



Larry's Corner

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Personal Grooming

Dancing is an activity where two people come in close contact. Before a dance:

- Shower and use a deodorant,
- Brush teeth and use mouthwash or breath mint.
- Abstain from foods that produce strong odors, like those heavy in garlic or onions.

The odor of cigarettes on one's breath or clothing can be very unattractive.

During a dance:

- Check your grooming periodically
- During active dance sessions, freshen up and towel off periodically in the bathroom
- Gentlemen, you can carry an extra shirt with you to the dance, in case you need a change.

On the Dance Floor

Line of Dance:

The dancing on a floor is done along a counter clockwise direction, known as the Line Of Dance. This applies to traveling dances including Waltz, Foxtrot, Tango, Quickstep, and Viennese Waltz, as well as Polka and Country two-step. Latin and Swing dances are more or less stationary and have no line of dance. Sometimes it is possible to dance more than one type of dance to the same song. For example, some Foxtrots can also be swings, and many Lindy Hop songs are just great for Quickstep. In that case, swing dancers take

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

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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the middle of the floor, and the moving dancers move along the periphery in the direction of the line of dance.

Getting on the floor:

Some caution should be exercised when getting on the dance floor, especially if the song has already started and couples are dancing on the floor. It is the responsibility of incoming couples to make sure that they stay out of the way of the couples already dancing. Specifically, before getting into dance position, one should always look opposite the line of dance to avoid blocking someone's way, or even worse, causing a collision.

At the end of the dance:

After the dance is finished and before parting, thank your partner. This reminds me of a social partner who, upon being thanked at the end of the dance, would answer: "You're welcome!" This always gave me a funny feeling. The proper answer to "Thank you!" on the dance floor is: "Thank you!" The point is that the thanks is not due to a favor, but to politeness.

If you enjoyed the dance, let your partner know. Compliment your partner on her/his dancing. Be generous, even if he/she is not the greatest of dancers. Be specific about it if you can: "I really enjoyed that double reverse spin. You led/followed that beautifully!" If you enjoyed it so much that you would like to have another dance with him/her again, this is a good time to mention it: "This Waltz went really great! I'd like to try a Cha-Cha with you later." Although remember that dancing too many dances with the same partner and booking many dances ahead are both violations of social dance rules.

Leaving the floor:

When a song comes to an end, leave the floor as quickly as it is gracefully possible. Tradition requires that the gentleman give his arm to the lady and take her back to her seat at the end of the dance. While this custom is linked to the outdated tradition requiring the gentlemen to ask ladies for dances, it is still a nice touch, although it may be impractical on the more crowded dance floors. In any case, remember that your partner may want to get the next dance. Don't keep them talking after the dance

is over, if they seem ready to break away to look for their next partner.

Leaving entrances free:

Some dance floors, especially in country western dance establishments, have limited access space (most of the periphery is railed). Dancers and onlookers should avoid blocking these entrances. In particular, avoid stopping to chat immediately after exiting the dance floor. Another issue in Country Western dancing regards line dancers, who sometimes share the floor with other dancers. They should avoid blocking entrances from the inside while dancing.

Sharing the floor:

Responsible usage of the floor requires that one stays out of the way of others. Some figures require a momentary movement against line of dance. These figures should be executed with great caution on a social dance floor, and only when there is no danger of collision. Avoid getting too close to other couples, especially less experienced ones. Be prepared to change the directions of your patterns to avoid congested areas. This requires thinking ahead and matching your patterns to the free areas on the floor (floor craft). While this may sound complicated to the novice dancer, it gradually becomes second nature.

Sharing the floor sometimes means leaving the floor! For example, if there are too many dancers to fit on the floor, then a considerate dancer would withdraw every few dances to let everyone dance. The same idea applies if there aren't the same number of men and women. Then there is a mismatch and for each song some people will be left without a partner. If there aren't enough partners, it would be nice to voluntarily withdraw every few dances so that everyone gets a chance to dance.

Another aspect of sharing the floor is to match one's speed to that of others. In a recent social dance, a particularly tall and handsome couple caught my eye. They were moving with great speed and skill across the floor, and I began to enjoy watching them dance. But then I noticed they were coming dangerously close to other dancers on the crowded dance floor, and many

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times other couples came to a stop and moved out of their way. It was easy to see they were unhappy about this couple "taking over" the floor.

Aerials and choreography:

The only thing to be said about aerials on the social dance floor is: don't do them. While they may look "cool," the execution of aerials requires training by a qualified instructor. Don't do them by yourself unless you are trained, and certainly don't do them on the social dance floor. Dancers have been badly hurt by either participating in aerials, or unluckily being in the proximity of those who did. In fact, in 1996, a swing dancer [died](#) during the execution of an aerial. Aerials can be extremely dangerous, please take this issue seriously.

The same principle applies to other lifts and drops, as well as choreographed patterns that require a large amount of floor space.



Did Your Partner Enjoy the Dance?

Dancing to the level of partner:

It often happens that the two partners dancing socially are not at the same level. It is important that the more experienced partner dances at the level of the less experienced partner. This is mostly a comment for leaders: when dancing with a new partner, start with simple figures, and gradually work your way up to more complicated patterns. You will discover a comfort level, file it away in memory for the next time you dance with the same partner.

The same principle applies to Latin and Swing followers, although to a lesser degree. Doing extra syncopations, footwork, free spins etc. can be distracting and even intimidating for a less experienced leader. Although I must say that the show-off follower is rather rare; most of the violations of this sort are by leaders who lead inexperienced partners into complicated figures.

Being sensitive to partner's preferences:

Social dancers strive to make their partners comfortable and help them enjoy the dance. This requires sensitivity to the likes and dislikes of the partner. These preferences can take a variety of forms. For example, I remember that one of my West Coast Swing social partners found neck wraps uncomfortable. In the same manner, some dancers don't like spins (or many spins in a row), while others really enjoy them. Some like extended syncopations and others don't. There are many more examples in various dance venues. Be sensitive to your partners. It is not too hard to detect their likes and dislikes, and if in doubt, ask.

Demeanor:

Be personable, smile, and make eye contact with your partner. Try to project a warm and positive image on the dance floor, even if that is not your personal style. Many of us lead hectic lives that include a difficult balance between study, work, family, and other obligations. Having a difficult and tiring day, however, is not an acceptable excuse for a depressing or otherwise unpleasant demeanor on the dance floor. Because of the setting of a social dance, we do not always dance with our favorite partners. This is also not grounds for a cold treatment of the partner. Once one asks or accepts a dance, it is important to be outwardly positive, even if not feeling exactly enthusiastic.

The social dancer is also well advised to be watchful of an unchecked ego. While a healthy sense of self is helpful in all social interactions, it is more attractive when mixed with an equal dose of modesty. Don't let perceived dancing abilities or physical attractiveness go to your head. It is helpful to remember that overestimating one's dance prowess or attractiveness is quite common.

Make Your Partner Happy

The single biggest secret of success in social dancing is to make your partners happy. Once you succeed at this task, your popularity will soar and you will never have a shortage of willing and enthusiastic partners to dance with.

Realization of this fact is an important first step. Then, one needs to master the skills needed to actually implement this policy. There are many ways you can make your partner happy, among them:

No uncomfortable leads: Cranking your follower's arm to make her turn, pushing and pulling to bring her into position, and other forceful leads will not be appreciated. If she is not doing what you want, then probably your lead was not skillful enough. Unless you know a pattern well, do not execute it on the social dance floor. Keep it for classes and practice time, until you have mastered the pattern, then bring it on the social dance floor. If the lead is good and the follower is still not following, again the leader is at fault, because he is leading a pattern too difficult for his follower.

No back-leading: When you ask or accept to follow someone in a dance, you implicitly agree to let them lead. While this doesn't mean you have to be a perfect follower, or even a particularly good one, it does mean that you should not try to lead *them*. It is disrespectful and disturbing to your partner when you steal the lead; you are rejecting their contribution to the partnership.

Protect your partner: For the leader this has two aspects. The first is floor craft. Anticipate the movement of other dancers, and match your figures to empty spaces on the floor, so that you do not run your partner into other couples. Secondly, if there is imminent danger of collision, pull your partner close and turn, so that you absorb the blow. The follower can also protect her partner by keeping an eye out behind his back. If a couple is approaching from his blind spot, a small pressure on his shoulder or hand can warn him of possible collision.

Entertain your partner: You are there not only to have a good time yourself, but also to entertain your partner. This means, among other things, making him/her comfortable, dancing at a level that is enjoyable for both, and maintaining a good sense of humor if something goes wrong. If you are a perfectionist in your dance studies, leave it behind in social dancing. Own up to mistakes if

yours, but do not dwell on them either way. Playfulness and lightheartedness in dancing also goes a long way. Look at your partner and smile (except in dances one is not supposed to). Focus not on yourself, but on your partner.

Make your partner feel appreciated: The most popular dancers are not necessarily the most skillful, but rather the ones who make clear to each partner how much that person's company is appreciated and enjoyed. Most people would rather not dance with someone who acts bored or put upon, no matter how amazing their dancing is.

The annoyance factor: There are many things that may be acceptable in everyday situations, and yet can be very annoying when done at very close proximity, as one has to be while dancing. In particular, avoid humming to the music, counting the steps, or chewing gum while dancing.

It is worthwhile to repeat once more the cardinal rule of social dancing: *You are happy when your partner is happy.*

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Larry L Ablin : lablin@frontiernet.net

Phone: 952-898-3513

Barb Johnson : westcoast65@frontiernet.net