



*We Help You Focus Clearly,
Organize Effectively,
And Act With Courage*

August 1996 - Volume 5, Issue 4

Teaching Leaders How to Lead

1. **Demonstrate and provide a visual image.** We model an effective lead before teaching it, so students know what they are striving to create.
2. **Teach the steps and how to perform them.** Next comes the detailed and difficult work of learning new steps, body positions, and patterns. It is hard work for the student, and requires patience, repetition, lots of support, and timely, corrective feedback from coaches.
3. **Coach from the follower's perspective.** Often we will take the follower's role in a practice dance. By pointing out what the follower needs in order to follow, we help the leader problem-solve.
4. **Switch roles to make a point.** At times, one of us will take the lead and the leader will assume the follower's role. We do this to demonstrate the impact of various moves on the follower, and to help the leader look at his/her part in a pattern.
5. **Maintain integrity.** By not compromising our standards and holding dancers accountable for the principles and conduct of the dance, we can help them become competitors and even champions.

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Leading and Following

by Cathy Perme

Have you ever noticed how well some couples look when they dance? It's almost as if they move as one unit, so fluid and dynamic that it is hard to tell who is leading and who is following. This is teamwork in ballroom dance, made harder by the fact that no other team sport so rigidly defines the roles of leaders and followers.

What I have learned through ballroom dance in the past year is what it really *means* to lead and follow. Most of the time we assume that "following" is passive and second best. We put the onus on the leader to produce successful movement. This is wrong, according to Cindy Nehrbass, Artistic Director at *On Your Toes School of Dance*. **The leader's job is to decide the alignment, patterns, and choreography, and to maintain the dance frame. The follower is responsible for the success of the production of movement.** Effective teamwork means that...

- **Followers have a *right* to stay balanced and to know what is expected of them.** Balance does not mean standing still. It does mean moving confidently on my feet. I cannot produce successful movement if I am off balance. If I am pushed or pulled across the dance floor, I may lose my balance. The leader must provide clear, accurate direction with a light touch, not with force.
- **Leaders have a responsibility to help their followers stay balanced.** Each follower has a different set of abilities and body type. The leader needs to be concerned with what will assist each follower to stay balanced and to move successfully. That means accepting feedback, problem solving, and adapting.
- **Leaders need *skilled* followers to produce movement.** The follower must learn a different set of steps and be able to perform them independently, even though it is only with the partner that the steps make sense. If I do not know my part or I cannot hold my own dance frame, the leader will have difficulty leading, and I will have difficulty performing.
- **Followers have a responsibility to pay attention to the lead.** A problem I have as a dancer is that I anticipate a lead because I get used to routines. As a result I make assumptions and may do something other than what the leader intended. A follower needs to pay attention to *each* lead.

Although it is the "organizational dance" that I am concerned with most of the time, these lessons hit home for me. Learning how to follow taught me to be a better leader, and hopefully, a better coach! □

This newsletter was made possible through instruction and interviews with Cindy and Jeff Nehrbass. They are award-winning ballroom dancers who own and manage On Your Toes School of Dance in Minneapolis, MN. Both are excellent teachers available for personal and group instruction at (612) 928-7803.