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The Game of Change: Risk Taking and Future Success

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Most people consider change as either unnecessary or not worth the effort, but more often than not it is necessary and it is worth it. Change is necessary, especially when the common practices of everyday thinking are not producing meaningful results. Take, for example, college teachers and their reasons for earning the PhD. Also, consider the influence of their mentors or professors who emphasized the importance of doing research over teaching. This means that when the students graduate with the doctorate degree they are poised to publish research papers more so than building their teaching skills.

Hence, most doctorate-prepared exercise physiologists are researchers, not teachers. Their reality is presenting research papers at national and regional meetings, and doing so as often as possible. It is good for their resume and academic status in the institution. This is what they were taught. As a result, they are not just good at doing research but driven to do research. They are not taught to value teaching or seeing themselves as teachers. In fact, if they can get a graduate student do their teaching, they will. Teaching is viewed simply something that must be done and, if possible, do as little as is necessary. This is why the object of the academic game is to be prepared graduates who honor the “publish or perish” idea of a college job. Unfortunately, the administrators in the academy reinforce the same thinking and, therefore, the vision of great teaching is seldom discussed or even valued.

These brief words about college teaching are not to be nasty or mean, but to simply share my thoughts in hope of breaking the silence. Personally, I hold no critical thoughts towards other academics (whether I know them or not). This article is my way of saying to academic exercise physiologists, especially the new ones that it is okay to be different and allow yourself to be influenced by the positive thoughts of wanting to be a better teacher for his or her students. It is okay to reach out to your students and help them be successful

as they move towards graduation. Students need teachers who actually do care for their well-being.

If it is true that we can only be what we see ourselves being, why not see exercise physiologists as teachers as well as researchers? This is not only important for the students, but also for the teachers themselves. Why? In short, my belief is that no academic exercise physiologist is a success in academia unless he or she loves teaching. Stated somewhat differently, no college professor can be a good teacher if he or she has contempt for academic responsibilities other than research. Academics must make the first move. The game of change begins from within each person. Teachers must work to improve their teaching skills.

I think exercise physiologists must believe they can be great teachers. Ask yourself, "What can I learn from teaching this class today, this semester, and throughout the academic year?" What can I improve? Remember, change is game of processing new thoughts and ideas. Regardless of the challenges of teaching and the lack of value associated with it, each class provides opportunity to learn, to grow, and to change the everyday mindset of academics. And, in particular, the mindset that anyone can teach minimizes the importance of good teaching and making sense of college teaching as a profession.

A student-centered mindset is critical to spending more time thinking about and engaging in student-teacher activities important to the students' success. A simple change of how college teachers think about "teaching" can make all the difference in the world to the students' future well-being. If you don't believe me, could it be due to a fixed mindset about what you were taught to expect once you became a college teacher? Strangely enough, few if any doctorate students think about the influence that their research-oriented professors have on them. They are in effect determining who you are and how you think rather than helping you to think out of the box and become master of your own thoughts. Thus, rather than growing as a thinker, doctorate-level students often become copies of their professors. Learn to listen to yourself. Are you thinking more and more about doing research and less and less about teaching? Are you excited about your first college job so you can start a research project while you are turning a blind eye to teaching and the needs students have? Does the idea of teaching three academic classes make you feel terrible while you excited about thinking of opportunities to use the new exercise physiology laboratory equipment? Do you avoid showing interest in taking about teaching techniques in case you might get interested?

Fixed mindsets exist in academia and all other areas of life. The bottom line is that new PhDs cannot become the leaders needed in academia unless they initiate control over their mindset. Changes in exercise physiologists are dependent on their desire to become the thinkers they originally desired for themselves. Learning a new mindset is imperative to developing a deeper understanding of the essential dimensions of teaching. That is why

new thinking, innovative practices, and reward structure that values teaching should be examined in doctorate school along with the constant stream of talking about research.

The objective of this article is to challenge college professors to rethink research, teaching, and the significance of an education in changing mindsets (i.e., if they can find time to read something other than a research article). An implicit assumption made is that a college degree prepares graduates for work in the public sector. Now that ~70% of the college teachers are adjuncts all across the United States, the exercise physiology doctorate degree cannot be viewed as an automatic career link to an academic position. Students need to understand that academic institutions are hiring fewer PhDs full time at nice salaries with healthcare benefits. Moreover, as a business, the administrators are using the institutions' money in non-faculty ways (such as building new dorms and athletic facilities as well as increasing their own salaries and hiring non-academics as assistants to do their work).

The idea of earning a PhD degree with an easy transition into an academic position is quickly becoming a dream of the past. Also, as a result of the failure of the chair and faculty members to change their mindsets, the college and university graduates are not well prepared for non-academic work (although they may be pretty good at doing research). Now that the graduates are in the real world of finding a job and paying bills, particularly the money spent on thousands of dollars for tuition loans, reality begins to hit home. This is when students at all levels realize that the exercise physiology curriculum and the failure of the faculty to educate about the transition from school to work leave them uncertain about what to do. Given that the faculty failed to prepare the students to function in the non-academic world, failed to provide occupational knowledge and skills (particularly, entrepreneurial skills) and, therefore, failed the educational system and the parents of the students who end up going back home to live, students end up on the short end of the stick. Students should not be viewed as objects of play with money from which to move into the administrations' bank account. But, honestly, this has become the academic reality faster than we may want to admit, especially since this is a model that dominates our culture.

The most promising way to provide specialized knowledge and opportunities is to prescribe exercise medicine to middle-age and older adults throughout society to prevent and treat chronic diseases. But, to do so, the students must be taught the business side of exercise physiology. As argued before, students need authentic information about how to be an entrepreneur in the pursuit of intrinsically rewarding application of exercise medicine in starting their own private practice. As an alternative to applying for graduate school and taking out more tuition loans, students should be challenged to risk different mindsets to increase future career opportunities. Yes, it is obvious that a new mindset is risky, but exercise physiologist must do the work necessary to become an integral member of the healthcare professionals.

A major step in the future of exercise physiology as a healthcare profession is to start thinking about "exercise physiology and private practice" in the same breath. Of course it

will not be the career path for all exercise physiologists. But, until significant changes take place in the academic settings, the risk, stress, and responsibility of starting your own healthcare business makes sense. So, if you are even slightly thinking about it, your first question is this: "How do I learn the business skills needed to start my own business?" Then, there is the question, "Should I start a solo practice or with a partner?" "What about location?" Yes, there are numerous questions to ask, particularly the questions that have to do with writing a business plan, finding a location, purchasing equipment, and marketing the practice.

In a nutshell, it is risky to change the game, that is, to change one's mindset. Yet, while there is the expression of safety in numbers, if starting your own exercise physiology practice feels right, then you should do it. If you are a member of ASEP, check with the CEO, Mr. Shane Paulson. He is "the" entrepreneur of the fine state of Minnesota. He will answer your questions and provide timely guidance. If you are not yet a member, consider joining. Professional associations, like ASEP, provide excellent resources and networking opportunities. Also, there will be specific articles written on this subject (i.e., the game of change, fulfilling your goals, and entrepreneurial steps to professional and financial success) in the upcoming issues of PEOnline and JPEP. Until then, stay mentally strong and resistant to the mindset of the academic status quo.