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**The ASEP’s Understanding of Groupthink**

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*The courage to speak up and share your thoughts means everything.*

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ave you had time with you busy schedule to stop and think about what it means to be in a classroom or a business meeting and not have the chance to get clarification about an issue? Yes, I know it happens and, more often than not, you walk away feeling uncomfortable. Why didn’t I say what I was thinking? Why didn’t I tell them that the proposal made no sense whatsoever? The implications may concern the entire group, young and old alike. The challenge is to speak up and share new thoughts and ideas when a person asks a question or presents a point of view that benefits a particular organization, but not all of its membership.

You are likely to be familiar with what I am talking about, especially when in a meeting and the person in charge ask for a show of hands as to whether they should reach out to ASEP for the accreditation of their undergraduate exercise physiology degree. No one wants to commit to their true feelings in front of their colleagues, especially if there is the possibility of the group turning against him or her. The result is that nothing changes or the vote is directed to a different organization and a different accreditation process altogether. Thus, in the end, a great opportunity is missed to make a major difference in the academic degree, department, and on behalf of the students.

Strangely enough the force behind the “no change” is fear of being ostracized should your thoughts run counter to the majority. No one wants to be embarrassed or humiliated in front of his or her friends and/or colleagues. So, whatever should have been updated or changed altogether remains the same; all due to the need to conform to the apparent norm. Note the word “apparent” because in reality it is very likely that many people that comprise the majority want to change and/or think differently about a given situation. Yet, because it is believed that playing it safe is “the way” to avoid issues and/or disagreements, people get locked into the status quo.

Interestingly, David McRaney’s comment is right on. He said, “…the norm reinforced itself even though most people disagree with it” (1). The point is the majority isn’t always the majority, but in fact consists of those who want to think differently but are uncomfortable among their peers in doing so. In other words, the act of not speaking out gives power to the assumed majority of exercise physiologists who come across convinced that all is well with exercise physiology as it is presently viewed. The end result is that nothing changes even though no one really wants to support the majority. Or, as Prentice and Miller (2) said in their 1993 paper, the failure to argue for change allows for the continuation of the norm that no one in fact really cares about supporting, but continues to do so since no one is convinced that the majority does not really exist.

To address this thinking specific to exercise physiology, the point the authors made in their work (1,2) is that you cannot be sure if the exercise physiologists who support non-exercise physiology organizations rather than the ASEP organization “…are real or imagined” (2). What if the majority of the exercise physiologists who are members of the large generic organizations are in fact so caught up in groupthink that their desired reality is anything other than their everyday illusion?

Stated somewhat differently, the fact that exercise physiologists may very well be living their lives completely outside of their desire reality, such as being members of ASEP and promoting the professionalization of exercise physiology (3), the result is a serious loss of time, opportunity, and purposeful care for real change and growth. Isn’t this exactly why every exercise physiologist who believes in ASEP should be speaking out as loudly and as often as possible to the imagined majority to help correct the wrong course of history for all exercise physiologists? Thus, we within ASEP encourage all exercise physiologists to share their beliefs with their friends and colleagues as to why the ***American Society of Exercise Physiologists*** is the professional organization of exercise physiologists in the United States.

In fact, this suggestion is a major component of the reasons why ASEP has a national conference every year. The ASEP message is shared with members and non-members that they are not by themselves. They also share their feelings, beliefs, and assumptions by way of the ASEP electronic journals, books, and wordpress.com sites (3). As McRaney (1,4) said, “Public discourse is the path to being less dumb. The only way out of the loop is to speak up, ask questions, and get a conversation going about what people truly think.” So, in short, be the person you think you are by standing up and sharing your thoughts, dreams, and expectations of ASEP for all exercise physiologists.

*Do not surrender to the majority that is an illusion of truth. Stay the course, be courageous, and fight for the profession of exercise physiology for all exercise physiologists.*

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