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Exercise Physiologists Need a Shared Vision and Purpose

Tommy Boone, PhD, MPH, MAM, MBA

ASEP Board Certified Exercise Physiologist

Do not follow where the path may lead. Go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.

-- Anonymous

Everything is changing except the majority of the academic exercise physiologists who are still living without a vision. They do not talk and share their thoughts about “what is exercise physiology”. The professors of exercise physiology are behaving today exactly as professors did in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Yet, since 1990, which is essentially 30 years ago we are still living like it was 1980! Meeting the needs of the students of today’s exercise physiology mandates that the professors move beyond yesterday’s thinking. Why is there no mandate to bring exercise physiology out of the 1980s into a coherent, vital, and energized professional organization? The short answer is because of the lack of a vision to see the difference between “how it has always been done” and “what should be happening” and, therefore, how the lack of a vision has stifled the development of exercise physiology as a healthcare profession.

A visionary commitment to the future is a vital component in bringing forth the emphasis on professionalism in exercise physiology. Without that component, there isn’t the creative force or a compelling vision to discuss how it is possible for exercise physiologists to create what has never existed. Everyone has done exactly the same thing semester after semester and year after year, which is to place emphasis on research and publishing versus making a commitment to promoting the importance of professionalism, professional development, and demonstrate the willingness to help support a profession-specific organization,

such as the American Society of Exercise Physiologists (ASEP). Why is that the case? The short answer is because exercise physiologists are not thinking about exercise physiology as a profession.

"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."

-- R. W. Dosick

As strange as it sounds, the majority of the exercise physiologists comes across as not being interested in suspending their own thoughts and allowing for the so-called unthinkable long enough to create a potentially viable connection to a new dialogue about ASEP. It is sad that the only dream they have is to advance themselves as big time researchers. There appears to be little to no shared values of being part of their own professional organization. It is as though research is the only purpose for exercise physiology. There is no vision for exercise physiologists? Surely, if the non-doctorate exercise physiologists are going to be happy, all exercise physiologists (especially the doctorate prepared) need a compelling purpose.

I believe that purpose can be and should be to work towards the professionalization of exercise physiology. I believe that if more exercise physiologists would stop and think for a moment about what will make them happy, they would escape the simplistic thinking that research is the only thing that is important. I believe that if they would get involved in the larger picture of "what is exercise physiology", they would begin to think of the possibilities and potentials for credible career options after graduation. If they would make the commitment to the ASEP vision of placing an emphasis on the professional development of exercise physiologists, all exercise physiologists would benefit. Exercise physiologists must have a vision.

Father Hesburg, the former president of Notre Dame said that, "The very essence of leadership is you have to have a vision. It's got to be a vision you articulate clearly and forcefully on every occasion. You can't blow an uncertain trumpet."

Having a vision is critical to success. Why not join the American Society of Exercise Physiologists and share in the development of the profession of exercise physiology? The ASEP leaders understand your concerns and wish to help by getting you involved in updating how exercise physiologists think about exercise physiology. Your involvement will help inspire your exercise physiology colleagues and give meaning to the need to think differently about exercise physiology. Your unique skills and talents will help exercise

physiologists at all levels to understand the importance of a collective body of professionals working toward achieving a common vision (i.e., a common purpose in life).

That is why the following content is on the ASEP website. The **ASEP Vision** generates hope, provides endurance, and motivates the discouraged. No matter how difficult, the essence of the ASEP vision is to see that the organization is recognized as the leading professional society of American scholars and practitioners in the study and application of exercise physiology to fitness, health promotion, rehabilitation, and sports training. The Society is dedicated to unifying all exercise physiologists in the United States to promote and support the study, practice, teaching, research, and development of the exercise physiology profession to serve the public good by making an academically sound difference in the application of exercise physiology concepts and insights (1).

Inventing the future of exercise physiology requires giving up what we think exercise physiology is today. Is the path presently unknown? Yes, but we must be willing to follow the ASEP path to make exercise physiology “the healthcare profession to prescribe exercise medicine”. That should be the underlying purpose of the undergraduate degree in exercise physiology. To accomplish this all-powerful means of empowering the students of exercise physiology, the academic exercise physiologists must be willing to be different. This will happen when they grasp the significance of the ASEP organization and the desire to create a different future for all exercise physiologists.

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The expression “we have always done it this way so why change” is common among individuals who are unwilling to take risks (e.g., become a member of ASEP and/or speak positive about the reasons it should exist) because they feel threatened by their colleagues should they go against status quo. Yet, regardless of the circumstances, redefining the future of exercise physiology depends on each of us to take responsibility for making a difference. It is simply wrong to turn a blind eye and allow the problems within exercise physiology to continue. I think a day will come when academic exercise physiologists, individually and collectively, will make a declaration of interdependence from status quo to support ASEP. Then, each of us will have found within us the power of unlimited possibilities as ASEP Board Certified

Exercise Physiologists. I believe this is the 21st century path to developing the future of exercise physiologists as professionals in healthcare and exercise medicine.

Together, the ASEP members can and will create the healthcare profession of exercise physiology.

References

1. **American Society of Exercise Physiologists.** (2019). ASEP Vision. (Online). <https://www.asep.org/about-asep/>

