

# DEVELOPING UNTOUCHABLE KINESIOLOGY PROFESSIONALS

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## POSITION STATEMENT

Universities are adequately preparing kinesiology and wellness students for the profession, but in tomorrow's workplace today's adequacy is not good enough. Instead, we need highly-capable future professionals. In today's world, there is definitely a need--a calling--for excellence. Friedman (2006) states, "In sum, it was never good to be mediocre in your job, but in a world of walls, mediocrity could still earn you a decent wage. You could get by and then some. In a flatter world, you really do not want to be mediocre or lack any passion for what you do" (p. 277). It becomes important for students to be untouchable with their skillset. Based on my personal observation and study, the areas that need drastic and concerted attention include establishing a profession, emphasizing technological fitness, revamping how we teach, and becoming good at collaborating.

## LINES OF LOGIC

The term "profession" has an important connotation that deserves attention in kinesiology. Abbott (1988) loosely defined professions as, "exclusive occupational groups applying somewhat abstract knowledge to particular cases" (p. 8). In higher education, the important characteristics of professionals include high levels of formalized education (Freidson; Lowendahl, 1997), serving as an agent to an established knowledge base (Freidson), and self-monitored controls for excluding nonprofessionals (Alvesson, 1993). *Kinesiology professionals* fall within these parameters to meet the traditional definition of "professionals." Kinesiology (i.e., "human performance," "exercise science," "physical education," "physical activity," "sport studies"), also would meet the definition of a "profession" were it not for our inconclusive stance on what our profession is; alas, we are headless horsemen running strong but having no identity. In the 1960s and 1970s, Physical Education began evolving from a general discipline to a collection of more specialized subdisciplines such as exercise physiology, sport psychology, sport sociology, pedagogy, and biomechanics. At various conferences, I have heard my colleagues bemoan the sub-disciplines and how they are hampering growth in the profession. Yet, this is a natural progression in professions: ". . .The mature profession is constantly subdividing under the various pressures of market demands, specialization, and interprofessional competition" (Abbott, 1988, p. 84). The existence of sub-disciplines alone does not disqualify a profession, but it is doing so in kinesiology. Our failure to maintain a cohesive profession under a *single* identifiable name truly does challenge our status as a profession. With no identity, we stagger to find a sense of direction. Only when we define what our profession is, can we answer the question, "Are we effectively preparing our students for the profession?"

After clearing the first hurdle, we need to turn our attention to better development of skillfulness in our future professionals. The aforementioned definitions of a profession fail to take into account the skills required in today's world. Traditional definitions operate under the pre-Internet premise that knowledge is exclusive. Today, information is available widely to everyone in developed countries. The important characteristic of a modern professional is less about knowledge and more about adaptability and specialization. According to Alcorn (2000), ". . .Two

things are necessary for an organism to survive in nature: the ability to fit into the structure of an environment through natural selection and specialization and the ability to adapt to changes in the environment" (p. 8). It is the concept of balance that allows for long-term survival, the balance between specialization and adaptability defines one's fitness. Technology is a key element of adaptability, and has been throughout history. Technology is, "The practical application of knowledge especially in a particular area" ("technology," 2010). Today's technology requires an ever-increasing use of electronic gadgets, computers, computer software, and Internet-based communication. Adaptability and technology have a reciprocal relationship: adaptations require technology and technology requires adaptation--the ability to quickly change and adopt new technology or abandon old technology. Effective use of technology is especially important in kinesiology and wellness. "Balance" in a variety of human "dimensions" is a foundation concept in health & wellness. Unfortunately, of the 7 commonly listed dimensions of wellness--spiritual, social, physical, environmental, mental, emotional, occupational--technology is not widely accepted as a distinct dimension. This oversight is grievous in today's world, for the aforementioned reasons.

### **CALL TO ACTION**

There are several aspects we need to improve to develop highly capable future professionals in kinesiology:

1. Establish a profession: First, we must get an identity. A single agreed-upon name is a start, even if we need to resolve the name issue by throwing a dart. Infighting among sub-disciplines must stop. Some sub-disciplines may need to divorce and formalize as a distinct profession. The most significant effort for an umbrella professional organization is Rainer Marten's spearheading the American Kinesiology Association ([www.americankinesiology.org](http://www.americankinesiology.org)). An effort like this will require commitment from all.
2. Emphasize technological fitness: Most professionals and students in kinesiology underestimate the importance of "technological fitness" (Sather, 2010). It must be integrated fully within our profession.
3. Revamp how we teach in the academe: There should be a return to the original meaning of university as "a community of masters and scholars" ("University," n.d., para. 1). The student plays the role of the active learner, and the professor is the mentor and guide. Professors should allow for individualization in classes, whereby not everyone does or knows the same thing. Traditional teaching methods should be abandoned. The modern world has quickly experienced a paradigm shift of professionals' skillset: it is less about the knowledge, more about adaptability and specialization.
4. Collaborate better and more often: Today's workplace is less vertical and more horizontal. From my experience, both professors and students in kinesiology are poor collaborators. The individualist notion has its place, but will stymie our professional potential. Good cohesion and teamwork should be exhibited while undertaking a variety of professional projects with a diversified collection of professionals, at all stages of development.

### **EXPECTED CONSEQUENCE**

The aforementioned emphases will help us step up our game in preparing professionals in the academe. Ericsson, Krampe, and Tesch-Romer (1993) established that expertise results from deliberate practice for a decade or more. University professors are just a small portion of this

timeframe for young professionals. Because of this we, in concert with other professionals, should focus on developing a skillset that will establish young professionals as highly adaptable, autodidactic learners contributors to profession of *kinesiology*.

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