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What Does it Take to Lead an Organization?

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Last week I read several interesting postings on the cardiac rehabilitation egroup. I found the following comment interesting.

“ASEP is not a serious contender because of leadership.” – Jeff Roitman

What appears to be missing in the comment is the changing nature of leadership. The author has failed to appreciate that individuals have the right to differing points of view. ASEP has demonstrated respect for sports medicine professionals in a variety of ways. Recent attempts by Dr. Robert Robergs to establish a professional affiliation with ACSM have met with no response from ACSM. Leaders of ACSM could operate in a far more positive fashion, but they haven't. Exercise physiologists had to go on the offensive.

When caring professionals plunge into the heart of an issue, there is no single right formula to follow. Members of ASEP have the right to create their own solution. Not surprisingly, they have their own particular take on leadership and professional success. The purpose of this brief article is to explain what everyone should already know. It takes guts to

make a decision to walk 100% in the opposite direction, even if you were to believe your colleagues might understand. ASEP leadership is not perfect, and they may not be much more than average at what they do. However, what they have done is take great personal and professional risk to correct mistakes. ASEP exercise physiologists have stood up for what they think is the right thing to do, and they have solved a few problems as well.

ASEP members have listened to the issues and concerns of many college students, exercise physiologists in the healthcare settings, and those directly responsible for academic programs. The organization exists for exercise physiologists who are impassioned about what they do and what they believe in. Members believe they have the right to exist, and that it is utterly inappropriate and improper to suggest otherwise. The idea that all exercise physiologists, including the undergraduate prepared, should be winners, or nobody should be is embraced by all ASEP members.

If leadership is about vision, and persuading members to join, ASEP has chosen the right people. Drs. Robergs and Carter are passionate about building an enduring organization driven by the ASEP vision. By now, everybody around the world should know what the members want to accomplish. They want to create an unprecedented opportunity for all exercise physiologists to be respected and credible professionals. In just a few short years, they have done just that with the "Exercise Physiologist Certified" exam. Whether anyone likes it or not, today there are certified exercise physiologists!

For individuals, however dedicated to their professional work, to speak negatively about specific leaders of another professional organization isn't right. Individuals have all the reason in the world to fight for their own ideas, if they think they are right. If professionals disagree, they should at least respect the other person's willingness to change what

can be changed. Professionals have a right to disagree in how they think their work for a higher purpose should be realized, which reminds me of the statement: "Usually if everybody is going in one direction it's wrong."

All anyone can do is the best he/she can. Being ready to change directions if necessary to achieve the ASEP vision is imperative, as well as being sincere on behalf of all exercise physiologists. Members of different ASEP committees are talking the talk, literally. Many readers of **PEPonline** may not realize the work that is underway, but their energy, integrity, and caring for exercise physiology are appreciated. Some are more flexible and adaptable than others, but all are willing to learn to feel valued and to have a stronger profession.

While leadership is important, I'm reminded of the statement: "When the best leader's work is done, the people say, 'We did it ourselves.' " ASEP is not about one or two individuals as leaders of a face-to-face recognition that change is inevitable. Instead, it is about a team of exercise physiology professionals who have decided that it is time to control their own destiny.

In our professional life with other people we are engaged continuously, through words, papers, and actions, in creating and re-creating the organizational institutions that make life possible. The process is never neutral but it should be ethical and fair, since organizations operate by ideas of right and wrong and conceptions of inescapable good. Hence, if we are to be wise in the development of our profession and the use of different organizations, we must assess and evaluate what exercise physiologists want and need, and how (or whether) a particular organization may help us in achieving it. But most of all we have to allow for talk and discussion, and we also have to discover and respect the professionals on both sides of the issue. One obvious place is on the Internet. There is a qualitative difference between real dialogue and abusive flame.

The idea of an organization for just exercise physiologists is not new, but most have not wanted to attempt it. To reopen or to actually do something about the limited jobs in exercise physiology, we have to bring others into our discussions. In so doing, even if everyone is able to put aside "what's in it for me," there will be real and legitimate differences of interpretation and application of principles. The differences will reach out to every condition and circumstance of what we do. The aphorism, "As a man thinketh in his heart so is he," embraces the sum of all his thoughts. It is fair to say that some exercise physiologists are anxious to improve their circumstances, but are unwilling to consider options. They consider themselves justified in keeping in stride with organizations that have strength in number, that are considered credible, and have legislative power.

The proof of this truth is their unwillingness to discover the hidden powers and possibilities within an organization created by exercise physiologists for exercise physiologists. This being so, exercise physiologists with the heart to change have the right to link their thoughts with a central purpose in their life. They also have the right to set out to achieve it. Such is not wrong but right when the "invisible" exercise physiologists have not lived like the PhD exercise physiologists. It is for them that ASEP is no longer a dream but rather a reality. They now can benefit from the dreamers who just a few years ago dreamed a beautiful vision from which its members shall become professionals.

Those who condemn the leaders of ASEP as non-important exercise physiologists are a bit thoughtless. They either fail to see the trials, failures, and struggles which so many non-PhD exercise physiologists have voluntarily encountered in order to gain work or "stay the course" with their traditional thinking. Seeing, hearing, and speaking with many of these individuals who have faith in the idea that clinical exercise physiology is exercise physiology has caused many to believe

that the clinical realm of work is too narrow in career opportunities. Work in cardiac rehabilitation can be very rewarding for the PhD prepared. It is a different story for the non-PhD professional who receives relatively little benefit and return for the effort. Part of the problem, from my perspective, is that certification should first be designed for the exercise physiologists, not specifically for the person who works in a hospital setting. Also, just any certification, regardless of its quality, is not enough if the purpose of the certification fails to hit the target.

The problem is not the question of the quality of a particular sports medicine certification or its advocates. For years, I lectured in many of the exercise technologists and exercise specialists workshops. I did so without consideration of what it meant to my exercise physiology students, that is, until a friend pulled me to the side and asked for a few minutes of my time. His concern was, "What went wrong?" Why are the exercise physiologists in sports medicine empathizing with non-exercise science/physiology students? Frankly, I was confused that this young man could not see the benefits of the workshop and the efforts of so many hard working professionals. It took some serious thinking to get past my beliefs of some 20 years. Yet, the more I realized that his question was a "cry for help" and a better way to affirm his worth as an exercise physiology student, I realized very clearly that he had the same right as the physical therapy student or the nursing student to feel special.

A certification that helps individuals who are not exercise physiologists access traditionally acknowledged exercise physiology jobs isn't right. It is a glaring statement that says, "You don't count in my eyes, you're not important to me, your thoughts and feelings don't matter." These messages are often expressed implicitly through the dedication to support the sports medicine certifications, regardless of what the non-PhD exercise physiologists are concerned about. They cry out for affirmation, and yet their professors are actually willing to certify anyone who passes

the exam. Fortunately, most members of ASEP are no longer supporting certifications that do not help exercise physiology students.

What went wrong bears repeating? The certification's process and insensitivity toward an audience of undergraduate exercise science/physiology students have caused them to feel less than special. It is logical, from their view, that if their goal in life is to be an exercise physiologist, then the goal is compromised when other individuals who are certified but are not academically prepared exercise physiologists apply for the same job. Hence, the objective of the EPC exam is to bridge the gap and build trust. It demonstrates an understanding of the issues and concerns of the undergraduate audience by providing a certification just for exercise physiologists.

The EPC is a positive, shared perspective that allows both exercise physiology faculty and students to proceed with the belief that "we understand each other". It is a direct result of a shared experience that helped me realize my earlier efforts, as a lecturer in sports medicine workshops, could be viewed as "an ego running amok." Fortunately, now I'm part of a group that is working to solve problems rather than merely pointing them out. We don't have to fear rejection or negative comments. Now that we have the opportunity to build our own future, students and teachers alike can adopt the ASEP hope for a better future, do something else, or not do anything. It is entirely our decision. We do have options. We can act now and join ASEP, wait and think it over, or stay with whatever organization that is right at the time. Think about it.

References

1. Roitman, J. (2000). Response to CEP statements. Cardiac-Rehab egroup. Available Online. www.egroups.com/message/cardiac-rehab/552