



### Partner Connection in Social Dancing

So, you've mastered the footwork, have spot-on timing but for some reason, NOBODY seems to guide (or respond) to you properly on the dance floor.  
Why can't they move with you the way your instructor does?

Here's why Partner Connection in Social Dancing is important and if we put it into an equation, this is what we get;

$$\text{Frame} + \text{Pressure} = \text{Connection}$$

Let's go over each part;

Frame is the positioning of your arms that creates room for you both to dance.

A poor frame results in crushed toes underfoot.

Pressure is a light and active compression (about 5 lbs) applied to your partner's frame through the palms of your hands. Passive compression by contrast, is just leaning on and becoming heavy in your partner's arms...and if someone isn't responding fast enough to a lead, you might need to upgrade your spaghetti arms from soggy to al dente.

Both of these together create Connection; which is where much of the joy of partner dancing comes from - moving together in unity.

Now that we understand connection better, how do we...

#### *Maintain it in Our Dancing*

1. Connect your palm to your partner's with about 5 lbs. of pressure. Have your partner resist the pressure, so your hands stay in the centre. Maintaining the pressure, have your partner move their hand around. Your hands should stay stuck together during the movement. Switch who initiates pressure and who moves so you feel both sides.

2. Take a two hand-hold.  
The leader initiates the pressure, then takes a step with the left foot forward, backward, or side, but not crossing.



The follower moves with them using their right foot.  
Both sides keep the connected hands in front and the same distance from the shoulders (frame) and maintain the 5 lbs. of force (pressure).  
Practice with more steps in any direction, without crossing.

3. Finally, take a closed hold.

Both sides apply pressure into the clasped hands, while the leader applies pressure through the right hand on the shoulder blade and the follower returns it with pressure on the leader's upper arm, just before the shoulder muscle.

Now try some basic steps, maintaining space between your chests and pressure through the contact points.

You should find it's a lot easier to follow your partner (or vice versa) than before; just remember that any difficulty in connection ultimately comes from poor frame or lack of pressure so, keep an eye out for it...your own, as well as theirs!

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## The Unique Qualities of Paso Doble



It's sad that so many dancers have to wait until they are already skilled before they are given access to this dance through typical training programs...

Paso Doble is the only dance in the Ballroom or Latin genres where characterization and emotional expression are more important than technical precision...we like to see heels used for walks and we need to have our weight in the right place but in general, there is a lot less than other dances in the way of technical detail.

Additionally, the Paso Doble is the only dance where the majority of attention is on the man and we refer to it as a man's dance for that reason.

In the Paso Doble he is front and centre throughout the dance, showing strength, confidence and yes, even arrogance!

Matadors who participated in bullfights were supremely arrogant. Their ability to face down a 1000 lb charging bull while remaining still and absolutely in control was legendary, and this is largely characterized in the dance.

Stillness is a vital element of a great Paso Doble performance and movements must be clear and controlled throughout the dance.

Unlike other dances, the lady must keep her attention on the man at all times so that she can properly represent the cape with a kind of razor-sharp focus of both parties in their performance, just as the matador focuses on every emotion of the bull to anticipate its next move.

Another aspect that makes the Paso such an exciting dance to learn is that it allows a very precise story to be told through every figure.

Each group of step patterns is clearly designed to express a particular element of the story;

The 'Grand Circle' is clearly the picture of the matador swirling his cape around him.  
'La Passe' expresses the cape being flicked back and forth.  
'Promenade Spins' reflect a spinning cape.  
'Coup de Pique' is a representation of the final victory over the bull (don't worry, no bulls are harmed in this dance!).  
'Flamenco Taps', while having nothing to do with the cape or the bull, are an expression of the lady's role and of the dynamics between the two partners.

It's really a great deal of fun to perform this dance, especially with someone who understands those characterizations.

*There is a kind of razor-sharp focus of both parties in their performance, just as the matador focuses on every emotion of the bull to anticipate its next move.*

The matador in the bull ring is not only confident and brave, he is fully aware of everything around him; he is aware of his own posture; of his body; of his space...he is mentally strong!

*The lead in the dance must convey these same characteristics if they wish to put on a believable performance.*

Everything a matador does is contrary to normal human behaviour.

When a bull charges towards you, the natural response would be to discover how fast you can run...the bullfighter stands still and actually draws the bull towards him, using his cape and body shape to trick the bull into missing his body by inches as he charges.

Matadors are masters of their movement, every action has its place and they use these actions to perfection, sometimes soft and small, sometimes large and dramatic.

In fact, many of the technical aspects of Paso Doble come from this same foundation.

The distinctive walk is a great reflection of the arrogance of the matador, stepping forward with boldness, the heel striking the ground first and the centre mass moving firmly forward.

The posture, with the curved shape always stretching obliquely in a diagonal direction away from the bull's horns.

The determined focus of the eyes, because a matador never takes his eyes away from the bull.

The curved sweep of the arms as he swings the cape around.



The lady's actions, while also matching these technical qualities, are soft and flowing to emulate the fabric of the cape and the lady's role in this dance is just as important as the man's, even though he might be considered the star...she needs to be just as strong but also fluid and soft, curving and flowing in response to his movements.

In addition, she has a key role as the Flamenco Dancer; these dancers are incredibly strong; confident in their own sensuality; and full of wisdom.

Like the matador, they are aware of every part of their body and use it to perfection; even their fingers play a role in drawing the eye during the performance.

The lady is aware that this is a man's dance and supports that reality; she respects that.

She enjoys his strength and confidence; she gives him the ability to take on this role and empowers it through her own actions but, at the same time, she knows that the presence of a lady makes the dance work, so she understands her own role in the performance!

While she doesn't compete with him, she is equally as powerful and just as important in the overall story. The lady knows that her partner would be limited in his performance, with no story to tell, if he had no cape, yet she celebrates his role and supports it.

All of these qualities work together to bring us into this imaginary world of the bullfight arena and the Paso Doble isn't particularly difficult to learn, but for many people, especially those who lack self-confidence, it can be challenging to overcome those internal barriers and embrace the dance.

Even a social dance Paso Doble using only basic steps can be powerful, dramatic and even unforgettable by integrating these aspects of the character of the dance into the movements.

If you're a social dancer, give this dance a try and you may find a new source of confidence as a performer and to help you see some of this character, here are a few examples to inspire you with some of the best professional showcase performances;

#### [Riccardo Cocchi & Yulia Zagoruychenko](#)

A great showdance performance from a few years ago shows great elements of stillness and caping actions.

#### [Michal Malitowski & Joanna Leunis](#)

Although Joanna is known as the world master of fast movement, she uses that speed in the most skilful way in a performance that never loses sight of the power of stillness.

#### [Slavik Kryklyvyy & Karina Smirnoff](#)

This showcase takes stillness to a whole new level; with nearly half the dance performed as a solo to illustrate the loneliness of the matador in the arena and, even after Karina joins him on the floor, the couple never loses sight of this key element of Paso Doble...until the dance eventually fuses into a Samba.

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## How your Personality can affect your Learning

First, the type of student makes a difference:

- In children; dance encourages a sense of responsibility and poise which may give the instructor a view into the adults they will become.
- For adults; the exhilaration and frustration of learning something new, after having mastered many things in life already, may lead to some unexpectedly major emotional highs and lows regarding dance. These emotions, may be more visible to their instructor than almost anyone else, or even only visible to their instructor.
- Couples have at least three personalities; one from each partner and one from two of them as a couple. The words "at least three" are very intentional; the mix of personal and dance relationships have the possibility of multiple personalities.



Here, we will look at personality in terms of mind-sets and preferences and one of the least recognized but most important personality dimensions for learning is...the talent vs the challenge mind-set.

#### The Talent Mind-set

The talent mind-set describes students who believe that they simply do, or do not have particular talents.

They are not passive however, as they typically believe that talents need to be discovered and nurtured before they will be recognized; they work hard to show that they have talent, but may take it a bit too hard when something is difficult, thinking that perhaps they do not have as much talent as they hoped.

*How this plays out:* Although these students work very hard and may be very good, they are not very likely to stretch to a new level until they are very sure they will master it. Even in a class they are typically the most likely to be cautious with new challenges and to push back when they are uncomfortable.

*Why?* These students tend to view successful opportunities as the ones where they can show their talent, rather than the ones where they have a chance to conquer a challenge or develop a talent.

Very often, they are used to being successful in this way, as they are very good at a lot of very specific things, and prefer to be masters of whatever they do and the great things about these students are their commitment and steady progress.

They want to understand things very well and that gives them a great foundation upon which to excel; they often develop into technically excellent dancers and strong coaches given their appreciation of clarity and detail.



The 'not so great' thing for these students is that they may fear failure a bit too much, although they may work hard not to show this fear and they may hold themselves back from new experiences and levels way too long or, entirely.

The important thing for them to remember is that dance is an amazing experience that has much more to offer than a first-place ribbon, trophy or medallion.

### The Challenge Mind-set

The challenge mind-set describes students who view challenge as essential to growth.

They believe that the amount of effort you put into something is directly related to the reward that you will get back but may, however, get discouraged if there are no, or very few clear signs that they are getting closer to a goal...or no recognition of their efforts.

*How this plays out:* Although these students may also work very hard and may be very good, they are more likely to gloss over essential basic skills while seeking challenges.

In a class environment, they may be the ones who are doing something completely different than what the rest of the class is doing; just to stretch, stimulate or entertain themselves and may also just be a bit more distracted unless information is presented in an interesting way.

*Why?* These student view success as being able to handle something that is either hard or new.

They are less likely to think that having difficulty doing something is a sign of failure and are more likely to see difficulty as just a necessary part of what it takes to get to the next level. When they actual master something, they will enjoy the feeling immensely but then may soon get bored with that particular success and need to move on.

The great things about these students include their openness to various types of coaching, and how quickly they can adapt. They are generally forgiving of the mistakes of others (because they forgive their own mistakes) and will often develop into very musical dancers and outstanding choreographers given their willingness to take risks.

The 'not so great' thing for these students is that they sometimes spread themselves too thin. They may not go deep enough, or stay long enough with the fundamentals of dance or with any one style of dance, to fully reap the rewards and the important thing for these students to remember is that the pursuit of perfection in dancing has enough challenge to last a lifetime.

Of course, hardly anyone has one mind-set or preference all the time and there are many things that may influence learning styles.

There is; *The preference to work things out in the moment with others vs reflecting on things alone; The preference to have things spelled out very specifically and concretely vs having them described in concepts and analogies; The preference for learning "steps - then character - then technique" vs "technique - then steps - then character"; and more...*

The best thing for instructors is to understand their students well enough to know what is most likely to frustrate or motivate them.

The best thing for students is to understand their mind-set and preferences well enough to not get too trapped in them.

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Basic steps can be more important than Choreography

## BASIC DANCE STEPS



Waltz



Foxtrot



Mambo



Moonwalk

Pole dancing

Basic steps, when danced at a high level are more beautiful in many ways than the advanced, dynamic choreography everyone seems to strive for...

The understanding of movement and the control needed to perform them well are much more involved than many of the fancy steps yet, too many dancers are so impatient to push their choreography that they never take the time to develop their basics.

Let's look at one Ballroom lecture on basic steps by Italian coach Michele Bonsignori in 2017 at the 'Camp'.

The Camp is an annual multi-day dance camp held in Wuppertal, Germany and considered by many to be the best of its type in the world featuring some of the best coaches in the WDSF. Thankfully, they post a number of their lectures online for free access, to benefit the worldwide dance community.

The presentation hits on a vital issue that is missing in much of today's dancing, as he begins by talking about a curious frustration he has encountered in teaching some of the top young couples in the world...they perform imaginative and creative choreography with tremendous effect yet when he asks them, at the end of a lesson to just dance a basic step, they have no idea what to do.

One of the statements that really stands out was that without a solid understanding of basic steps and how they relate to all other figures you will never be a champion.

He goes on to show that, if you don't spend enough time to understand the basic steps with all the dynamic quality they bring to your understanding of dance, you really cannot consider yourself an advanced dancer and covers things like use of the knees and centre and, understanding where your foot pressure needs to be at every part of your dancing.

Bonsignori also points out that WDSF amateur world champion Olga Kulikova, before she was a world champion, was falling short of her goals due to what many would see as a nearly insignificant issue in how she used her body weight before the dance even started.

The lecture is primarily focused on Slow Foxtrot and Tango, with a couple of Waltz examples thrown in, and you'll see how critical it is for anyone desiring high marks in competition to focus on a thorough understanding of basic steps.

I hope you enjoy this lecture and can gain a little more insight into the 'basics' [LECTURE LINK](#).



**Dmitry Zharkov - Olga Kulikova, RUS**