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**The Heart of ASEP is Change**

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If you want to make enemies, try to change something.

**- Woodrow Wilson**

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**he** process of change involves sharing your thoughts and ideas with colleagues. That is why I am still writing and talking about ASEP and professionalism in exercise physiology. Yes, there is a team of ASEP exercise physiologists who are working to change the behavior of non-ASEP exercise physiologists. Unfortunately, the behavior of the majority is frozen in yesterday’s thinking.

Hence, the issue is not ASEP. Rather, it is the present-day exercise physiologists’ commitment to status quo, which is sports medicine, exercise science, kinesiology, and similar organizational offshoots from the health and physical education degree. The feeling that exercise physiologists must do something different from their traditional behavior has not surfaced as an ambitious vision. After all, the academic exercise physiologists are rather successful at playing the research game and that pays well for the academic types.

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| **Change your thoughts and you change your world.**  **- Norman Vincent Peale** |

But, here again, the students of exercise physiology are left to defend for themselves. A few make a difference while the majority are unhappy customers of the educational process. Done well, they would also have a credible career after college. Instead, they work as personal trainers or fitness instructors. Or, as is true for most college graduates, they complete an application for graduate school. Never underestimate how the complacency of the faculty has contributed to significant unhappiness and anger among parents.

Deep down I want to believe more academic exercise physiologists also have the desire to help their students to be successful after college. The problem is that they believe there are personal risks to sharing their thoughts, especially given that they differ dramatically from the everyday conversations and experiences of being a faculty member. And so, the weaknesses of yesterday’s approach to fulfilling the exercise physiologists’ role in the kinesiology or exercise science department continue to allow the problems that take from the students’ education.

While it has been a long road to get to this point of talking about the conflict between department titles and the politics that guide and frustrate faculty members, the only way exercise physiology can grow as a healthcare profession with the career-specific academic and laboratory skills is to transform the exercise physiologists’ thinking. No, it is not about shouting or shoving, it is all about logical and right thinking. Exercise physiologists at all academic levels can and will learn to trust each other. Think about it. Can you imagine how we will grow professionally when our behaviors and thoughts are linked as guides to a totally different culture of amazing healthcare professionals.

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| **The world hates change, yet it is the only thing that has brought progress.**  **- Charles Kettering** |

Understandably, while everyone has their own ideas about change, the key is to be focused and disciplined in building trust that supports teamwork. We need to get involved in our future as exercise physiologists. We need to communicate the direction of needed change, the mechanics of subtle changes, regardless of the frustration and forces otherwise working against us. This is a very important point, and one we cannot continue to turn a deaf ear to.

The ASEP goal is to get as many exercise physiologists as possible working together to make the ASEP vision a reality. The key is to do one positive thing at a time on behalf of ASEP. That way we will individually and collectively generate a feeling of ownership and excitement. After all, we are exercise physiologists. We are not exercise scientists. We are credible healthcare profession. We are not trainers.

Under no circumstances is this way of thinking problematic. There is no evidence that it will hurt exercise physiologists while, on the other hand, there is every reason to believe it will improve communication and career opportunities at all levels of the profession. Hence, however frustrating the change effort is, we must not let up. We cannot walk away from the work that must be done. It is a great challenge, but it is worth the time and commitment. And yes, it is necessary to challenge the power and politics of organizations that hinder the changes required to fulfill the ASEP vision.

Typically, no one wants to believe that their friends in other organizations are doing what they can to block their efforts to change, but it is the reality of difficult politics and the reason for acting as if there is no solution to going forward. In time, the waves of uncomfortable feelings will generate an overwhelming sense of failure. But, always remember, change is an uphill challenge that plays out across decades of work. As John P. Kotter and Dan S. Cohen (1) said, “Dying will not help.”

While collaboration is an answer to working alongside a colleague with a different point of view about exercise physiology, it is seldom successful. Why, because the commitment to an organization other than ASEP is a commitment to an entirely different vision. It is also a commitment to friends of that organization who are part of his or her way of thinking. Without having similar organizational structures that share the vision of something better for all exercise physiologist, the unannounced challenges between organizations will continue to undermine efforts to change, to grow, and create new possibilities. This is the biggest challenge to successfully becoming a collective body of healthcare professionals. We must change how we think so that our behavior will communicate the ASEP vision that defines who we are.

**Something More!**

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| **The world as we have created it is a process of our thinking. It cannot be changed without changing our thinking.**  **- Albert Einstein** |

Yes, amazingly, miraculously, in time we will change our thinking for the better. We will have the faith it takes to think as ASEP “Board Certified Exercise Physiologists”. We will share our new profession of exercise physiology and its powerful message that regular exercise is the 21st century medicine to prevent and treat chronic diseases (2). The relationship that is established when we engage in exercise is hundreds of years old, but we have only recently embraced its power to change us for the better.

Exercise is not a pill and yet, it is medicine. The young and older boys and girls and adults of all ages and gender are living the seemingly impossible objective of being healthier by starting and staying with an exercise program. Imagine, walking just 30 minutes every other day and you begin to live with a statistically stronger chance of not succumbing to a disease or disability. All it takes is faith to begin the first step.

To stay with an exercise program is not a self-centered or self-serving activity, it is caring about yourself. Similarly, to change our thinking isn’t easy. In fact, it is always difficult to change behavior. Why, because it takes commitment of time and effort, just as it is with losing weight or stopping smoking. Fortunately, the ASEP leaders have developed the professional infrastructure to ease the transition and thereby stay motivated. All it takes from the exercise physiologists is the readiness to change how they think. Those who are unwilling or resistant to change are in denial. They believe status quo is the answer, and hence the thoughts of changing are pushed to the side. If only they would reach out to a friend in ASEP, it is possible that with the encouragement they would begin to act as if they are what they would like to be.

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| **We must be willing to let go of the life we have planned, so as to accept the life that is waiting for us.**  **- Joseph Campbell** |

Here is the deal, it isn’t impossible to think differently. We must want to believe we can, and then we must make the effort to think through the so-called impossible! So, let us learn and create the success we deserve as exercise physiologists. We have the same potential for career success as other healthcare professions. So, why not do it now? Do it! Look up ASEP on the web and become a member. Don’t be too proud to make the right decision. All this said, let nothing tempt you to compromise your thinking to organize your life around the ASEP perspective. Believe in yourself. Begin today to make things happen. Supporting ASEP as the profession of exercise physiologist is a big deal. After all, as Robert H. Schuller (3) said, “If it’s going to be, it’s up to me.”

If America is going to embrace exercise medicine at a professional level of personal attention for each and every client and/or patient, then exercise physiologists must learn to be proud of who they are. They must break free from the failure to think if they are going to make a difference. At the personal level, one powerful means of “breaking free” is to believe in your own self-worth, ideas, and thinking. This may sound too basic, but the fact is we must help our students of exercise physiology by encouraging them to support the ASEP thinking that is about taking responsibility, change, integrity, and hope. Hence, in this way, the ASEP exercise physiologists know where they want to go, the importance of influencing the change process, and the courage to stay the course when times get rough.

**Doing for Others**

No doubt you have heard the expression, “Life is all about doing for others.” This is the dream of the ASEP leaders. It is the energy that drives the organization. It is the vision of something better for the students of exercise physiology that keeps the organization going. The leadership believes that the college students need more at graduation than the usual faculty expression, “It’s time to complete the application process for physical therapy.” Perhaps, even more shocking is that the students don’t say, “But, what about my degree? I want a job as an exercise physiologist.” And yet, at no time during the student’s academic major did the professor talk about exercise physiology and career opportunities. Why, because the faculty’s only interest is doing research and publishing papers. They do not think of exercise physiology as a profession, much less a healthcare profession.

The majority of the academic exercise physiologists are members of several popular generic organizations. Their passion for “professionalism” and the development of exercise physiology is essentially non-existent. The notion that something other than sports medicine (such as the American Society of Exercise Physiologists) was founded out of passion for exercise physiology and the students who want to be an exercise physiologist. For many of them, they are not interested in PT, nursing, or a similar major. The energy that drives them is exercise physiology. It is why they are in college. It motivates them to complete yet another loan application to come up with the money to pay for tuition every semester for four years. Their parents believe that the college degree will open the doors of good to excellent career opportunities. After all, the American dream is to go to college, get a degree, locate a great job and all is well, that is, until the son or daughter returns home, which is too often the case when the faculty is doing for themselves and not doing for others.

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| **It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change.**  **- Charles Darwin** |

Think of what it must feel like to be in debt for $40,000 or $140,000 with a college degree without a job. A vision of a good life with a college degree, but without a career-specific job is problematic. In short, it is just a degree if not a meaningless degree if it fails to help the graduate locate a credible job after college. It begs the question, “Who is to blame?” The short answer is the faculty. They are responsible to their students who believe their professors are trustworthy and upfront with their intentions. They are responsible for upholding the integrity of the educational in-and-outs of the academic degree. For example, is the degree linked to a career-specific type of work? Is the faculty doing everything possible to ensure that the degree meets the ethical and professional standards, as defined by the profession-specific organization?

Where are the exercise physiologists who are interested in doing what is necessary to ensure that the students of exercise physiology are looked up to? Shouldn’t the academic exercise physiologists be more responsive to change? Shouldn’t they support the ASEP leaders’ efforts to accredit undergraduate programs? Strangely, I am reminded of what Shakespeare wrote in *Hamlet*: “To thine own self be true.” In short, exercise physiologists must listen to the heart beat of the college experience. They must find out what is important for the students and their parents. They can’t simply continue to think that the only thing important is their job. Understandably, they were taught in doctorate school that research was the only thing important. But, they are more than just their research. Their students depend on their guidance to be the best they can be after college.

**In Closing**

it is important to not let the academic environment hold you back. Exercise physiologists need college professors with the passion to teach, to move the students from within so they too will understand the power of commitment along with the energy to turn difficult times into a positive reality. This speaks to the heart of ASEP and its desire and persistence in staying on target. Students must be taught the power of persistence, particularly at the critical of graduating and becoming an exercise medicine professional. Hence, why not switch from focusing on status quo to focusing on changing how we think so that we can overcome our fear of change. All we need to do is stay the course. As Helen Keller said, “Life is either a daring adventure or nothing at all. Security is mostly a superstition. It does not exist in nature. Start the ASEP ball rolling by reading about the power of persistence.

Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence.

Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent.

Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb.

Education along will not; the world is full of educated derelicts.

Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.

-- Calvin Coolidge

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