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**Why Not Try to Make a Difference? A Personal Perspective**

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*ASEP is fire in the belly.*

Why is it so difficult to engage new ideas? Where are the leaders in exercise physiology with the willingness to do something different to make a difference? Why are the ASEP members taking responsibility for the profession of exercise physiology while others are making excuses? Where are the college professors with the desire to inspire others to join ASEP and support its vision? Who among us has the passion to make a difference in helping the students of exercise physiology? We need answers to these questions.

I have read hundreds of articles and books about making a difference, and I still find myself asking the same questions. Why is there so much resistance to change? Is it because there is a sense of losing control? Why is it that organizations are so slow to change? Is it because they are fearful of the uncertainty? After years of asking these questions, I find myself still dealing with the transition issues. The ASEP seed was planted in 1997. There has been plenty of time to get comfortable with the idea of growing the profession of exercise physiology. All I can say is that it is a real concern for me because changing how we think has everything to do with the ASEP commitment to promote exercise physiologists as healthcare professionals. Knowing when and how to promote exercise physiology is critical to the success of our students.

Certainly, the differences between ASEP and other organizations can’t be that distracting. So, I keep asking myself, “Why is the organization still small when there are so many exercise physiologists?” Not knowing the answer bothers me because it is important to figure out exactly what needs to be done to help influence in a positive way the students’ success after college. I suspect that I am likely to continue asking questions and others like them for some years to come. But, please appreciate that I have little to no desire to ask academic exercise physiologists and then wait for a response. I am more incline to think and do something with friends and colleagues who understand the need for ASEP.

In a nutshell, I will continue to think for myself and do what I can to move exercise physiology forward. Yes, I have said similar things in the ***Professionalization of Exercise Physiologyonline,*** the ***Journal of Professional Exercise Physiology***, and exercisephysiologists.wordpress.com that is a tremendous outlet for me. This is in addition to a dozen or more books about professional development, code of ethics, accreditation, board certification, and standards of practice for exercise physiologists. Understandably, it is my choice to write and publish my thoughts and, yes, I can believe that most people realize none of it happens overnight. It takes diligence and hard work to make a difference.

While it is obvious that ASEP’s existence has created positive and negative ripples throughout the community of exercise physiologists, the process of sustaining the effort to make a difference isn’t easy. It is likely that being honest and transparent by key members of ASEP has resulted in being misunderstood by key members of other organizations. Above all, the power to achieve and make a difference comes with work and a lot of responsibility. It also comes with the attitude of “never stop believing” in ASEP. That is, never quit the fight regardless of how hard you are hit. Stay the course! After all, it is good to remember the cliché, “One man’s work is another man’s play.” It all depends on your attitude.

Often, I have asked the question: “What can a person do to minimize the discomfort of change that will make a difference in the lives of our undergraduate students?” Frankly, I still don’t have the answer. It is likely that I will remain on the outside of everyday professorship looking in for a long time to come. What I do know is that making a difference takes time, discipline, and courage. At times, as you might imagine, I have wished that I was more like everyone else I have worked with. But, I know that life is what we make it, and I am armed with the faith, hope, and prayer that others will eventually understand and support the ASEP organization. Yes, it takes faith to believe that updating the way we think will make a difference in the future of exercise physiology.

Although I think a large percent of the academic exercise physiologists believe that getting beyond the way things have always been simply isn’t worth the effort, I could be wrong but I don’t think so. No doubt many colleagues are honest and fair. They want their students to be successful after college. Maybe they think “telling students to complete a PT application during the spring semester of their senior year is the right thing to do”. But, even if they do believe it, I can’t accept that it is the right thing to do. Why, because exercise physiology is more than just an academic course. It has the potential (just as PT and AT did in their developmental period) to be a “profession” and, therefore, why not fulfill what at least looks to be the right path for exercise physiology? Why not do everything possible to be recognized as a profession of exercise physiology?

Maybe it is just a matter of time before academic exercise physiologists will wake up and step up to the plate of change. After all, the American Society of Exercise Physiologists exists to listen to the Spirit of Change that will empower the students of exercise physiology as healthcare professionals. Since I was intrigued by the original idea of ASEP since 1997, I have worked non-stop to share ASEP with colleagues as a way of making a difference in exercise physiology. The ASEP leaders have asked for help in carrying out the process of change by joining ASEP and promoting ASEP accreditation and Board Certification. While the process has produced resistance, there is nothing ASEP has done or is doing that is wrong or questionable.

I am sharing my thoughts simply to help the reader understand why I think changing how we think is not just important but critical to the survival of exercise physiologists without the doctorate degree. Also, do not forget that turf fighting between organizations and among healthcare professionals is real and has always gone on. After years of college teaching and publishing research papers, I have experienced the disagreements and verbal battles between individuals and, yes, between leaders of organizations as well. Disagreement is real and at times very problematic and hurtful. But, consistent with a favorite saying of Ray A. Kroc in his 1978 book, *Grinding It Out*, is the following, “Press On: Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful individuals with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.”

Capitalizing on the college’s interest in publishing research articles is a major key to the professors’ financial success and security. It is crazy but true that colleges are spending more time chasing research money, published research, and publication records than teaching. In fact, as strange as it sounds, many college professors are not trained to teach. But, they are trained to do research. They are not rewarded for excellence in their teaching. In practice, though, the academic setting and administrative oversight needs reinventing with teaching as being recognized as the icing on the cake (i.e., academic industry).

Today, as I have said before in many ASEP electronic articles, the idea for ASEP and its approach to exercise physiology got a major push from talking with the parents of my students about exercise physiology. One of the first questions they asked me was, “What is the exercise physiologist’s professional organization?” At first, my response was always simple. I said, “Well, exercise physiologists have for decades established their membership with the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM).” It wasn’t until after several similar questions from other parents that it hit me just how stupid my thinking was early on in my career. What caught my attention then is the same today, which is this: The parents’ loss of hard earned money for college tuition and living expenses for their children, given that the academic exercise physiologists did not have their own professional organization to support a professional infrastructure for all exercise physiologists.

It is simply a lack of desire on the part of the professors to take a stand. Hence, thousands of colleges and universities throughout the United States have not been doing what they should have been doing. Meaning, as well, it was not fair to my students and their parents for me (as Department Chair) to not commit myself to making a difference. That is why I decided to change how I viewed “what is exercise physiology” and “who is an exercise physiologist”. Believe me when I say that I have since come to fully understand the answer to both “what” and “who”. My life during the past 25 years is seriously different from the first 20 years as a college teacher. Please appreciate that I am uncomfortable with my slowness in acknowledging the need to change. But, all I can say is that I am committed to the change process. I will talk the talk and walk the walk to do what I can for what I believe is the profession of exercise physiology. If God’s willing, I will continue to do this for another 20 years.

But, having said that, it doesn’t answer the question: “Why does change threaten the academic exercise physiologists.” So, I will address the specifics of what I believe represent the reasons why academic exercise physiologists are so resistant to change. But, first, it is extremely important to highlight that change threatens just about everybody regardless of who they are and what they do. It isn’t easy to live your life one way for what seems forever the correct way and then wake up on a given day and you are told that it must be done another now. It is not only confusing but strange and seemingly so wrong and unnecessary to do things differently.

How could an exercise physiologist who has always been a member of ACSM now support ASEP? I ask, “Why not?” When a person realizes that he or she has been walking for days in the wrong direction to get home, then, it is clear that a change in direction is required. It seemed so obvious to me that the ASEP way is not only refreshing but timely and right for exercise physiology, why not change? Yes, I understand that the ASEP way was not the ACSM way, but no one ever said that an ASEP member could not be a member of other organizations as well. Thus, it occurred to that life is always a challenge, especially when it is obvious that change is required. Understanding this point comes with taking a deep breath and filled with dreams, hopes, and possibilities. Hope, in particular, is always important, especially for the exercise physiologists whose careers are less than desired and, yes, for the students who are so dependent upon the hopeful finding of leaders and creative thinkers in exercise physiology.

By the time I had conferred with several exercise physiologists looking for and hoping for the supportive help of a few, my life took on a different view from years earlier. But, no matter how many steps forward I would take, there were always those moments when I was suddenly stopped by the chaotic beliefs of so many of my colleagues. They had become so attached to the thinking of the hardcore sports medicine mentality that it was increasingly evident that making a difference was either not going to happen or would be very difficult. Although the exercise physiologists had taken the wrong path, they were not yet convinced of turning back. For certain, they were not going to become ASEP supporters tomorrow or the next day or even next month.

Also, another common explanation of why they are so many supporters of the generic sports medicine organization is consistent with their inner comfort and desire to move away from their traditional link to degree programs that simply failed them in so many ways. After all, publishing scientific papers is the primary way exercise physiologists have learned to feel good and gain the respect of other college professors, especially since the sports medicine emphasis on research and publishing helped the professors get promoted and tenured. Then, too, being an ACSM member allows for attending social and political events that have a profound link to ACSM’s non-exercise physiologists who are members of their own profession-specific organizations.

The transition from traditional Health and PE to ACSM has been a move for decades in the wrong direction from that of a profession-specific exercise physiology organization, such as ASEP. By the time ASEP was founded, it had become routine for exercise physiologists to take a stand with practitioners from several areas of scientific study. Their point is this: “The ASEP’s way of thinking and solutions is not as desirable as ACSM.” In fact, I have been told that by several doctorate- prepared EPs that we enjoy doing research and everything that goes with it. One female professor said, “We did not earn the doctorate degree to babysit undergraduate students and, secondly, that ‘publish or perish’ is a fact of academic life. It is what drives the doctorate-prepared professors to do research. It isn’t like I am not teaching a course here and there and when I do teach, it is the students’ responsibility to do those things necessary to get a job after college. Nowhere in my contract does it say I am responsible for helping students get a job.” From the professors’ point of view, given the interest of the ASEP leaders to create an academic curriculum that is career-specific for a job, then, why joint?

Obviously, many college professors will have to undergo radical rethinking of their role in academia if they are to agree to help students prepare for a career in healthcare. It is the hope of the ASEP leaders that they will rethink their position sooner rather than later. Increasingly, more parents believe that “professors, departments, and institutions” are responsible for helping their children to be successful after college. Increasingly, I believe society is beginning to hold all three accountable because the students are paying customers. The product they are studying for and paying high tuition dollars for is for the right education to help ensure the students’ success at finding a credible job upon completing the undergraduate degree. This means that exercise physiologists as college professors must remove the traditional academic barriers that have them convinced publishing research papers is the only thing important. They must be willing to ask questions, redirect their energy in the department, and focus more on the students and their needs (such as ASEP) and less on themselves and what helps them succeed.

The great challenge is to make an effort, to take the first step, to begin the process of change, and to do what is obviously necessary to transform the purpose of the department, college, and the professors’ role to one of helping to increase the success of the college graduates. Yes, it is inevitable that there will be mixed emotions, a time of trial and error, and occasional thoughts of chaos and confusion. But, remember the present-day failure and frustration will be replaced with smiles in due time. The entrepreneur gets this point and understands that the blueprint of success is a function of failure and success to see the mission succeed. Above all else, believe that what you hope for will happen, and it will happen.

The ASEP leaders see themselves as entrepreneurs with the goal of empowering exercise physiologists, not just the doctorate prepared EPs who believe the world spins around them. The leaders want members who are committed to working on behalf of the professionalization of exercise physiology. The image of students finding or creating great career opportunities after college is exactly what drives the leadership to keep going. They live Matthew 7:7 (NIV), which says: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

Yes, the leaders believe they will see more and more exercise physiologists join ASEP. Yes, it will be slow but it will happen. The image of an increased number of members is on their mind. They believe it will happen for the good of the students and the professor. Their thoughts, prayers, and imagery keep the visualization of happy voices and smiles alive after college. No doubt you remember the old saying, “A picture is worth a thousand words.” Well, as a way of sharing, I earned the PhD from Florida State University in 1975, but I needed more. The truth is, as my subconscious mind understands, I am not just an exercise physiologist. I am an ASEP Board Certified Exercise Physiologist. I wanted the distinction of a title that defined me, and I have it. It is a permanent and ideal title for the work I am involved with on behalf of ASEP and everyone who wants to be recognized as a healthcare professional.

Professors across the academic majors of exercise science, kinesiology, and human performance, must spend more time running the mental race of change that will engage them as college teachers with the desire and willing to teach students how to think about the profession of the future, how to make thoughtful decisions about the academic major, and how it will help them to find purpose that will empower them and their students in life and work. Hence, if you are a college professor, why not ask yourself the following questions: “How will the kinesiology degree help my students find meaning and purpose in life? Or, it may be necessary to ask, “Is the exercise physiology faculty doing what it can to help students be successful in their post-college life, especially in the areas of finding meaning and purpose as an exercise physiologist. In so doing, always remember that it is within your power to never give in to one or more colleagues, individuals, or friends who want to deflect you from living your dream.

Serving others is always the right path for it helps to create and sustain a healthy and happy life. In the end, your faith in God will give you the will to keep going, and that is what “making a difference” is about. Yes, we all have doubts from time to time. At times, I am sure some of us are paralyzed by fear of doing this or that and who will say whatever. But, if you desire a better destiny as I do for all exercise physiologists, join ASEP and get involved in a strategy and a plan to persevere on your behalf and that of others. Remember, in closing, as Robert H. Schuller would say, “It takes guts to leave the ruts.” Do you have the guts to make a difference in your life and the life of others?

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