



5 Tips on How to Become a Better Leader at a Social Dance

Maybe you want more dances in an evening, or maybe you would just like more enjoyment of the dances you have. You could be wondering how to be more musical, or you could simply want to stay on time. No matter what, if you're a leader on the dance floor, you would probably like to become a better one.

The following are things I've picked up or learned from others on how to be the best leader you can be...from when you first see a potential dance partner, right up until the music ends.

1. Ask...with confidence.

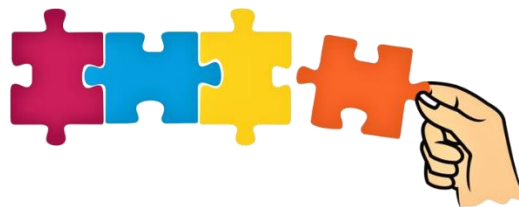
Many of us fear rejection so much that we sabotage ourselves before the dance even begins. When looking to ask someone to dance, you may need to 'trick' your body into behaving more confidently than you feel:

- Imagine that you are the best dancer in the room and it's their loss if they say no.
- Rehearse a simple phrase like "would you like to dance?" until you can say it automatically and confidently.
- Watch for the less experienced dancers and ask one of them first. This helps relax you and can boost your confidence so you can take on more advanced dancers later.

2. Plan ahead, and be assertive.

Many beginner leaders worry about being creative enough; they try to show off and usually end up awkwardly switching to a new step halfway through the current one. To avoid this, dance patterns you know well, while planning ahead for the occasional advanced step.

Remember that your partner would rather dance simple steps comfortably and safely than be jerked into patterns at the last second. Over time, you'll find you can still plan ahead while dancing more and more difficult combinations.



3. Learn to smile.

What easier way to instil confidence in your partner, while conveying that you enjoy dancing and invite them to enjoy it with you? A smile, even if you have to plaster it on your face, instantly makes you less distant and scary-looking, and therefore more like someone worth dancing with. And as a bonus, studies have proven that even a fake smile creates a feeling of happiness, allowing you to dance better and shrug off mistakes faster.

4. Protect the partnership.

Another important role of the leader is that of protector on the dance floor.

To keep yourself and your partner safe from collisions, practice thinking like a car driver:

- Stay constantly aware of nearby couples, and try to anticipate and avoid problems early.
- Maintain a buffer of space (one metre if possible) between your partner and any other solid object.
- Look for openings between couples where you can merge with traffic.
- Guide your partner gently on and off the dance floor with a hand on her back.

5. Forgive mistakes - yours, and your partners.

No matter how hard you try, mistakes and missteps will happen on both sides.

When this happens, the best thing you can do is swallow your pride, smile, and perhaps offer a light hearted joke ('don't worry, we won't have to amputate this time...') Time spent berating yourself for a mistake is time you could have spent enjoying the dance, so move on!

Notice that none of these tips have anything to do with how good a dancer you are?

Focus on being a decent human being to your partner instead, and the dancing will come with time.

5 Tips on How to Become a Better Follower at a Social Dance

In the social dancing jungle, we all generally want the same thing: To score as many good dances as possible. Beginner followers will often display this by trying to 'force' a dance, by adding tons of styling, yanking themselves around the floor and generally ignoring the leader.

However, wise followers know that the best way to improve their dances - and the calibre of their leaders - is to practice paying more attention to the opposite end of the partnership.

The following tips will not only make the dance more fun for you, but for your partner as well.

1. When asked to dance, be polite.

Over the decades many articles have already talked about this...but here's my 2 cents!

Accept any and all dances from beginners or advanced dancers, men or women, old or young. Dance socials survive by ensuring that everyone has fun, and that means allowing everyone at least one dance.

HOWEVER, you do not have to accept a dance with someone who you believe will be inappropriate or harmful to you in any way; If they come knocking, let them know you are taking a break and give repeat-offenders a more direct "No Thanks!"

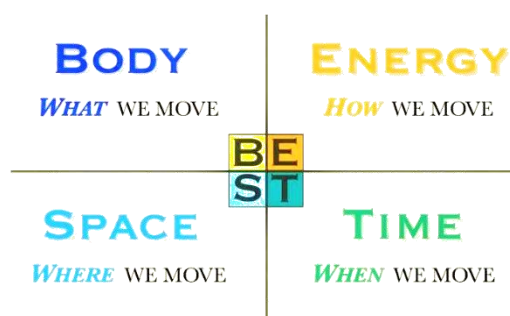
2. Put your partner first.

It's like this: If you don't want your house to become a pigsty, you and your romantic partner must work together to keep it clean. Likewise, you and your dance partner each have your roles to play, so that you can both have fun while putting forth the effort needed to sustain the partnership.

For a follower, this means paying attention to your leader and responding quickly, so they can lead you into more exciting moves.

After all, if you aren't willing to work with your partner, why are you dancing with them in the first place?

ELEMENTS OF DANCE



3. Stay alert.

A follower who tenses up at a step she hasn't seen before is in for a tough time at a social, where only the beginner dancers are predictable. The biggest challenge every follower faces; is being able to respond to the unknown as quickly as possible.

Two things have to work together to make this possible: muscle memory, and a blank mind. Muscles gradually learn to react to the patterns of movement over time, so even if you weren't prepared for a lead, you still react in the correct way.

Quieting the mind is just as important however, so it doesn't interfere with what the muscles are doing. Practice meditation, put all your mind into the connection, distract it with math sums, whatever it takes.

4. Never hang on and, never let go.

What the heck does that mean???

Well, it's the leader's decision to create a connection (e.g., offering a hand) or to release it but a nervous follower can easily fall into the trap of 'hanging on for dear life'.



Alternatively, they may be predicting the moment when they are supposed to take their hand back...and in doing so, they miss the cool move the leader was about to send their way!

5. Style, but make it compliment your partner.

For more experienced followers only!

If you want to add your own styling, you must first know it will not interfere with your leader.

For example, if the leader asks for a basic underarm turn by raising his left hand, you can likely add styling with your left hand on the turn until you face him again.

Other forms of styling - body rolls, shaping, syncopated taps and flicks - have specific places where they can be executed without smacking someone's butt by accident.

Stay alert for the unexpected however as a less experienced leader may give you less 'room' for styling than others.

The Magic of Momentum in Dancing

So, what's up? You've seen the videos of professional dancers flowing through step after step, so seamlessly you can't even tell where one pattern ended and another began...but when you dance, it feels like each step clunks down about as smoothly as bricks on a wall.

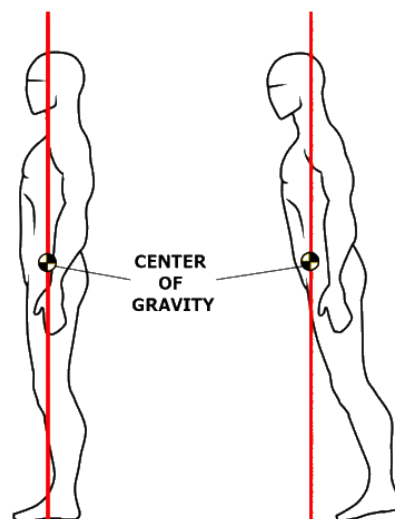
The differences between what you see and what you dance yourself lie in how you direct your momentum from point A to B.

When practicing the techniques below, always remember that the end goal is to dance efficiently, by conserving momentum with minimal effort.

Why? Because it's the loss of momentum that makes your dance feel so clunky.

Would you enjoy a rollercoaster that stopped and started every 5 seconds?

Follow these steps, and you'll ensure a smoother ride for you and your partner.



Rolling Through the Steps

This is probably the first momentum-generating technique we are taught; the goal is to simply travel in a straight line, using the following foot technique:

For Standard/Smooth: Walk normally.

Notice how your heel strikes the ground first, then rolls to the front of your foot as you take your next step.

Concentrate on keeping your body level by softening your knees and push off the back foot to create your forward energy.

Don't lean forward! If it starts to feel like the concourse at an airport, you know you're getting somewhere.

Do the same thing backwards, this time by sliding the ball of the foot back and letting it roll until the heel makes contact.

For Latin/Rhythm: Slide forward on the balls of your feet, NEVER losing contact with the floor. There's no foot rolling action here but, there is hip-rolling action.

As your weight transfers forward and your heel kisses the ground, let that forward energy settle into your hip, rolling it backwards, until it almost feels like your weight is moving towards your heel.

The energy must roll forwards again, so send it into the opposite hip, stepping forward as you do, and repeat.

The movement should feel like an infinity symbol rolling around in your hips, fed and maintained with your forward (or backward) momentum.

Aim for Zero

At rest, we must always return to the balls of our feet.

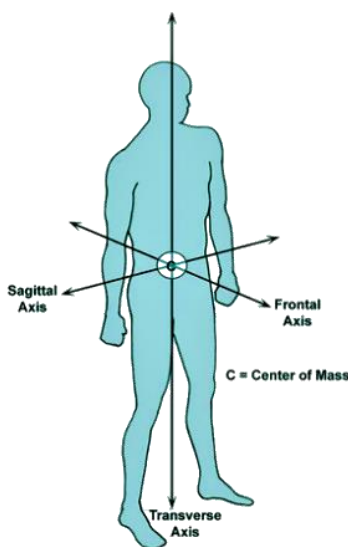
This means we anticipate the amount of energy we need to get from point A to B, and practice until we can transfer from ball to ball without wasting energy. One way we do this, especially on the side steps, is by driving a wedge out with the inside of the free foot, then rolling to a flat on the weight transfer.

Why? Because the rolling action helps to slow us down, exactly as much as our transfer to the side 'sped us up' so we come to rest over our foot - at zero.

In smooth/standard, we use this technique for our forward and backward movements too, rolling through our foot to ensure continuous movement.

Of course, we don't actually want to stop moving on the dance floor - we want to stay balanced and in control...because uncontrolled momentum is lost momentum.

Blending the Movement



The above techniques are great for single-direction travel, but what about changing directions (i.e., turns)?

We are already completing each weight change on the balls of our feet, which is the best place for them to pivot, if needed. Now it's up to our body rotation (Smooth/Standard), or our hip rotation (Rhythm/Latin) to rotate strongly enough to turn the rest of our body along a new path.

This includes anything from the waltz reverse turn to a triple spin in mambo - the only change in our bodies is how strongly we rotate; also, we must make the turn as we arrive on a new foot or, in others words, the last instant before our forward energy would stop.

Wait longer, and you'll have to 'force' the twist to build up momentum again. Turn too early, and you won't be balanced on the ball, and end up falling out of the turn.

Blend the energy from the previous movement into the new one and nothing will be lost.

Juggling Energy

In ballroom dancing, your partner is just as important as you are for conserving momentum.

The two of you must be constantly working in tandem or in opposition to each other, in order to keep energy juggling between you.

One common way this is expressed is through a light but responsive frame, which acts as a shock absorber for any movement - it can compress and extend, but always with resistance and like the willow branch, it immediately snaps back to place once the pressure is reduced.

Often, the follower acts as a shock absorber for the leader, bending slightly to receive their momentum, which then travels into their body and moves them a split second later.

A back-leading follower might think they are helping but, in reality, they are killing the momentum for both of them.

Remember that, like the rollercoaster, there are no sudden stops or changes. Work hard to make every movement soft but irresistible and enjoy the delightful flowing dance that arises.

The “Telemark”, “Double Reverse Spin” and “Wing”

We have some rather strange names for figures in our Ballroom and Latin dance syllabi. How did these names originate? Here are three examples, the origin of which are, I think, fairly well known.

The “Telemark”: British dancers, skiing in Norway in the 1920’s, saw the “Telemark Turn” used in skiing to quickly change direction. They named the dance figure “Telemark” as the manoeuvre reminded them of the skiing turn.

The “Double Reverse Spin”: Why double? It is only one full turn or less, however, the originator; [Maxwell Stewart](#), always danced two consecutively, hence “double”.

The (Waltz) “Wing”: I have always wondered how the Wing got its name and references by Josephine Bradley (renowned dancer, teacher, competitor and examiner and creator of the heel turn) provided the answer.

She explained that the figure was so named because the followers part resembled a large bird (e.g., seagull) folding it’s wing into its body...and instilling this mental picture into the student’s mind may achieve results.

The description below is more in keeping with the original style of the movement which can be seen on this old [film record](#) (at approximately 3.15 into the clip) and not how it has developed to its current execution.

Starting in P.P. with the lady’s head turned right, ask the lady to turn their head and torso strongly to the left between 2 and 3, thus creating the bird’s folding wing effect.

This strong body turn should ensure that the lady does the desired foot swivel on the R.F. between 2 & 3. *Remember to use the earlier Rise and Fall, viz “Commence to rise e/o 1; Continue to rise on 2; Up. Lower at e/o 3”.* You should then see the executed “wing” effect.

When the figure was created in the 1920’s, I’m quite sure that like many other figures, it occurred quite by chance.

Most likely, a couple found themselves in promenade position, blocked by another couple and the man led his partner around to his left side to avoid a collision. Doubtless, they would think “that was nice” and then set about refining it.





**Special
Olympics
Australia**

Announcement

To: All students of Inclusive Sport Academy

In order to help combat the global physical inactivity crisis, we have launched a new online course to improve physical literacy for people with intellectual disabilities (ID) and autism.

The ground-breaking course - Physical Literacy for People with Intellectual Disabilities and Autism - is hosted on our online learning platform, the Inclusive Sport Academy.



The course will help build the sport and disability sector's knowledge base about physical literacy and inspire you to make a difference in the lives of people with ID and autism.

You can find out more about the course by logging into the Inclusive Sport Academy.

[Access Inclusive Sport Academy](#)

The new course and the learning experience within the Inclusive Sport Academy is fun, purposeful and puts you in a position to confidently apply your knowledge and skills in your field.

Physical literacy is the key to building the competence and confidence for participation in sport and physical activity, and we're proud to be leading this education to change the future for people with ID and autism.

Kind regards,

Yvonne Snell

General Manager – Participation and Programs
Special Olympics Australia

P.S: You can download a more detailed PDF of this memo by clicking [here](#).