



Larry's Corner

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Aol

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

Attitude When Social Dancing

What does it take to have fun dancing?

Good attitude (cheerful, tolerant) as opposed to bad attitude (worked up, critical). Good attitude is of course important to having fun. This is a universal truth not specific to dancing.

Good dance technique as opposed to poor dance technique.

I see four possible extreme combinations:

- poor attitude and poor technique (NO FUN)
- Poor attitude and good technique (can be fun, if you don't feel insulted. I have more fun dancing basics with a beginner who is enjoying herself than a more advanced dancer who gets all worked up because I don't hold my arm just so, or dare to mix International and American patterns in Rumba, or some criticism of that nature. I have more fun dancing with my partner, with whom I can experiment and make mistakes and laugh about it, than with certain women of similar skill levels from local chain studios, who get disapproving expressions on their faces if I do one or two non-syllabus patterns.)
- good attitude and poor technique (can be fun, if you don't break an arm - most dancers don't enjoy dancing with someone who has actively bad practices, like the

killer arm grippers, etc.)

- Good attitude and good technique (MOST FUN)

Given dancers with good technique, what can make dancing more or less fun? Attitude, of course.

Given dancers with good attitudes, what can make dancing more or less fun? Technique, of course.

Generally, the one with the worse technique has more fun. Part of the goal of having good technique is to help your dance partner have more fun. If you want to have fun, you don't need good technique -- just a partner with good technique.

But if you want your dance partner to have more fun, then you need good technique. There are elements of social dance that are purely social, where smiles, friendly conversation, succeeding in moving to the music and doing a few basic steps, etc. override whether your partner is leaning on you, jerking you off balance, crushing your hand, trying to step on you, etc. But an amount of technique that enables you to feel good and helps your partner to look good and feel good can only enhance the experience. Some competition technique does look stilted on the social dance floor; but a lot of the technique taught by competition coaches are things that make the dance feel more in balance, more fitting to the character of the music, and smoother to both oneself and ones partner. Sometimes not knowing precisely where to put a certain part of your body results in transferring momentum to your partner and throwing them off balance. The problem you face after you learn what good dance technique feels like, is that you become more sensitive to the bad habits of your partners. Sometimes ignorance is bliss, but the better social dancers are adaptive rather than ignorant. Those who can't or don't want to learn to adapt can end up paying their professional dance instructors lots of money. Otherwise, stop being concerned about your partner having fun, and just concentrate on having fun yourself; try Contra or Square or some other dance form where people tend to be less anal-retentive about "technique" but nonetheless enjoy dancing together. Fun is primary, because fun is what motivates people to continue dancing. If they happen to enjoy learning tons of technique

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as beginners, or they want to move right into competition, fine - but I don't think that's true of most people. What else is social dancing about, if not

(a) getting enjoyment yourself and

(b) pleasing your dance partner?

To briefly reiterate:

When two people dance together, the one with the worse technique has more fun. (Assume a good attitude all around.)

- Part of the goal of having good technique is to help your dance partner have more fun. (This requires a Good and courteous attitude.)

- If you want to have fun, you don't need good technique -- just a partner with good technique. But if you want your dance partner to have more fun, then *you* need good technique. (And a good attitude.)

There's just no place for jealousy in the Dance Community. If one is of a jealous nature, going to a "real" dance is the wrong thing to do with a lover. Just walking into a dance, with all the hugs and kisses of greeting, and the additional ones after dancing, and then again at the end of an evening . . . well! If either partner cannot trust the other on the dance floor, there's major trouble. Non-dancers may get the wrong impression when they first start. Until they become familiar with the dancing community, there may be some confusion and potentially awkward moments.

Etiquette When Social Dancing

Dancing was born in a noble and elegant attitude. When a man escorts the lady to the floor for a dance, she should be on his right side. Not only is this the "place of honor", but there is also the symbolism going back many centuries, which implies that the man is offering his fighting arm in service to his lady, and by placing a hand on his arm she is accepting him as her champion. For everyday modern ballroom etiquette, the woman precedes the man to the floor, no contact is required. Once on the dance floor, the man takes a position and extends his left hand to his partner in invitation (palm vertical, towards her), she takes the last two or three steps towards him and takes his hand and then comes into his arms (Exception: Viennese Waltz. Right hand, half turn, curtsy.) The "lady being on his right because his sword is on his left" is just another urban myth. No officer and/or gentleman would wear his weapons at a ball. The man's job is to show off the lady and let her have fun.

If you are interrupting a conversation to ask someone to

dance, you should at least apologize to both people for interrupting the conversation. Unfortunately, even this simple courtesy can't be found in many dancers.

A general rule is that one should always say yes (once per evening at least) when one is asked to dance (this is true whether a leader asks a follower or a follower asks a leader.) Exception: if one has reason to believe that person would hurt you or if one is in an unusually fragile state due to injury recovery. If you find yourself in a painful situation, don't be afraid to stop and say something like "I am sorry but some of your moves are aggravating a past injury and so I will have to sit the rest of this dance out." Nobody should, out of politeness, risk injury. If a man leads you badly - especially when he tries to do something that endangers or hurts you - you can:

1) Subtly refuse to follow... don't pull away, just back lead or do something very different from what he's expecting.

2) Boldly refuse to follow... let go! Become physically detached from him and tell him (out loud) that it hurt!

Smart guys will at least realize that they've done something wrong and will get the idea after this happens once or twice. Dumb or uncaring guys aren't going to get the idea, but you'll know to stay away from them in the future. Don't feel that you have to get through the dance with them.

What are the consequences of saying yes and do you accept those? I have danced with a few ladies who said yes and then intentionally showed little or no interest in dancing or were rude in other ways. I would have preferred them to have simply said "no thanks" if they were not really interested in dancing with me.

Men and women are both allowed to refuse a dance and "sit one out". If they do, the rules of etiquette say that they must sit it out completely, regardless of who asks them to dance. Exception: a woman (or man!) trying to shake someone who is hitting-on/pawing her should be free to ignore the cad and immediately go find someone else with whom to dance. Why let a bozo spoil a nice evening of dancing?

If you have trouble telling people that you don't wish to dance with them, try this rejection line: "I'd love to, but I think I'm going to mingle--there are many people I haven't danced with yet. Perhaps we can get in another before the end of the evening?" [The second sentence/question is optional]

On rules of etiquette... Social dancing is as friendly a place as you make it, but it's not slavery. You aren't a paid taxi dancer, required to dance with whomever. Sitting out dances, just because someone you don't want to dance with asked you first, is not what you paid

your money at the door for. Dance with whom you want to. That said... Remember that you may have to ask (beg, plead) to get the person you turned down (and maybe his friends also) to dance with you in the future. Maybe he won't have fun, will stop dancing, won't tell his friends how much fun it is, all your favorite dance places will go out of business, you won't have anywhere to dance, etc., etc. Aside from good manners, there are other reasons to be polite. Many beginners who later become good dancers remember who was courteous and who was not.

Looking at yourself in the mirror is definitely not correct behavior at a social dance. When you practice, especially by yourself, looking in the mirror can be helpful. Looking when you are socially dancing with a partner can be rude.

When you've finished dancing, always thank your partner first, thank them for asking you to dance if that was the case, and mention something that was inspiring if that emotion was tweaked.

Dance Floors

I tell my students to sit out a dance if the floor is too full and then be first on the floor for the next one. If everyone did this it would sure make for a nicer place for all of us to dance. I do this socially. Most recently at the Minnesota West Coast Swing Club dance I was asked to dance on two different occasions and as we approached a very crowded dance floor I turned to my partner and asked if we could sit this one out and get a better shot at a good space on the next song. Both times my partner and I enjoyed a nice short chat and then a much better dance than we would have had if we had crowded on.

Understand rules of traffic flow: Line of dance is a counter-clockwise progression, fast lane is outside, slower traffic further inside, stationary dances in the center. Don't block traffic in the fast lane, don't follow too closely, share the dance floor. Speeding through the middle of the floor (the sanctuary for stationary couples) is as rude as backing up in the fast lane. That having been said, the floor at a public dance is open to all. A total beginner has paid the same price you have to come & dance & is as entitled to as much floor as you are. It is up to the more experienced dancer to always be gracious about sharing the floor with, and to keep out of the way of, the less experienced who may not yet understand the rules. Do not do like some of the new so called Attitude dancers that think they own the floor and go where they want to. This, indeed, is a mark of good floor craft. If the floor is very crowded, good floor craft means sharing and using space with each other. This is something that a lot of "fancy step sequence" teachers don't (help their students) understand. The accomplished dancers who contribute most to the pleasure of other dancers should be an

inspiration. The ones who steal social dance time to show off, or use floor space inconsiderately are just egotistical bullies who maximize their own pleasure at the expense of others. It is a very strong point with me that more experienced dancers should NOT try to intimidate the less experienced dancers. Don't forget, one of these days this "beginner" may be pushing you off the floor!!

If you are walking on a dance floor, please do so on the outside of the floor and in the direction of dancing. Never, never try to get out of the way of a good dancer. By doing this he will have problems, since he has already planned, how to get around you. The best thing to do is: Ignore him! Obey the dance lanes, movers on the outside, non-movers on the inside.

In general, avoid the corners so you don't get trapped. During a competition or social dancing, stay one lane in from the outside edge of the floor; ready to move inside or backwards in case the couple in front of you stops - never move to the outside of the floor to find space, it is the easiest way to find yourself trapped. Many of the top pros have groupings for competitions, routines for shows. If they get boxed into a short side corner at the start, they can't start a long run so many would choose a grouping appropriate for the type of floor (square, rectangular or circular). Since couples are not out there by themselves, each must adjust to a constant changing layout. Often to get out of a crowd, one couple might go into a syncopated running group to leave the others behind, while another couple might go into a line and a stationary grouping waiting till the bulk of the couples have moved along.

It's okay to dance something different from what other people are dancing, but only if:

- You and your partner are well versed in both dances, so that you can control your own movements well and you can anticipate the likely movements of the other dancers,
- You are extremely careful in your use of the floor, limiting yourselves exclusively to your proper area (perimeter for traveling, center for spot),
- you are always willing to defer to those who are dancing the more appropriate dance (e.g., foxtrotting very delicately during a swing),
- you do so only when floor conditions permit (e.g., foxtrotting only when the floor is sufficiently un-crowded that there is a mostly unused perimeter).

Come Dance With Us

[Http://www.comedancewithus.com](http://www.comedancewithus.com)

We started a new Web site Bulletin Board, Photos and stories for Dancing.

If you have questions about dancing, learned a new dance step, have dance clothes or shoes you are not using and want to sell, or need you can use the Bulletin board.

If you want to see photos of Minneapolis, MN dancers, you can go to the Photo Gallery.

If you want to read dance storys they are under Headlines.

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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.

Teach Ballroom at Jefferson Community Ed on

Wednesday at 26th and Hennepin 612-668-2740

Lakeville Class Century Junior High 952-985-4610

Prior lake class Grainwood Elementary 952-440-2930

Web <http://www.dancempls.com> for where to dance in Minneapolis, MN

Web <http://www.comedancewithus.com> for Bulletin board, Photos, and Dance stories.