

HOW TO BECOME A GREAT LEADER ON THE DANCE FLOOR

Becoming a great leader on the dance floor is a lofty goal with many rewards. It's also within the reach of anyone willing to pursue this elusive skill.

There are two key ingredients to becoming a great leader:

- 1) Connection
- 2) Clarity

On this issue will be concentrating on the first Key ingredient - "Connection".

CONNECTION

In order to lead someone you first need to establish a connection with that person. Without connection any attempt to lead will feel abrupt and unsettling.

In order to establish connection with another person, you first need to be connected within yourself. The best way to develop your inner connection is by consciously focusing on your core area (one inch above your waist line to one inch below).

Your core area connects your entire body and provides it with a dynamic tension that adjust to the speed and power of your movements. As you practice concentrating on your core area you will feel your inner connection increase.

Establish connection within yourself before asking a partner to dance and when you touch their hands they will feel that connection and respond to it. They won't know why, they'll just know that for some reason they dance better when they dance with you. You will be aiming to connect from your core area to theirs; the hands and arms just help transmit that intention.

A good exercise is to concentrate on your core area until you feel your arms and body connected. Put your hands in front of you (as if you are holding a tray). Now, with your feet side by side (about shoulder width apart), start transferring your weight from one leg to the other - make sure as you transfer weight that your arms and columns are connected and are part of the weight transfer.

Now try this exercise with your partner in front of you; the palms of your hands are up and your partner's are down; connect the hands at the fingertips (your arms will provide a little tension upward and when done properly she will provide a reciprocal tension downward that will maintain your fingertip connection).

Start moving from one leg to the other making sure that you are communicating the weight transfer - not merely moving your hands from side to side, but keeping your body connected and transferring your weight with your entire body columns.

As you practice the above exercise you will feel a connection with your partner as you move from one leg to the other. Since the hands are moving you might think the hands are doing the leading - try now disconnecting the core and lead only with the hands and you will notice that only her hands will follow your hands and not her entire body.

The above exercise will do wonders for your connection within yourself and with your partner.

At the beginning you will feel a bit stiff as you move with your partner from one leg to the other; this, however, is okay. Soon you will establish a solid connection that will make this action as natural as breathing.

Connection is an elusive quality; and like a pilot before take off, it's usually a good practice to have a check-list of steps to help make sure we dance connected.

- * Concentrate on your core area to develop your inner connection.
- * Establish a fingertip connection with your partner as soon as you touch their hand by providing a little lift upwards with your arms. You are aiming to connect from your core to their core.
- * Make sure you are connected with your partner as you get in dance position by maintaining the upward lift.
- * Both of you should lean slightly forward towards each other in order to maintain connection while moving.
- * Once you start dancing, you will be alternating between leading and following your partner's movement to insure you maintain a continuous connection.

Becoming a good leader is not something you learn - it's something you continually improve. Work on your connection and you will be on your way to becoming a great leader and a very popular dance partner.

Happy dancing,
Blanche & Emilio

HOW TO BECOME A GREAT LEADER ON THE DANCE FLOOR - Part Two

As we mentioned in our previous issue, there are two key ingredients to becoming a great leader:

- 1) Connection
- 2) Clarity

In this issue we will be concentrating on the second Key ingredient - "Clarity"

Let's start with the first aspect of clarity. Before you can lead, you must have

a clear vision of the direction in which you would like your partner to move, and the timing in which you would like your partner to follow.

Your best way to experience this aspect of clarity is to select a few basic steps

in one dance; learn and rehearse the direction, footwork and timing for the leader's part; then learn and rehearse the direction, footwork and timing for the follower's part.

When you know both parts of the pattern, you will have a clear vision of what you are trying to accomplish with the lead. That in turn will give your body the natural confidence of movement that will convey the same clear picture to your partner - thus allowing her to easily follow your lead.

That brings us to the second aspect of clarity - the ability to convey your "intention" to your partner in a manner that let's her dance, rather than feeling pushed or pulled from one step to the next.

"Let me hear your body talk" - words of a song, but also the key to giving your partner a clear vision of your intention.

The great news is that you are already good at "letting your body talk". Picture for instance when a friend comes to your front door and you want to invite them into your home. What do you do? Do you grab them by the back and push them in - or do you simply move out of the way to create a space for them to go by - using your arm as a means to invite them in and extend a warm welcome?

In essence what we do naturally with our body language to convey our intention to our partner is to create a space or vacuum and invite them to fill the space.

Try these exercises:

Stand with your partner and hold her right hand with your left hand. If you want her to come forward, you could pull her with your left hand (and that would be a valid way); or you could try gesturing with your body in the direction you want her to move - extending your right arm as an invitation for her to move forward.

Or, for instance, if you want to lead the lady into an arch-underarm turn from an open break (as in Rumba), you could just lift your left hand and

hope she follows; or you could create an arch with her arm and yours and then with your right hand convey an invitation for her to go under.

These simple exercises will allow you to experience leading and following as a natural thing. Once your body is aligned with your intention your movement will be more graceful and your bodies will create more natural lines and shapes.

When dancing in closed position, think of your frame as a protective area you create for your partner. Lead the lady by moving that protective area in the direction you want her to go. Your frame should be solid with tension on the outside of your arms and she should feel protected and comfortable.

Become more and more aware of leading by invitation, by creating an obvious space for your partner to move into. Your partner will enjoy always having a clear understanding of what you are asking her to do.

Now, add "Connection", the first ingredient we covered in our previous issue, and you will know exactly when to initiate each lead. By being connected with your partner you will be moving as one; you will know when she has fully completed a step and is ready to be lead into the next one. You will be giving her the opportunity to dance!

Connection and Clarity - the two key ingredients to becoming a great leader on the dance floor. Master them and each dance will become an enjoyable flow of leading and following. Your dancing will soar - and so will your popularity!

Happy dancing,

Blanche & Emilio

Next issue: How to Become a Good Follower on the Dance Floor
