

Larry's Corner

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Asking/Being Asked to Dance

If there's someone you want to dance with, you should feel free to go and ask her to dance. This is especially true for beginners, don't be afraid to ask someone to dance. Women are normally very good about dancing with beginners and really don't care if you only know three steps. So go ahead and ask them to dance. You can warn them that you're a beginner when you ask, if you want (I used to). Also, it's not common to be turned down unless the

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

If you have anything you would like to write for us, just write it up and give to Barb or Larry.

I enjoy writing something for you. LARRY

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person is taking a break and sitting out the dance, so there's little risk of rejection. Although tradition has men asking women to dance, there's absolutely nothing to stop women from asking men to dance (and a lot do, in my experience). In fact, I'd encourage women to ask the men to dance; some like me are a little shy. Plus if you ask us, then we know you do enjoy dancing with us and aren't simply being polite, accepting our requests to dance because you feel you have to. Here are some points to keep in mind on this topic. Always accept invitations to dance unless you don't know the dance in question or if you are sitting out and taking a break. If sitting out, you should not accept an invitation from another person. You can also decline if you have already promised the dance to someone else, but you should avoid setting up many dances in advance. You are also allowed to decline for other good reasons, e.g. that person has physically hurt you in the past, so you should never feel *forced* into dancing with someone you don't want to dance with. Don't let etiquette or being polite overrule your own common sense and good judgment.

If you must decline, it's common, but not required, to provide a reason (example, I'm resting). Optionally, you may suggest dancing the next dance or a later dance, but if you do, make sure you do reserve that dance and don't dance it with someone else. A turn down without explanation is generally considered more serious and usually taken more personally than a turn down with an explanation, so you should be careful about declining without giving a reason.

As a general rule, you should expect to dance at least once with every person that asks you to dance. If you decline because you don't know the dance, it's probably a good idea to suggest dancing the next dance that you do know, or if you're just resting, you can suggest dancing the next dance.

Requests to dance should be polite and can be very simple. Things like "May I have this dance?" or "Do you tango?" (when you don't know if the person you're asking knows the dance) usually suf-

face. Smiling and offering your hand is good, too. I've also found that for people I dance with regularly, making eye contact and then smiling and offering my hand is often enough, so sometimes I don't need to say anything.

Always ask the person you want to dance with directly. That is, if the woman you want to dance with is talking with someone else, there's no reason to ask the person she's talking with if you can dance with her even if it is her boyfriend/husband/etc. If you want to dance with her, ask her. Asking a man for permission to dance with the woman he's with is a bit out of date and potentially offensive to the lady (I'm not his property, it's my decision who I dance with, not his, etc.). So ask her directly and then if she wants to check with the person she's talking to if it's OK, that's her choice. But be polite about it -- don't rudely interrupt a conversation and yank someone away. If the woman I want to dance with is talking to someone else, I usually go over there and listen in to their conversation, then when they pause to acknowledge my presence, I'll greet them, maybe chat a bit, and then ask her to dance.

If there's a group of people together and you want to ask one of them to dance, be clear as to who you are asking to dance. It can be embarrassing for people to think they've been asked to dance and then find out they weren't. Making direct eye contact with your desired partner and/or holding out your hand can help make your intentions clear. Asking by name will obviously work, too.

Try to avoid monopolizing partners, particularly ones of a higher level than yourself. It's generally considered bad form to always dance with the same one person (or few people) all the time, so you should frequently switch partners. I add in the point about better dancers primarily on my own experience that almost everyone likes to dance with the advanced dancers, so they're often in high demand. While the advanced dancers do usually dance with anyone, beginners included, I'm sure they like to dance with others of their own level as well, so it's good not to monopolize them.

Another point I saw somewhere said that if you can, you should try to avoid walking past people in order to ask someone else to dance. It can make those not asked feel like they've been passed up. This is something I usually try to do, but it gets higher weight for people I know (i.e., I'm more likely to pass by someone I don't know than someone I do know). I wouldn't let this stop you from going and asking someone to dance if you really want to dance with them though.

Increasing Your Chances of Being Asked to Dance

The following points generally apply to women since they are usually more likely to be asked to dance. However, it applies equally to men since there's nothing to stop a woman from asking a man to dance.

- Requests to dance are generally very rarely turned down. If you must decline a dance invitation, then it's usually a good idea to suggest that you dance the next dance or the next one of the same type with the asker. If you don't attempt to counter your declining of a dance request, then each time you decline a request, you are reducing the chances that that person will ask you to dance again.
- It is considered extremely rude to decline one person's request to dance and then accept a request from someone else for that same song. The first person that you decline will normally take your refusal to dance as a personal insult when you go ahead and dance with someone else on the same song. Doing this is very likely to put you on that person's "don't ask" list. If you turn down one person's dance request then you have to sit out the whole dance if you want to remain on good terms with that person. However, if you provide a reason as to why you want to dance with someone else and the person accepts it, then there is no problem.
- Be positive when you are out dancing on the dance floor. Enjoy yourself, that's what dancing is all about. There's no need to apologize to your partner for every single mistake you make. Your partner may not have even noticed that you made a mistake (especially if you improvise well).

Your skill level has less to do with whether someone will enjoy dancing with you than your attitude towards dancing and simply having a good time. This may come as a bit of a surprise to beginning dancers, but it is generally true. You don't need a big repertoire of fancy steps to be an enjoyable dance partner. Doing a few simple steps well can be better than doing a lot of fancy steps poorly.

Asking for a Dance

When asking for a dance, it is easiest to stay with traditional phrases:

- ``May I have this dance?"
- ``May I have this Waltz/Rumba/Foxtrot/etc."
- ``Would you like to dance?"
- ``Care to dance?"
- ``Shall we dance?"

In the past it has been the tradition that men asked women to dance. But this custom has gradually changed. Today, women should feel equally comfortable asking a partner for a dance, even in a formal setting.

If your desired partner is with a group, be unambiguous and make eye contact when asking for a dance. If you vaguely approach a group, two individuals may think you are asking for a dance. You can imagine that the one not getting the dance is going to be miffed. Let's avoid such awkward moments by a decisive approach and solid eye contact.

What if you want to ask someone to dance, who is engaged at the moment in a conversation? Is it acceptable to interrupt a conversation to ask someone to dance? Some would say that one's presence in a dancing establishment indicates a desire for dancing and everyone is fair game. Others say that interrupting a conversation is rude.

In my opinion, ask someone to dance if you think he/she is ready to dance and will enjoy dancing with you at that moment. This requires you to be a good judge of the moment. Also, if you know someone well enough to know they don't mind being interrupted, then go ahead and ask them.

Perhaps one way to handle this is to walk gently to the edge of your intended partner's "personal space", which is about 2-3 feet (one meter). It will give you an opportunity to ask them to dance. If your presence is not acknowledged, then it may be a good idea to find someone else for that dance.

Exercising common sense and social skills is always a good idea. If someone is sitting closely with their significant other, whispering sweet nothings to each other, then it is probably not a good time to ask either of them for a dance. Now a different scenario: your intended partner is cornered

by a bore and being lectured on weather patterns in lower Nambia. You can advance and stand close. Once your intended partner makes eye contact with you, smile and say: ``Dance?" Usually, that is enough to do the job. If not, it is better to leave him/her to learn about weather patterns in lower Nambia.

Sometimes two individuals simultaneously ask someone for a dance. In that situation, dance etiquette recommends that the object of attention should accept one of the dances, while offering a later dance to the other one.

Whom to Ask

If each person dances with only one or two others, the social dynamics of dancing will be compromised. For that reason, dance etiquette strongly encourages everyone to dance with many different partners. This is to ensure a diversity of partnerships on the floor, and to give everyone a chance to dance. Specifically, dance etiquette rules against asking the same partner for more than two consecutive dances.

One of the common violations of this rule occurs when someone dances most of the night with their escort. The ruling of etiquette in this case is much the same as for the traditional (formal) dinner parties: one never sits down to dinner next to one's spouse. It is assumed that if spouses were interested primarily in talking with one another, they could have stayed home together. By the same token, going to a social dance demonstrates a desire to dance socially. This means dancing with a host of partners, and not just with one or a select few. I have heard a version of this rule that reserves the first and last dance of the evening to be done with one's escort, and other dances with others.

People generally tend to dance with others at their own level, but you should try to dance socially with partners of all levels. Dance etiquette frowns on those who only dance with the best dancers on the floor. Although this is not the worst dancing offense, it is certainly bad form. Better dancers are especially advised to ask beginners to dance. Not only does this help the social dynamics of a dance, it also helps the better dancer (although it is outside the scope of this discussion to explain why or how).

Unfortunately, there are some social dancers who consider themselves too good to dance with beginners, who cannot ``keep up" with their level of

dancing. It is often the case that these dancers are not as good as they think. They need good partners because only good partners can compensate for their mistakes, bad technique, or other inadequacies. The truly good dancers often seek the challenge of dancing with those at lower levels, and enjoy it. Good dancers make their partners look good.

Declining a Dance

Being declined is always unpleasant. For beginners and shy individuals it is even harder to take, and may discourage them from social dancing. Dance etiquette requires that one should avoid declining a dance under almost all circumstances. For example, there is no correct way of refusing a dance on the basis of preferring to dance with someone else. According to tradition, the only graceful way of declining a dance is either (a) you do not know the dance, (b) you need to take a rest, or (c) you have promised the dance to someone else.

The last excuse should be used only sparingly. When declining a dance, it is good form to offer another dance instead: "No, thank you, I'm taking a break. Would you like to do another dance later?" Also, declining a dance means sitting out the whole song. It is inconsiderate and outright rude to dance a song with anyone after you have declined to dance it with someone else. If you are asked to dance a song before you can ask (or get asked by) your desired partner, that's the luck of the draw. The choices are to dance it with whomever asked first, or to sit out the dance.

Does dance etiquette allow declining a dance outside of the cases mentioned above? The answer is yes. If someone is trying to monopolize you on the dance floor, make inappropriate advances, is unsafe (steps on your toes constantly or collides with others on the floor), or is in other ways unsavory, you are not condemned to suffer endlessly. Dance etiquette does not wish to put anyone under the tyranny of the inconsiderate. It therefore cautiously allows in these cases to say: "No, thank you," without further explanation. However, this option should be exercised with great restraint and only in the case of repeat offenders.

Being Declined

The first thing to do when one is turned down for a dance is to take the excuse at face value. Typical social dance sessions can be as long as three to four hours, and there are few dancers who have the stamina of dancing non-stop. Everyone has to take a break once in a while, and that means possibly turning down one or two people each time one takes a break. The advice to shy dancers and especially beginners is not to get discouraged if they are turned down once or twice.

However, since social dancers are generally nice and polite, being repeatedly declined can be a signal. In that case, it is a good idea to examine one's dancing and social interactions to see if anything is wrong.

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