

Larry's Corner

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Do you have any likes or dislikes, stories, or helpful hints for dancing? If so, write it down and give to Larry Ablin or Barb Johnson. We will add it to one of the future News letters.

If you would like to tell us how you became interested in dancing, write it down and give to Larry or Barb, we will add your picture with it and put it in one of the future Newsletters



During my last trip to South America while attempting to salsa dance with a latin friend I heard him say to a fellow Ecuadorian (who must have had a "non dancer" partner like me): "We're in the same shoes". At that point I vowed that I would learn to dance and that I'd be back. That was 12/2002. I started taking latin dance classes 2 months latter. A

few months into the latin dancing I became reacquainted with my beloved swing dancing, taking east-coast and Lindy hop lessons and most recently west-coast. Poco a poco (little by little) I ventured forth experiencing and learning other types of dance.

Now I can't dance enough and don't ever envision my life without dance.

Cindy Robertson

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How Followers Can Help Beginning Leaders

Beginning men need a lot of help. And the best way their partners can help is to follow their lead, even if it's wrong, rather than "compensating" for a bad lead. This gives the leaders proper feedback. By feedback, I don't mean verbal criticism, but direct feedback in the sense of "I wonder what happens if I push this button?" If the leader doesn't lead or leads something other than what he's supposed to lead, the follower should not compensate and do the right thing despite his lead; she should do nothing, or whatever he did lead. This way he can clearly see which cause has which effect. If the follower compensates, she deprives the leader of this cause-effect feedback, and he'll never learn to lead properly. It's very dangerous to try to teach or offer unsolicited criticism. Unless you are the teacher, of course, in which you know what's appropriate. If you simply follow whatever is led, you are not criticizing. The fundamental question here is how can dancers be most helpful to their partners? I believe the general consensus is by dancing to the best of their ability, and for followers, that means following to the best of your ability. One of the most difficult problems with beginning followers, from Tango to Lindy Hop, is that they don't follow. They don't dance with their partners, but rather observe the instructors and others, while holding on to, but otherwise ignoring their partners. It's very difficult to lead someone whose body is all twisted while she tries to watch other people. Or her feet. Sometimes I've been asked for verbal cues by a beginning dancer. If she instead tried to follow exactly what I lead to the best of her ability, I wouldn't have to compensate for errors that she might make and I could concentrate more on my own dancing.

What Can Be Led Or Followed

Another aspect of leading/following is what can be led to whom. Someone taking lessons and only getting to a dance once a month is probably learning how to take lessons more that they are learning to dance. But, those people are still a lot more fun to dance with than the ones who only get to a dance once a month with no lessons in between. There are three categories for dance patterns:

1. Those that could be led to anyone (presumably someone off the street);
2. Those that could be led to a follower knowledgeable in the style of dancing but not that particular pattern;
3. Those that could be led to a follower trained in that particular pattern.

It is important to categorize the figures you lead when you are dancing with different partners so that you don't crash and burn upon attempting to lead type 3 figures on a type 1 follower.

Some sound advice on dancing with those less skilled than you:

- accommodate their imperfections so they look good but do not minimize your technique.
- become aware of their balance at all times because when they unbalance you it is because they are falling out of balance. If you can feel this happening then greater compression on your part is needed.
- Reframe the dancing--heck if I can dance with Level 1 ladies and make them feel good, then the easy to lead dancers are a snap. It then becomes a challenge rather than a chore.
- Create situations whereby the lady has no doubt about your intentions: i.e. overstate the case.

I used to think that only when you can smoothly lead any partner through every step are you ready to move on, but that is wrong. If you are dancing to compete, then you need to be able to lead your competitive partner well. She may be (probably is) better than the average social dancer, and therefore does a better job with a worse lead. Barb and I agree that social dancing is the real test of your technique and proficiency, but just because I can't do a throwaway over-sway with anyone on a social floor doesn't mean we shouldn't have that figure in a routine! When I was sticking to the "I want to lead anyone" attitude towards lessons, we weren't progressing very quickly as a partnership.

I think a leaders skill at a figure can be broken down into four levels:

1. basic understanding (can do with professional instructor)
2. understanding (can do with a good amateur partner who also knows the step)
3. good understanding (can do with an amateur partner who doesn't necessarily know the step but is a good dancer)
4. mastery (can do with virtually anyone)

Interestingly enough, I have had the most success when dancing with non-dancers in Swing and V. Waltz. Swing has a sufficiently flexible hold to permit close control of what the lady is doing. Viennese waltz is so fast the lady doesn't have time to make a mistake. It's the slower dances, where the lady has time to think and to try to do something that she thinks is right (rather than moving naturally) that are tough to lead beginners through.

One of the most difficult skills in dancing is the ability to dance well with anyone. This not only requires being able to adapt your leading/following style to that of your partner, but also being able to adjust your list of moves to

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your partner as well. When you dance with a woman for the first time, lead her through "test" moves, easy moves that she can follow but which give away her following ability. Afterwards, select only those moves which you know she will be able to follow. A woman who is a beginner need never fear dancing with a good dancer he will always make her look good (and himself as well).

One of the most common leader mistakes is trying to lead a less experienced follower through complex moves. Intermediate and advanced dancers should start simply and work up to more complicated moves as the tenderfoot follower is ready. When you show off the nifty move you learned at the last workshop, and the follower can't cope, you both look terrible... when you do simpler moves with elegance and confidence, and the follower is happy and on the beat, you both look fabulous. If the follower loses the beat on an underarm turn, it is very likely that she will be lost on the subsequent pattern, so make sure she is on the right foot before you continue.

The Importance Of Dancing With Beginners

While there is no question that dancing with a better partner will make you look good, and that with such a partner you can concentrate more on styling details and so on because the lead and follow doesn't need so much attention, it is not the best way to practice lead/follow skills. If learning leaders only dance with accomplished followers and vice-versa, they won't develop great leading/following skills, because they won't need to. Now let's suppose that YOU are a great leader or follower. What happens if you dance only with other great dancers? Your lead and follow skills will gradually deteriorate -- because you're not working them very hard. After some months without exposure to beginners, you may be surprised to find that you can't dance with them very well, even though they seem to do okay with other beginners.

You learn how to dance better by dancing with more experienced partners. But you learn how to lead/follow better by dancing with less experienced partners. Your skills are put much more to the test dancing with a beginner than with an experienced dancer. It is easy to lead/follow a great dancer. All your weaknesses as a leader/follower show up with beginners. Dance with them and ask yourself why each incorrectly led/followed figure didn't work and when you figure it out, work on incorporating the fixes into all your dancing!

You cannot become a good dancer by dancing only with the same person. Dancing only with each other, you will become good at dancing with each other with all the mistakes and bad habits that become correct for you.

There is a certain type of character (leader) that one encounters again and again if one has been dancing for any length of time: the guy who only wants to dance with the best followers because he believes they are the only partners who can match his high skill level. Often what is REALLY going on is that only the best followers can compensate for his mistakes or idiosyncrasies. They make him look good. But the guy continues to think he's the tops because he insulates himself from feedback. "Dancing with poor to average followers is a good reality check." If none but the best can follow your leads, I respectfully suggest your leads could use some work. Also, that kind of thinking ultimately harms their dancing. I've seen guys overestimate their ability and abandon the study of technique FAR too soon. Consequently it will take them a lot longer to reach the next level of skill. Dancing is STP

10% Skill

30% Technique

60% Practice.

Swing Clubs

East Meets West; 952-949-3016; 1st and 3rd Friday Dance at Dancesport in Hopkins 816 1/2 Main St.

Minnesota West Coast Swing; 651-731-9768; 2nd and 4th Friday Dance at B-Dale Club South of the Dale and Cty. B in St. Paul.

TC Rebels Swing club; Hotline number 952-941-0906; Dances are at Harmonie Dance center Corner of Old Shakopee Rd and France

When dancing West Coast Swing be sure to line your slot with the boards on the floor. If no boards then line up with length of room

Singles all Together has Ballroom lessons on Monday night 8 pm at the Lenox Center in St Louis Park.

Singles all Together West Coast Swing on Tuesday night 8 pm at Medina Ballroom Next session starts 1/6/2004.

Basic Step for ChaCha

Beat	Mans Foot	Mans step	Ladys Foot	Ladys Step
1	Left	Left	Right	Right
2	Right	Back Rock	Left	Forward Rock
3	Left	Forward	Right	Back
4	Right	Right	Left	Left
&	Left	Together	Right	Together
1	Right	Right	Left	Left
2	Left	Forward Rock	Right	Back Rock
3	Right	Back	Left	Forward
4	Left	Left	Right	Right
&	Right	Together	Left	Together

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Come dance with us

Leaders: If you only remember one thing, this should be it:
 Global lead/follow rule – Lead Direction Before Rotation.
 This means that if it's a traveling spin, you must lead her to
 travel before leading her to spin. If it's a stationary spin, you
 must lead her to stay in place before leading the spin.

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Come dance with us



Larry L Ablin and Barb Johnson

Teach Beginners at Singles All Together dance class on Monday night, at Lenox center on Minnetonka Blvd in St Louis Park.

Teach at Singles All Together on Tuesday night 8pm at Medina. Starting West Coast Swing Intermediate again on 3/2/2004

Teach Ballroom at Jefferson Community Ed on Wednesday at 26th and Hennepin 612-668-2740 Next class starts 1/29/2004 630-830 8 weeks

Lakeville Class starts 1/30/2004 630 to 930pm Century Junior High 952-985-4610

Prior lake class start 2/19/2004 630 to 940pm Grainwood Elementary 952-440-2930

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