with the necessary changes in the academic program. The willingness to be the person you were meant to be requires the behavior of thinking and writing about “what is exercise physiology” and “who is an exercise physiologist.” No, it doesn’t come easy but it is possible and, certainly, it is necessary. This point was highlighted by Viktor Frankl who said, “...the capacity to remain our own person in the face of what is given us the ‘last of the human freedoms – to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.’”

The question is not what you look at, but what you see.

Henry David Thoreau

Life is therefore rather simple when you think about it. The problem is not taking the time to “think differently” or “see differently” when it comes to exercise physiology. It is not exercise science or even sports sciences. To see and to understand the differences between exercise physiology and one of 40 similar undergraduate degree titles is the first step. Fortunately, there are signs that when a person takes time to do so, serious changes in one’s lifestyle become evident (even in this fragmented world of academia).

Life isn't about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself.

George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950)

For sure, the image of “what is exercise physiology” isn’t what sports medicine says it is. Honestly, this thinking should be obvious by now. The problem is that too many PhD exercise physiologists in particular are walking around with deaf ears and blind eyes. Clearly, they are smart people. But, smart people can and do get lost when listening to

bad advice. One wonders at times if they are even thinking. Working as a personal trainer alongside a non-college graduate who is also a personal trainer isn't a meaningful career option. Similarly, working for athletic teams sounds interesting, but is it a viable career option? The short answer is "NO." There are very few financially credible opportunities outside of one's own personal healthcare business to design, instruct, and implement effective strength and conditioning programs. After all, the athletic trainer is 9.9 times more likely to be hired than the exercise science graduate.

Okay, what about cardiac rehabilitation? Well, it is true that a certain (small) percent of the exercise science graduates work in cardiac rehabilitation. The problem is that they end up working under and not necessarily alongside the nurse or physical therapist. Why? There are many reasons. The bottom line is that the great majority of these individuals realize out of financial necessity that they must go back to college, often majoring in nursing or physical therapy so they can locate a credible job when they graduate.

What about private sports medicine clinics, wellness programs, and work hardening programs? It is the same story; one that has been played out for decades with the same results. As long as academic exercise physiologists establish their worth in surrogate leaders, they will not be free (and their students will always surface as losers). They will remain trapped in the self-absorbing fear that has convinced them that they are not able to make it on their own. This fear has led them to the lack of freedom that keeps them looking the other way when ASEP leaders knock on their door.

Students wishing to pursue a career in the exercise science field are strongly encouraged to pursue further education, such as a Master's degree in Exercise Physiology. Why? The answer is rather simple. The professors realize that the entry level employment in corporate fitness centers and health clubs doesn't cut it financially. That's why the department websites conclude that exercise science makes an excellent foundation for graduate work in physical therapy, occupational therapy, physician's assistants, medicine, biology, exercise physiology, biomechanics, and nutrition.

Henry D. Thoreau said, "Friends...they cherish one another's hopes. They are kind to one another's dreams." Well, by now, it should be clear that if college teachers aren't willing to "see differently," then, their students and their hopes and dreams aren't likely to be realized. This means that the teachers are not their friends and, frankly, they are not kind to their students' dreams and expectations of getting a college degree.

We must learn to see differently.