

Lead With Lead Hands Low

by Harold & Meredith Sears

In the Latin rhythms, the man's lead is often solely through his left hand. You are not in closed position where the right arm and frame adjustments can clarify your lead. You might be in left open facing position or in a fan position, and your lead comes mainly through your toned left arm and into her toned right arm. One way to lead more comfortably is to keep those lead hands low.



Men, if the lead hands are high, then the force of your lead is being directed toward her shoulders or maybe even her head. She'll have a sense of being pushed over. Picture a child's spinning top. If you nudge the top of the top, it starts wobbling. You've pushed it off balance. If you could nudge it lower down, closer to its center of gravity, you could move it, guide it, without throwing it into a wobble.

Open Hip Twist —

One good place where the lead hands really need to be low is in the Open Hip Twist. In Rumba, we might begin in left open facing position. The man steps forward on his left foot, and the woman steps back right. He recovers right; she recovers left. On the slow count, he closes left to right with tension in the lead arms, she steps forward right toward the man, she meets the presence of his body and the tone in his arm, and she swivels sharply to the right. If those lead hands are held low, then her hips will turn. If for some reason, he has held his hand up, at chest or shoulder level, then her right shoulder would be pushed back in an awkward, toppling sort of way.



Half Basic to a Fan —

Let's assume we have done the Half Basic. On the first step of the Fan, the man is drawing the woman toward him, rather than leading her away, and again he needs to keep his left hand down. He steps back on his right foot (woman forward left). If he holds his lead hand high, this action will pull her forward at the waist or will turn her shoulders to the left prematurely. With lead hands low, she will step straight into him, upright and in a good facing position. It is on the second step that he steps forward and she steps back and turns left, for her final back step into fan position. Maintain the low handhold throughout, and she will feel the lead through her center of gravity (hips) and her whole body. Raise lead hands, and she will feel pulled over, pushed over, or uncomfortably twisted in her torso.

Alemana —

A raised lead hand does not provide a good lead, either forward or back, but it is a great lead to invite the woman to turn and dance under lead arms. Let's again put ourselves in left open facing position and have the man dance forward left, recover right, and close left to right. But this time he raises lead hands above her head. It is clear that we no longer have a lead focused on the woman's right hip, to trigger a Hip Twist, but what sort of lead do we have? If he moves his hand a little to his left, changes to a palm-to-palm hold, and if he turns his upper body a little to the left, then he is not using a pressure kind of a lead (which would create a toppling feeling for the woman). Furthermore, his step was a closing one, so he is not drawing or pulling her. Instead, he is providing a "lure" kind of lead. His hand is up there, tantalizing; his body is turned that way and so directing her attention to her right. All this is saying, "Here — go this way." She hasn't been pulled, but she has been invited to turn right and to dance through her Alemana Turn.

Hockey Stick —

In the Alemana, the man raises his lead arm early, on step three, and the woman begins upper-body rotation early, even before the Alemana Turn begins, but in a Hockey Stick, he keeps lead hands low longer. In fan position, on step one, he steps forward left and leads her to close right to left with a little pressure directed through lead arms toward her right hip. He recovers and draws her forward left, still with lead hands low. He closes left and she steps forward right. Now, the lead hands are coming up but only to create a little arching window. She is even with his shirt buttons. You might gaze at each other through that window, but she has not begun to turn. The man steps back right and allows his hand to accompany her as she steps forward again. He recovers left and *finally* raises his lead hand above her head. Now, she steps forward right and turns sharply to the left to face partner and line and center. Lead hands didn't come all the way up until step five, and that lead causes her left-face turn. We end the figure with a forward right for the man and back left for the woman to left open facing position, diagonal reverse and wall. The hands come down on step six, starting with the shoulder, then the arm, and only then the hand. If you simply lower the hand, then you will straighten the elbow instead of just lowering it, and your lead will be pushy—it will have a forward component, and again you will shove her top off its base.

