

Ballroom Dancing

Ballroom Dancing has many elements found in High Reliability Organizations (HRO) but on the scale of two individuals in the immediacy of a performance. Without trivializing live-or-die situations, ballroom dancing, as many activities such as rock climbing, team sports, and mountaineering, uses the same methods as HROs which underscores the part the human mind has in reliability. Isolated from the danger and melodrama of high-stakes activities, ballroom dancing provides a heuristic and metaphor for descriptions and discussions of highly reliable behaviors.

Lead and Follow

The convention for ballroom dancing is to have a male leader and a female follower. We will use lead and follow for the roles with the male pronoun used for the Leader and the female pronoun used for the Follower. The author will present in the order of Connection, Follow, Lead, and then Etiquette.

The Follower is the object of the dance while the Leader brings attention in the best light to the Follower and allows the Follower to perform. The Leader leads by guiding the Follower without pulling or pushing. In effect, the lead is a suggestion the Follower takes. If the Follower consistently does not take the lead there is something fundamentally wrong with the interaction.

Connection and Communication

Dancers communicate to each other through the connection they make and maintain throughout their dance. This connection, called the frame, occurs at different points and provides communication during movements on the dance floor. Physical connection is through the arms and hands with motion from the legs transmitted through the body core to the arms and then the dance partner. Visual connection is eye-to-eye contact, body observation, and the direction the dance partner's face. Aural connection is through shared experience of the music which drives the dance.

Weak connections interfere with communication during the dance moves because the body motion does not transmit through the arms to the dance partner. Hands should be interlocked in a manner that allows for quick release and freedom of motion when remaining in contact. The Leader should not hold the Follower's hand tightly as this reflects nervousness in the lead position. Weak connections also occur when the dancers do not have control over their movements, rather they move quite freely with large steps and hand motions.

Communication occurs from muscle tension between Follower and Leader. This tension creates momentum that enhances the next dance step and continues the dance movement. Movement and momentum allow the dance pair to recover from or carry on through an error. Errors never occur from one dance partner's action as each action derives from the movement and momentum

of the dance pair together. If miscommunication occurs, the dance partner should communicate the correction discreetly while dancing. Bringing attention to the mistakes of one's partner is bad form.

The dance progresses through momentum which makes some steps follow others in a logical order while other steps cannot possibly follow. Contributing to use of momentum is judgment by the Follower whether to accept a lead and the ability of both Leader and Follower to control their bodies and their momentum. Control allows larger, more active and full motions, steps, and styling.

Follow

The Follower performs within a frame created by the Leader. To do this the Follower must keep herself available and ready for the next the signal. The Follower moves into the dance step selected by the Leader which makes room for another step and keeps momentum for the Leader to lead into another step. In some dances the Follower moves slightly behind the Leader while at other times she moves in concert with him. The Follower chooses to follow and may not, or should not, follow into a step she cannot perform or follow a bad lead (for example, late or early timing of the lead or the wrong step). The Follower stays connected to the Leader during the various dance moves. Letting go of the Leader loses the communication path of the frame while holding too tightly to the Leader makes his job more difficult. Anticipation of the next dance step marks a smooth dance couple but predicting the next move or how the Leader will move next is called "back leading" and will interfere with the freedom of the dance floor. This requires concentration on the part of the Follower while, at the same time, she is performing her moves and flourishes.

Lead

The Leader initiates the Follower's movements and is in charge their action on the dance floor. The purpose of the lead is to show off the performance of the Follower. To do this, the Leader must hold the Follower securely yet allowing the Follower freedom of movement and performance. Leading occurs through nonverbal communication using the eyes, face, hands, and body. The Leader must anticipate the next moves and give time for the Follower to respond. The lead should occur in a manner that the Follower must follow without the use of force, push or pull.

Dance Floor Etiquette

Etiquette is the unwritten adaptable rules of social behavior with some rules specific to national cultures, ethnic groups, work cultures, and worksites. Ballroom dancing uses etiquette to guide behaviors between dance partners that may not know each other and for crowded dance floors with the inevitable problems when people move about in confined spaces independently while in parallel activities. The dancers should be aware of their surroundings which include the

direction of dance, other dancers, and the space they need for a dance move or to change direction. A crowded dance floor may require smaller steps to give other dancers the freedom they need for their dance. One must have respect for others and apologize or excuse themselves even if it was not their fault. Dancers must take responsibility for all actions and know the correct placement for each dance. This will allow others to enjoy their dance.

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**The following is from Tavier Morales
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Processes: Amalgamations

A dance move has several elements which involve Steps, Body, Arm movements, and the Head. The dance step starts from the top down moving from the shoulders through the core, hips, thighs, and to the balls or soles of the feet. These elements are combined into footwork and patterns which allow for combinations to develop flow and momentum.

The dancer learns this through individual foot, body, and arm movement. When combined, the dancer has learned individual dance moves but must then develop into a dance couple. The difficulty of working as a couple rests in the complexity of movement while holding another person which is not a natural action. After this is accomplished, dance groupings form.

Each dancer will combine, or amalgamate, these steps into one form. Working memory keeps in store five to seven groupings of data. As the dancer combines steps into a dance form such as rumba, cha cha, or waltz, the dancer can advance to more intricate or complex steps.

Standardized Steps Build into Dance

The student learns the box step. For the Leader, the left foot steps forward followed by the right foot up and to the side about slightly wider than the shoulders. Then the left foot closes next to the right foot. You have finished one step. The right foot steps back and the left foot moves back and to the right, slightly wider than the shoulders. The right foot moves to the side and comes together. Repeat this and you make a box over and over. The Follower moves in the opposite starting with the right foot back.

I like teaching the basic steps first because you can then change the motion to give different dances. If you use hip action you are dancing the Rumba, a Latin or rhythm dance. If you walk smoothly keeping your head level you are dancing the Foxtrot, a

smooth dance. If you move with a rise and fall you are dancing the Waltz, another smooth dance but to a 1:3 time. (The Foxtrot and Rumba have a time of 1:4.) The same box gives you variations and you can dance different dances.

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Lead and Follow

Lead

You can't expect to lead a partner until you know what you are doing yourself. Lead is a technique all in its own. It doesn't mean to push, pull, shove, or drag the Follower across the floor. It does mean to indicate which direction the Leader wants the Follower to go. He does this by placing his weight over his foot which requires knowing the steps for that dance. Knowing the steps lets the Leader concentrate on Leading. I teach all Leaders to lead well enough to dance with any type or level of partner. After all, you may dance with the Follower who does not know the dance step. I want her to say how much she enjoyed dancing in my student's arms. As a Leader you must be aware of the next five steps you are going to dance. Sometimes people might get onto your way and you must then decide if you are going to change your patterns or hold in place.

Follow

If you can't follow you can't dance. Following is a technique within itself. It is the sensitivity of staying with the Leader's momentum as well as maintaining rhythm in whatever direction he has chosen. If the Follower rests too heavy in the Leader's arms or flounders about not knowing what to do it signals to the Leader a lack of interest in dancing or lack of desire to follow the lead. The Follower is expected to follow a Leader, any Leader and not only a good Leader. (As we all know, there are not enough good Leaders.) She must allow the leader to take a step first before she can move. After the leader has taken his step she must follow right behind his step. I teach all my Followers not just the patterns of dance but also the elements of the dance step and the directions they will receive from all types of Leaders. In this way, the Follower can dance the lead of any level of Leader and enjoy the freedom of dancing.

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