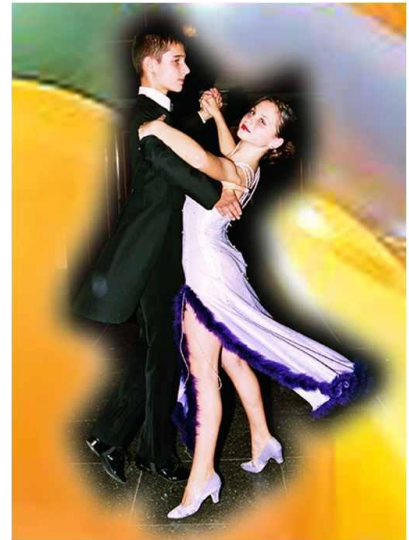


Dance In Response To Your Partner

by Harold & Meredith Sears



We recently read that good communication is made up of —

- 7% words,
- 38% voice quality, and
- 55% body language.

If actions speak more loudly than words in conversation, think how still more important those actions are when you dance. It might *seem* that we are dancing to the cues, but we really need to be dancing to our partner.

Ladies, you carry the most obvious part of this burden, given traditional lead and follow. Don't hear the cue and then dance the figure. Don't anticipate the lead. If you do, *you* are leading,, and you will feel a tussle, like four hands on a steering wheel.

Responding to your partner is both visual and tactile. Your eyes may be up and left, but you can learn to keep your partner in your peripheral vision and to pay attention to his head and shoulder movements. Properly, these movements will be an integral part of his frame movements, and you will feel them through your toned frame, but the more sensory input, the better. You hear the cue, so you are prepared for what will happen. Then you see *and* feel the lead. Think of it as triple input. You can follow with extra confidence.

You might think that it would be useful to watch your partner's feet. There is no more direct signal of where he is going to step, and at a very simple level, it is true that if you can see him step through to a New Yorker, then you can do it too. But there are unfortunate consequences:

- First, if you wait until you *see* him step, you will be late. You have had no advance notice, and you simply won't be able to process your visual information and trigger your own muscle action until a moment or two later. Receiving the lead from his topline might seem like a secondary way to get it, but it comes earlier than the step itself. He begins to look to reverse—pay attention—this hints at his intention. Then his left arm begins to come in, and you can feel what is to come. Finally, he begins to step through, and you are ready. You step through with him.
- Second, if you look down at your feet, you will shift your whole upper body into your partner. You'll tip off your center, come into his space, push him out of



his proper position, and you both will be off balance and unable to move freely. It seems more common that the man hovers over the woman than the reverse, but the important message is that both dancers should try to stay up and back—not off your center the other way—but the lower torso forward and upper torso back in counterbalance—centered. Let your bodies flare out a little at the chest, shoulders, and head—like a graceful urn, a flower blooming ... You'll move more freely.

Maintain your frame, ladies. Maybe the first thing to think about here is simply supporting your own arms. Rotate your shoulders back, and lift just a little through your shoulders, back, arms, wrists, and even fingers. Don't raise your arms above your shoulders, and, men, if you are taller, lower your arms a bit to accommodate. This attention to the

arms does two important things. First, it simply gets the woman's weight off her partner. He is strong, and he could carry you through the dance, but if you free him of this burden, both of you will move more freely. Second, this effort of supporting yourself will put the tone in your upper body that will allow you to feel and respond to his movements. The often-repeated adage is, "You can't lead or follow with spaghetti arms." Just as you can't push a piece of cooked spaghetti, you can't lead a limp partner.

Imagine dancing a Waltz Box. As the man steps forward and the woman back, she should feel the pressure of his right hand release, pressure at her lower torso increase, and pressure all along her left arm and left fingertips urging her back. This generous amount of information and clear lead happens only with a toned frame. If bodies are limp, then the only thing that she feels is the man unexpectedly running her down. One difference between comfortable lead and follow and being run over is a toned frame on both dancers' parts.

In round dancing, of course we pay attention to the cues, but our dancing becomes smooth only when we pay equal attention to, when we watch, feel, and respond to our partner.

