

Why Beginners Quit Dancing

by Mark Van Schuyver

A popular dance instructor told me that "out of 1,000 folks who think they might enroll in a dance class, perhaps 50 will actually do it. Of these brave 50, only 30 or so will finish the beginner series. Of the 30 only 20 will return for intermediate classes. After one year, maybe 10 will still be dancing."

"Gee whiz! Only ten out of 1,000?" I asked.

"This number might be high," he replied thoughtfully.

Why such a high turnover? What makes it so hard to begin? What makes it so hard to stay with it? Let's examine the top five reasons why people give up before they really get started.



NEW-BE ANXIETY

Adults don't like to look stupid. That is the bottom line. We adults know how to walk and we don't like to crawl. When new student "John Doe" walks into that first dance lesson, he is no longer Mr. Big. At that moment, gone is the respect of family, friends, church, and co-workers. Zero is the value of his BA, MBA or Ph.D. Years of jogging, golfing, skiing, skating, and batting will not help. Suddenly big John is a kindergarten child again. He's a little kid, a "baby dancer," new-be-know-nothing. This is simply not a condition that adults like to be in.

New-be anxiety is absolutely normal and completely unavoidable. New students can increase their odds of staying with the dance by realizing that this is a price that every single person must pay if they wish to play. Knowing that you are not alone helps a lot. Ask other beginners, intermediate, advanced dancers, and your instructors to share their new-be stories with you. You are not alone John Doe!

FEAR OF REJECTION

It is human nature to seek acceptance and avoid rejection. New dancers enter a world of leaders and followers who seem to know everything while they know virtually nothing. To a New-be, the dance floor is so scary that it might as well be made of ice. Fear of rejection by experienced or even other beginner dancers is very real.

New dancers take heart. A very high percentage of experienced dancers will say yes to a beginner leader or follower if asked politely. Tell the person that you are just starting and don't worry about doing anything fancy. Followers you must ask too. In dance club environments it is perfectly acceptable for follower to ask leaders to dance.

If you are a beginner leader, give clear leads and never force your partner. Stay with basics and do not forget to smile! Remember, three basic steps done well are better than a hundred fancy moves lead badly.

If you are a beginner follower, keep cool and relaxed. Listen to the music and let the leader put you in place. If you miss a lead just laugh and keep dancing. Don't apologize or freeze up. Just relax and follow, you will be fine. Leaders and followers, always thank your partner regardless of relative skill.

BAD PLANNING

Lots of dancers quit because they fail to plan for dancing. Dance lessons take time and social dancing takes time and special planning. Babysitters, practice partners, phone calls to find out where folks are

going to meet all take time and energy. Without planning, dancing loses its priority status in our lives.

If you find yourself thinking, "I'll go out next week," you may be on your way to quitting. In the beginning, it is important to discipline yourself to attend classes and social dances. Plan for dancing. Don't lose your momentum.

FAILURE TO PRACTICE

Failure to practice is a major cause of frustration for all dancers. That which is not practiced will not be remembered. Studies have been done on this. New material should be practiced within ten minutes of learning. Then practice again within two hours of a lesson. More practice must be done within twenty-four hours to insure retention. Then, weekly practice is needed to maintain the material and advance the skill.

This schedule of practice is only a minimum amount. It is just enough to make us remember. To get better, to perfect a new skill or dance technique we need even more practice with partners and coaches. Learning is hard. Practice is essential.

STOP AND START

Years ago I taught marital arts classes. Over a seven-year period I observed many students who dropped in and out of class. With each return effort, these folks demonstrated beginner-bravery but lost learner-momentum. With each return, they dropped out sooner and returned even later. Without exception, every one of these stop and starters quit before obtaining any significant skill.

A body in motion tends to stay in motion. If you are a beginner who is serious about dancing, do not stop. If you must miss classes and social events, then dance in your house or in your hotel room. Do not stop as it greatly reduces your odds of reaching your goal of becoming a great dancer. Find a way to dance every day.

CONCLUSION

If it is true that only ten out of 1,000 who start dancing stay with it then it is a huge accomplishment to be one of those ten. If you are a beginner, and you stay with it, you will soon become a member of a special community of brave souls who did not quit. You will enter a world of folks who did not give up when the newcomer anxiety bug struck. You will join a group of people who overcame their fear of rejection and kept dancing anyway. You will see people that did not forget to plan to dance, folks who practiced hard and stayed with it every day. Students who did not stop and start. In short, you will see yourself.

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