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## **Where is the Courage to do the Work of Becoming a Healthcare Profession?**

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I haven't typed a word for some minutes now. Just looking at my iPad and expecting something to happen. I know I must write an article for JPEP. Why? Because that is what I do and have done since I created the journal in 2003. I write about exercise physiology, the need for professionalism, and why exercise physiologists can't get with the change process. You have no idea how much I think about and pray for academic exercise physiologists to step up to the plate. If only they would do so, then, the students would stand a great chance of being successful after college.

Strange as it seems, my work comes across much like a country song with someone crying about somebody but nothing ever happens. Song after song nothing changes. Much like article after article no one comes forward to support the idea that the 21st century is different from the decades earlier and all the emphasis on exercise specialists and trainers. We aren't physical educators, and yet so many exercise physiologists think they are exercise scientists! Really, it is a strange mentality. Publish a paper and automatically college teachers in exercise science departments believe they are exercise scientists. Honestly, it is a sad outcome for exercise physiologists who simply want to be recognized as healthcare professionals.

I suggest that rather than falling victim to such common thinking exercise physiologists should create a logical and rational analysis of who they are. For certain, that is exactly what the leadership of the American Society of Exercise Physiologists did in 1997 when they developed the professional infrastructure of exercise physiology as a healthcare profession. If you were to break from status quo, go to the ASEP website and read the "vision" statement. Take a look at the requirements to sit for Board Certification. If you are a student, ask your teacher about ASEP accreditation. If you have an interest in exercise physiology work after college, go to the ASEP website and read the exercise physiologists' standards of professional practice.

Everything is in place for academic exercise physiologists to embrace each other and their profession. We within ASEP believe the professional infrastructure is in place to be recognized as a healthcare profession. We write about it and some of us pray about it. Why? Because it is the right thing to do and it is simply no different from what other health professionals have already done to ensure the growth of their profession. We must stop wasting time and get with the change in our thinking that exercise science and related degree programs are exercise physiology. Sure, there are similarities but rather than continue with exercise science, human performance, kinesiology, sport science, and similar degree titles, why not unite them as one title and that is exercise physiology?

One title, one profession, and one purpose will move exercise physiologists into the ranks of the established professions. That is it. That is the ASEP organizational, academic, and political thinking. Yes, I understand it isn't easy to think outside the box. I understand there will be colleagues who will look at you like you have gone over the edge. I understand that what I am suggesting is radical to the status quo academic types. But, it is time to take a stand and do so regardless of the consequences. It is time to stand tall and strong for changing exercise physiology from yesterday's thinking of fitness professionals to the 21<sup>st</sup> century thinking of healthcare professionals. We must change to survive. We must start thinking as professionals if we are to become professionals.

Why is this so hard to understand? Change is life. We must learn to adjust or we will fail to move forward. We must learn to think as professionals or we continue as technicians or personal trainers. Neither is what we actually are but to become what we are we must start believing it is true. We must believe we are healthcare professionals. We must believe we are "the" professionals with the scientific education and hands-on laboratory skills to prescribe exercise medicine.

But, such thinking brings me back to my purpose and concerns that bear directly on why I am writing this article. Why? Why am I writing this article? You tell me! Is it because I need another published article? If not, why? Is it possible I am writing this article because I care about exercise physiology? Do you care exercise physiology? Really, think about it. Do you value being an exercise physiologist more than being called a personal trainer or a fitness instructor? Or, perhaps, since you are a "college teacher" and you already feel good about yourself. Is that it? If so, I am still interested in why you allow your students to be used as is so clearly evident to anyone with their eyes open?

Believe me students are getting the short end of the academic stick. It doesn't matter that their advisors tell them to apply to physical therapy with the idea they will have a great future. That is the teachers' way of trying to save face. After all, they knew 4 years earlier when the students declared their academic major that they, as academic exercise physiologists, had failed to rise to the occasion of changed thinking. As faculty, they knew that without the faculty's commitment to new thinking that nothing has changed or will change.

It is strange that nothing changes until you realize that everything you have been doing is wrong. For example, it is always wrong to mislead college students and their parents. It is

wrong to stay the same because those in power refuse to admit the need the change. It is wrong to keep doing what you have done for decades just because it benefits you (i.e., research and publishing) regardless of the needs of the students. It is wrong ... Simply wrong not to stop turning a blind eye to what other professions are doing and why. But, for now, the majority of the academics do not see what they are doing is wrong!

Indifference to change when it is obvious that change is necessary is negligent behavior. There, I said it. Simply not changing behavior because it is too much work or because your friends may think badly of you is no reason not to change, especially when change is the right thing to do. Yes, the sports medicine and exercise science approach to exercise physiology is outdated thinking that is driven by politics, power, and greed. Moreover, a physical therapist is either a physical therapist or nothing. Exercise physiologists must move to the forefront in name and purpose. They are either exercise physiologists or exercise science sports medicine personalities. Which one are you? Or, which one do you want to be?

When reality sets in, if they honestly want to be known as exercise physiologists, then, they must support ASEP as their profession-specific organization just as physical therapists support APTA. It isn't a complicated thought process, yet the majority of the academic exercise physiologists are still guided by outdated and lazy thinking. As members of various generic organizations, they show little desire or courage in doing the work of becoming a credible healthcare profession. Isn't that sad? I find that it says a lot about who goes into exercise physiology. I wish it was different, but until I am convinced otherwise the facts are clear: Academic exercise physiologists are the least likely to be front runners in healthcare.

### **Suggested Readings**

Boone, T. (2015). **Promoting Professionalism in Exercise Physiology**. The Edwin Mellen Press.

Boone, T. (2012). **Exercise Physiology as a Healthcare Profession**. The Edwin Mellen Press.

Boone, T. (2009). **The Professionalization of Exercise Physiology: Certification, Accreditation, and Standards of Practice of the American Society of Exercise Physiologists (ASEP)**. The Edwin Mellen Press.

Boone, T. (2007). **Ethical Standards and Professional Credentials in the Practice of Exercise Physiology**. The Edwin Mellen Press.

Boone, T. (2005). **Exercise Physiology: Professional Issues, Organizational Concerns, and Ethical Trends**. The Edwin Mellen Press.

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