

## **For Women Only: Following** **Followers are encouraged to suggest corrections or improvements.**

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Let me admit up front that I am male and that I cannot explain all the aspects of being a good follower. Even so, I am single, I dance often, and I typically dance with many different partners on a given evening. Thus I can tell you what I, and many other men, like in a follower. Cultural proclivities notwithstanding, it is not how "attractive" you are in the traditional male sense. "Pretty" is not nearly as important as comfort when it comes to dance partners. Men can look at you from across the room, but when dancing, we share a bit more.

**Chemicals.** Whether you are clean in mind and heart is relatively immaterial, but if you are not clean in body and attire, you could be offensive, and we will avoid you. Perfumes and cologne do not make up for cleanliness, and they might also be offensive or precipitate allergic reactions. If you must wear scents, keep them off contact surfaces, especially your hands. No one likes to go home with a "perfume sampler" on their hands and shoulder.

**Cadence.** The music and the cadence of the dance style tell us when to step, and the dance style tells us how to step, but we decide where to step. If you conform to the cadence, even disregard of style will likely be of little consequence. If you do not conform to the cadence, you will likely never be in sync with your partner. Thus, you need to learn the popular cadences, and there is one that supersedes all others, SQQ. If you can maintain a SQQ cadence throughout a medium tempo, 4/4 song, you are *almost ready* for any dance venue where the men know how to dance. Furthermore, that competence will make learning other cadences easy and efficient. Learn SQQ, dance with good leaders, and you will progress.

**Dance Frame.** This is the other component of *almost ready*. No matter how competent you are with cadence and style, if you cannot connect with your partner, you will not be a desirable dance partner. The Dance Frame is the connection that enables partners to dance together.

**Weight distribution.** Carry your own weight; if you and your partner were to step back from each, your respective frames should remain in place. Hold up your own arms; do not depend on your partner to carry your arm weight.

**Stay firm but flexible.** Your frame should be neither cast iron nor gelatin; spring steel is a good compromise, and err on the side of rigidity until you "get the feel" of a flexible connection.

**Handhold.** Palm to palm, draping your fingers over his, forming a loose, three-sided socket for his fingers; extend your thumb, resting it gently against the base of his thumb. Do not grip with either fingers or thumb; you have considerable mechanical advantage in gripping the base of his thumb, and you can easily create discomfort. Gripping also limits flexibility in movement to accommodate turns and directional variations. (Excessive gripping will keep you from being asked to dance. If your partner grips, politely tell him you don't like it.)

**Left hand.** Ergonomics and style will influence the position of the left hand; whether on his upper arm, deltoid or against the back of his shoulder, rest your hand gently rather than "hanging on desperately."

**Plane Geometry.** Keep the torso planes and the plane of the hands/elbows parallel when in closed position, and keep the hands/elbow plane midway between the torso planes.

**Stay in the curl.** Your left shoulder should exert gentle pressure on the man's right hand, and he depends

on you to establish and maintain that pressure. Too much, and the man is forced to work too hard, and he might tire of dancing with you. Too little, and he loses orientation. Keep that pressure gentle and constant, and you will become a coveted dance partner. With experience, and with the man's right hand at the center of your back, responsiveness to hand pressure can effect a precise, subtle lead/follow connection.

Stand up straight. Whether or not you wish to effect the sometimes exaggerated form of formal dancers, avoid leaning forward. Back a bit at the top can be good, straight to the top is acceptable, leaning into your partner is not acceptable for most ballroom dance styles.

Shift left. By standing slightly to the left of center, looking over each other's right shoulder, you allow your feet to pass each other easily.

Open Frame. The quality of connection in open position is as important as in closed. Keep your elbow at or slightly in front of the rib cage, and never fully extend your arm. Your partner's fingers form a pivot, and the curl of your right hand forms the socket. In relation to closed frame, his hand position changes more than yours. He lowers his hand and extends his fingers inward rather than outward; you continue to drape your fingers over his. Gripping destroys the socket/pivot connection and precludes most variations.

Turning frame. For underarm turns, keep the upper arm in line with the shoulders and parallel to the floor; extend the lower arm upward with the hand forming a socket for the leader's pivot fingers. If you grip his fingers during a turn, you could lose that partner permanently.

Stay aware of position. After any variation that separates you from your partner, the sooner you get back in position, the sooner you can continue the dance. Whether in closed or open position, take every reasonable opportunity to get in front of your partner. Positioning yourself in front will help him stay oriented and comfortable, and likely result in more variety for both of you.

Stay close. Unless otherwise led, stay in place rather than drifting away from your partner when turning. With swing dances, use a rock step rather than a back break that takes you away from your partner. Don't make your partner work too hard at keeping up with you, especially during turns.

Avoiding collisions. Lead when necessary. With a proper connection with your partner, you will be trusted when you take the responsibility to lead him away from a collision, and by being responsive to his lead, he will be more confident in leading you near other dancers and merging into a line of dance. If you find yourself bumping into other dancers, don't blame your leader unless you are sure that you were exactly where he expected you to be when you collided. I admit to having sometimes been at fault when bumping others, but I have had many more collisions because of the unpredictability of other dancers or my dance partner. Good dancers can dance in very close proximity without collision; when the other dancers, or a dance partner, are unpredictable, it is more difficult to avoid collision, even when the dance floor is not crowded.

Line of dance. In progressive dances, assume that you will be moving along the line of dance, and adjust your role accordingly. If necessary, take responsibility to suggest moving along the line of dance or taking your non-progressive dance to the center of the floor rather than blocking traffic in the outer lane.

Shut up and dance. If he wants to talk, and you aren't yet comfortable with conversation while dancing, be quiet, ignore him, and concentrate on following. If necessary, tell him you have difficulty talking while dancing. Don't apologize constantly. Self-assess. If you miss a particular lead with a particular partner, perhaps it is him rather than you. If you miss a comparable lead with other partners, then it might be time to take a lesson, or ask for assistance from a friendly dance partners.

In summary, keep it clean, keep it quiet, connect gently and dependably, stay aware of your partner, be responsive to directional pressure and enjoy the music and dance.