

Larry's Corner

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Come and Dance with us

Do you have a story 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 don't know me my picture is on the back page

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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 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 ex-



Larry and Kathy at SAT West coast swing class

perienced 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"

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Importance Of Dancing With Beginners

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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

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.



cSat West Coast Swing Class

next level of skill.

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 than 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.

One of my teachers gave me 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 those 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 probably is better than the average social dancer, and therefore does a better job with a worse lead. My partner and I agree that social dancing is the real test of your technique and proficiency, but just because I can't do a throw-away 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 a 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

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What Can Be Led Or Followed

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doesn't necessarily know the step but is a good dancer)

4. Mastery (can do with virtually anyone)

The most success comes 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.

I would happily give up my trophies to be able to dance well with any woman out on a dance floor. 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 repertoire of moves to your partner as well. When dancing 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

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,

is a beginner need never fear dancing with someone who pays attention to the level of dance the woman is at; 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.

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 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 impeccably, 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.

Why Forceful Leads Are Not Required

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Why Forceful Leads Are Not Required

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When a man leads his partner he first must know exactly where he wants his partner to go. His lead must be resolute, confident, PRECISE. As a leader you should adhere to the "rule of TBC" (Tender But Compelling) Without words, his body should communicate his intentions to her so well that her body has almost no choice but to follow. This is not to imply that a strong lead is the product of "muscle power" developed in the gymnasium. The leader's timing and clarity of purpose is essentially what "powers" the "tender but compelling" communication to his partner that almost seems to appear in her body - something approaching ventriloquism, something so skilled that I'm barely aware of it at all. (Of course the follower must be "totally ready mentally and physically" to execute just what her leader is compelling her to do).

Leaders - if you don't dictate where your partner's body should be at every moment, it won't be there (and as a good leader, if it doesn't end up where you planned, you quickly change plans - remember, "leading" is really "leading AND following".) Consequently, when leading you restrict her choices until there is no choice; it should feel to her like the most natural (and only) thing to do. This works well with a good follower who knows the rules of following

since within these rules she has only one option. With a beginner follower, some leads are likely to be met with a good deal of resistance. In this case a stronger lead will probably just be met with more resistance. If you overpower her, she will usually give in - and the move will not be smooth and will feel terrible for both you and her. I find that if I give up leading when I'm met with unusual resistance, the beginner follower will be more likely to want to try again and will make a real attempt not to anticipate that it is a move in her current and limited repertoire. Your partner will be more likely to look at this as a learning experience and thank you for showing her some new stuff rather than apologize and probably think that she wasn't good enough to dance with you. At times I have had advanced beginners back lead and start doing something they know when the first part of the lead is identical to what I intended. If I am giving no lead and my partner just takes off, I used to be inclined to hold

her back. I've come to find it's really not worth the effort and just makes a mistake look worse than it really was. Of course, it's not always her fault... While I've had the experience of meeting enough resistance to prevent proper dance movement, I've later found in all such cases that my own technique was lacking in some way. Admittedly, with sufficiently poor followers, very subtle faults in the lead can result in major problems.

Proper lead is "An indication of speed and direction without force or verbal communication" and defines follow as "traveling in the path of least resistance." Some say that a lead is an invitation. The term, "invitation" is not synonymous with leading - in fact this is probably the most inaccurate description of leading I have ever heard. A lead should never be just an invitation to do something. Instead, a good lead clearly and unquestionably places the follower where she should be - there is never a moment where the follower thinks, "Hmm...shall I accept his invitation?" That is, a proper lead will leave the follower with no choice whatsoever. Unless she Hijacks the Lead.

When communicating his intent through a lead, the man must "speak" clearly - if he "mumbles" the lady cannot understand no matter how good she is at following;

With better followers, one really

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When all else fails
send flowers the next
day.



Jefferson Community Ed Dance Class
26th and Hennepin

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does have a choice in techniques.

1. Let the leader put the lady exactly where he wants her.
2. The leader permit's the lady the freedom of going to the right place.
3. I myself prefer #2 with ladies who follow reasonably well, and the former is not always realistic in practice. For example, an ECS cross handed tuck-turn (American-spin), where the only connection is right hand to right hand. A beginner has a choice of simply letting her elbow go back behind her torso, which, given that she is a beginner is likely what she'll do because at her level of dancing following means letting yourself be pulled around.

There are definitely techniques that can be used to give a more assured, less ambiguous lead to beginners. For instance, when dancing socially, I could usually get people to dance continuity style properly even when they had never done it before simply by making sure they had their weight over the proper foot and taking a very strong foot rise to keep them from changing weight too soon.

The concept of leading is not something that can be easily passed on by pen (or word processor) But here goes...

In Swing as in all forms of partner dance there are three overriding factors for good lead and fol-

low:

1. Each person is responsible for their own balance. (However, for many moves, you need to put some slight weight behind your connection and use your partner for an instant - to help start turning for example in an American Spin. Followers who hold themselves up 'all' the time - those wonderfully balanced ballet dancers who have never partnered - don't give the leaders the connection they need, and thus the leaders can't do their jobs)
2. The center line of each partner should always be in a relationship towards the other.
3. The lead should be just that-

a lead: not a victory in a tug of war. The partner must react to the leaders initial action, not resist the lead until his force overcomes her resistance.

"Leader and, Follower must compensate. If a follower moves far away from the leader, it is good dancing for the leader to follow the follower out instead of tugging her back into position. Also, the follower must compensate for poor indications from the leader."

Applying physics to ballroom dancing leads to the pushy

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Sat West Coast Swing Class
Tuesday Nights 8 pm at Medina Ballroom

If she's heavy on 1, the man may be making too large of a lead on 1. Try taking a smaller step (while retaining the body lead.) She may be more comfortable taking smaller steps.

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F=MA view. The proper theoretical basis of ballroom dancing is signal analysis. Leading is negative feedback, and following is positive feedback. Dancers should strive for high gain with stability. Here's a metaphor that an engineer might relish: positive and negative feedback.

I notice that a lot of beginning (or maybe just: bad) followers react to my pull at the start of a WCS pattern by pulling back. Instead of coming forward of their own accord, they act as if they're standing on a skateboard, and I'm a doorknob: they pull to move themselves forward. Some will even lean back, really hanging off me. Expecting of course that I, as the studly stud, will be rock steady and thus make them come forward. I hate that. (I've managed to floor one woman by inadvertently letting go while she was hanging off me like that.)

Trying to rationalize I would say that their reaction to the pull at the start of a pattern is to increase the tension.

Ultimately this will move them forward, but it's a waste of energy. The correct reaction to my pull would be that they move themselves in order to 'lessen' the tension. The opposite also happens: in a push break I push on the 4th beat or thereabouts. I've encountered (thank goodness very few!) followers who will give me a sharp push at that point. This has zero effect, because I'm not a wall: my muscles

absorb this shock. It does start to hurt amazingly fast. Same story as above: when they feel my compression (push) they should not increase the tension (as if they push themselves off a wall), but try to decrease it.

So, the correct action would be positive feedback (they make themselves move more than a purely rigid system would do, given my force exerted), while the incorrect one is negative feedback (trying to counteract my force exerted, and only moving as a side effect of this).

Tips For Leaders

1) Begin the lead one to two beats ahead of the move; e.g., if you're doing triple-step-triple-step-rock-step, then use the momentum of the rock-step to lead the next figure.

2) Accomplish tip #1 by getting your own momentum going early. She will be able to sense the change in weight and momentum. The "hand" lead should be a natural extension of the momentum lead, feeling almost superfluous.

3) Accomplish tip #2 by visualizing the next move in advance in your mind. If you fail to completely visualize the move, then just go into a move you know better, even if it's just a basic (just go back and forth between open and closed positions if you have to). By sticking with what you can visualize, you have a

better lead and your partner remains at ease.

4) When all else fails send flowers the next day.

Tricks For Followers In WCS

1) Arm Tone: there is a reason (besides not knowing better or lack of experience) for why a follower might intentionally go limp and let her arms fully extend on 1,2; she is doing it as a defense mechanism when given an arm lead. An arm lead is inherently more jerky and forceful than a body lead. Letting the arm fully extend allows for more of a shock absorbing effect for the follower. I've heard several very good instructors say that they purposely go limp when someone gives them a jerky lead or is too forceful so that they can protect their arms. I've used this defense mechanism when necessary. However, for really bad cases of forceful leads, I've found that resorting to the traveling coaster step is the best defense since the forward momentum dissipates much of the force.

2) As a follower, when dancing with an inexperienced partner who gets off beat, first try to keep your footwork correct to help him feel the rhythm if he asks for help. End up acting like a sort of dancing metronome which can really help a beginner who is 'aware' that he has a tendency to get off beat. However some men have no clue about keeping the beat or knowing on which foot to turn the follower,

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Tricks For Followers In WCS

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and you can tell that "helpful back leading" would be useless. Whenever you dance with this kind of partner, simply do your best to protect yourself from physical injury -- with these men, you have to literally run during most of their maneuvers to keep from either falling or getting your shoulder thrown out of whack.

3) Followers, it's OK to bend at the waist in some styles of dance. In fact it's required to do a duck out from a west coast swing basket whip. The technique for duck outs/tunnels; Ladies, instead of allowing your head to look down while ducking out, you must bend at the waist while keeping your head looking forward.

Tricks For Leaders In WCS

1) If she's heavy during the anchor-step, the man can lighten it up by taking a slightly larger step on 4 or by doing free spins on the anchor. She will stop trusting you to hold her up and will maintain her own balance. This helps both partners since they are both free to play on the anchor without giving away balance to the other partner, but you must regain the connection on 6&. If she's too light during the anchor-step, the man's foot can be moved can be slightly back on the "step" of his "anchor-step" to tighten the connection.

2) If she's heavy on 1, the man

may be making too large of a lead on 1. Try taking a smaller step (while retaining the body lead.) She may be more comfortable taking smaller steps.

3) If she's like a puppy on a long leash, i.e. uncontrollable, you have to lead the entire move, rather than just 'opening the door for her' Keep your frame. This is important for the follower who gets past you by the 2 count. You can't even do a simple tuck if she's already at the end of the slot.

4) If she's lost in her own little syncopation world and letting the connection fail, put her into multiple spinning moves. It will make her concentrate on the connection. And when she's in a neck wrap she can't go for her personal record of 50 body waves in under three and half minutes.

5) If she walks out of her anchor step early, or comes in on 1 ahead of the lead, and the man reacts quickly he can a) stop her, or b) take extra walk-walks back. When a woman tries to walk in early, leave her out there for two more beats. She will never stop doing it if you try to fudge for what she is doing by leading her in on the 6 or 8. Besides it could become a habit that could be hard for a leader to break. It also could (and will) put you off time. I would think the best thing to do would be to lead a lot of basics and keep adding the extra two counts just to get her out of the habit of trying to come in on her own or early.

Dance Etiquette

Line of Dance is counter clockwise around the room for dances that move, like Foxtrot, and Waltz.

People who aren't moving like Rock and roll, Rumba, or Swing Dance in the middle of the room.

If you bump into someone, say sorry.

If you step on partner, say your sorry, then forget it. (Don't rag on it.)

Finish the song you started dancing to, before excusing yourself.

Don't do a step that requires kicking, on a crowded floor.

Dance etiquette offenders

Bulldog: One who does step or kick, no matter who is in the way.

Chatter box: One who is always talking. (Social talk ok but not constantly)

Crooner: One who sings or hums with music.

Debater: One who talks politics or religion while

dancing.

Iceberg: One with no smile (At least look like your having fun.)

Jolly Extrovert: One who is cheerful with surrounding people, but forgets his own partner.

Quitter: Suddenly tired 1/2 way through song. (Finish Song)

Wrong way charlie: Clockwise traveler. (Against line of dance)

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. Louis Park.

TC Rebels Swing club; Hotline number 952-941-0906; Dances are at Everett McClay VFW on frontage road of 494 by Mall of America.

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 nite 8pm at the Lenox Center in St Louis Park.

West Coast Swing on Tuesday night 8 pm at Medina Ballroom

TGIS dances will have free lessons 1 hour before Dance starting at 730 pm on the 1st and 3rd Saturday.

There will be 15 minutes of Beginner to get people started, Then 30 minutes of intermediate. Then 15 minute practice till dance starts.

So for all you singles that want to learn to dance while holding each other come on out.

COME AND DANCE WITH US

Larry L Ablin

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

Teach at SAT West coast swing on Tuesday night at Medina.

Teach at Jefferson Community Ed on Wednesday 26th and Hennepin

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Larry's corner online at

[Http://](http://)

www.dancempls.cutecity.com



Ladies in waiting at East meets West Dance. Waiting for more guys to show up. Guys we need you to help keep all the extra ladies busy not just these three lovely ladies.