



# Larry's Corner

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## *Unsolicited teaching:*

This is unfortunately one of the more common breaches of dance etiquette. Ironically, this error is often committed by individuals who are not fit to teach! Experienced social dancers dance at the level of their partners. Instead of trying to teach someone a pattern in a few minutes, it is better to concentrate on doing what both partners can do, and enjoy the dance. Unsolicited teaching can be humiliating and takes the fun out of dancing.



## *Soliciting teaching on the floor:*

This is not necessarily a violation. There are times in fact when it is flattering to be consulted about a point of dancing. However, this issue should still be approached with a little care. Here is a worst case scenario, to illustrate the point: A polite dancer is excited when his favorite song comes on, and he asks the closest stranger for the dance. She replies: "I have never done this dance before. Can you please teach me?"

It is debatable how much one can learn, from scratch, in the 2-3 minutes a typical song plays, but that is beside the point. This may be a song he really wants to dance to. For this or any other reason, he may not want to spend time at that moment teaching someone, but she has left him no polite way of getting out. In this situation: (a) She doesn't know him (so cannot justify the imposition based on friendship), (b) she solicits teaching at the time he is asking her to dance, which puts him at a disadvantage, and (c) she does not know anything about the dance, so he cannot say: "let's just do what you already know."

Being considerate does not necessarily limit interactions between dancers. People do learn quite a bit from each other in social dancing. Observing a few simple points, however, will make this process more enjoyable for all parties con-

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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cerned:

- Don't solicit teaching the moment someone asks you to dance. If they are polite and considerate, they will feel trapped, will spend the next few minutes with you, and then for the rest of the night will avoid you like the plague. If they are not so shy, they will not teach you, and for the rest of the night will avoid you like the plague.
- A good approach is the following: when asked to dance, one can say "I would like to, but I don't know the dance." This gives the asker a cue to offer help, but at the same time the asker is not cornered.
- The asker in this situation can either offer to take the partner on the floor and do some basic steps, or if s/he is not so inclined, take it as a decline of dance: "Oh, it would have been fun, perhaps we can do a different dance later?"
- It is better to get help from friends, or at least someone you have had a dance or two with already, rather than an absolute stranger.
- If you want to get pointers from someone, wait until s/he sits out a dance. Then go talk to her/him. Almost anyone will be more than glad to be helpful in a situation like this.

### **Summary**

- Etiquette is here to ensure everyone has a good time in a social dance setting, so pay attention to it.
- Your outfit and accessories should be comfortable, safe, and also reflect the culture and level of formality of the dance group. Most importantly, do not forget your dance shoes.
- Ask everyone to dance. Do not monopolize one partner for the whole night.
- Today's beginners will be the good dancers of tomorrow, so be nice to them and dance with them.

- Do not decline a dance unless you absolutely have to. Having declined a dance, you cannot dance the same song with someone else.
- Be considerate of other couples on the floor. Exercise good floor craft. Do not cut other couples off. No aerials or choreographed steps on the social dance floor!
- Stationary dancers (e.g. Swing dancers) stay in the middle, traveling dancers move on the boundary along the line of dance.
- Avoid patterns that your partner cannot do: dance to the level of your partner.
- Never blame your partner for missteps.
- No unsolicited teaching on the floor!
- Smile, be warm, be personable, be nice.

### **Who is Popular?**

At this point you are a considerate social dancer who always puts his/her partner first. But building a reputation takes time. What makes someone popular at first sight? If you look around a dance hall at the start of a song, you will see dancers going around, scanning the crowd, looking for their next partner. Surely, you think to yourself, they don't all know their potential partners. Then what are they looking for? Here are some answers:

**Good dancers are in demand:** This is by far the most effective way of becoming popular in the dancing circles. Regardless of everything else, good dancers are always in demand. This should serve as a powerful incentive to try and improve your dancing. There is no need to know a million patterns; but one needs to have good technique and lead/follow. Practice, practice, practice! Then practice some more.

**Dancers seek dancers:** Dancers are more likely to seek those they see dancing on the floor. Only as a second choice do they turn to those sitting on the sidelines. Maybe this is due to a feeling of con-

confidence that someone seen on the floor is actually a dancer, or a pleasant dancer, or is less likely to decline a dance. Whatever the reason, if you are seen dancing on the floor, you have a better chance of getting the next dance. Think of it as a form of dancers' confidence. Getting this confidence will help you have a pleasant night of dancing. Do your best to get the first few dances once you arrive at a dance event; it gets easier afterwards.

**Dance shoes:** Dancers look for dancers, but how does one spot a dancer (unless you see one dancing)? The answer is: dance shoes! At a dance event where people don't know each other, you will see experienced dancers scan the crowd, not looking at faces, but rather looking at the feet! Making an investment in a pair of dance shoes is a sign of enthusiasm for dancing. Dancers know that, so wearing dance shoes will increase your chances of getting asked to dance.

**Dancers seek those who say "yes":** Being turned down for a dance is never fun. Besides, it is a waste of time: with only a few seconds between songs, if one gets turned down once or twice, the next song is a loss. If you decline dances, or if you look stern, or hard to please, your chances of being asked to dance will be reduced, which brings us to the next point.

**Eagerness, willingness to dance:** Stand close to the edge of the dance floor. Watch the dancers on the floor, tap your foot to the music. Smile. Dancers will be attracted to you if they feel you want to dance. Better yet, don't wait to be asked. Go ask someone to dance! What is the worst that can happen? Even if you are turned down, you have demonstrated your willingness to dance.

**Sense of humor, pleasantness:** Be nice to your partner. He/She was certainly nice enough to ask you to dance, or agree to dance with you, so return the favor. Remember, you are there to have fun, so have fun! Have, or at least emulate, a pleasant demeanor. Most importantly, smile!

**Physical attraction:** This is the one factor that is somewhat out of our control, but it is undeniable that in dancing, as everywhere else, good-looking people have an advantage. Men, especially, will gravitate to pretty women. Women, while lamenting the shallowness of men, gener-

ally behave no better.

That said, for the most of us who are not endowed with movie-star looks, there is good news. Good looks might help in getting the first dance, but in the long run, personality, sense of humor, and most importantly good dancing skills, trumps good looks (at least on the dance floor).

### ***Dance Partners***

We already know about not monopolizing a partner. Dance etiquette has ruled that no more than two consecutive songs be danced with the same partner, so that everyone can find a diversity of partners to dance with. To do this is not only fair, it is smart: you will get to dance with everyone and improve the prospects of your social dancing.

Dancing with a wide set of partners is a cornerstone of social dancing. This general principle applies to everyone, including dancers who are romantically involved. A romantic pair that dances only with one another undermines the structure of social dancing by refusing to contribute to it.

Romantic couples who refuse to dance with others often act out of fear and inhibition: fear of damaging the romance by dancing with someone else, or feelings of insecurity when their sweetheart is dancing with someone else. These negative emotions are unfounded, and arise from completely invalid notions of social dancing. Requesting or accepting a dance carries no commitment outside of the duration of a song, typically 3-5 minutes. Think of it as a brief chat with someone in a cocktail party, before moving on to the next conversation. Going to a dance and declining to dance with everyone is as boring and pointless as going to a party and not speaking to anyone. We will say more about this topic in the section on Dancing and Romance next month.

A great way to increase one's circle of dance acquaintances is to ask beginners to dance. I still fondly remember the advanced dancers who with some degree of regularity asked me to dance when I was a novice. Dancing with begin-

ners is not only an excellent way to develop your lead/follow, but also is a great human investment that will pay off handsomely, because novice dancers don't remain that way for long. Don't think of dancing with a novice as charity, you are doing yourself a favor.

On the other hand, be judicious about asking those more skillful than you. If everyone was constantly seeking dance partners better than themselves, virtually no dancing would take place. Dancers are nice, so the skillful partners that you seek may not decline at first, but if you continue to hunt them down, they will start avoiding you. My rule of thumb is: the frequency of asking someone to dance is inversely proportional with their level of dancing. If someone is far more skilled than you, then ask them only sparingly (of course feel free to accept whenever they ask you, which could be often). If someone is equally or less skilled than you, ask them more often.

How do you get dancers, especially better dancers, to dance with you? Just be a considerate, warm, fun-loving partner, and keep improving your dancing.

Finally, on the subject of regular dance partners: whether or not to have a regular partner depends on many factors. The obvious advantage of a dance partnership is having someone to take classes and practice with, or to go out dancing with, especially to places not frequented by dancers. However, dance partnerships present unique challenges, and may complicate other parts of your life. A dance partnership is a very special kind of relationship, with a delicate balance, whose maintenance is highly nontrivial. The interaction of dance partnerships with your personal and romantic life is especially something to be carefully considered.

There are many arguments both in favor and against regular dance partnerships; the validity of each of these arguments varies greatly according to the personalities involved. Like any other relationship, a dance partnership requires care, consideration, and expenditure of time and effort. Before getting into a partnership, make sure you are willing to make the personal investment necessary to make it a success.

It is worth noting that one has no claim on the regular dance partner during a social dance. In a social dance, everyone dances with everyone, with

the exception of the first and last dance of the evening, which can be reserved.

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