

## Round Dancing Is A Partnership

by Harold & Meredith Sears



We hope that your first reaction to our title is, *Of course* dancing is a partnership! Of course we are dancing together. This is not line dancing. But, there are three habits that get in the way of smooth, comfortable partner dancing, and, of course, there are three strategies that can counteract those habits and make our dancing more fun. They are cooperation, collaboration, and compromise -- the three C's of partner dancing.

Sometimes, we dance our steps and figures with less attention to our partner than we need to give. There are probably several reasons for this self-centeredness. In learning a new dance, we usually hear about the steps individually. We step forward. Our partner steps back. The man thinks about the man's steps, and the lady thinks about the lady's steps. We may even practice separately from our partners -- the men get up and try their part; then the ladies get up and do theirs. Of course the cues come to both partners, so each can independently dance their own figures. But an independent approach to dancing can lead to pushing and pulling, tugging and jerking. One might forge ahead, leaving the other behind. We definitely want to dance as one unit, not two. We need to **cooperate**. So, yes, learn your steps, your part, but learn your partner's part, too. If you know that in a Telemark To Semi, the lady's second step is a Heel Turn, then you can think about not stepping long or wide and so pulling her off that turn. If you don't know her steps, then you can't even think about that issue.



If you try to use lead and follow techniques, then another uncomfortable habit is leading with strength, with singleness of purpose, with determination -- and then expecting the follower to keep up, no matter what. This is a self-centered, autocratic, caveman-kind of lead and follow, and it is not fun for either partner. Of course, the follower is going to be jerked, dragged, and generally beaten up. But the leader is going to meet resistance, work hard, and feel frustrated, too. We need to **collaborate**. Ladies, as the traditional follower, you are taught early to feel your partner and to respond to his lead. But, men,

you too must feel your partner, feel if she is on balance, feel where she is in her sequence (which you know and can visualize), and then you need to adjust your movements and your subsequent lead to complement her movements. We need to work together on this. At least one teacher has bluntly said that the man needs to follow too, and that is simply and straightforwardly true. The leader guides and supports his partner, makes it easier for her to do what she needs to do, but he must respond to her movements and adjust. She is the picture; you are the frame. She is the performance; you are the stage. She is doing the work; you need to assist however you can. An old admonition is to lead what you want but dance what you get.



Typically, we try to take each step and dance each figure exactly as written and precisely on the beat. We waltz 123, and foxtrot SQQ, firmly on the beat of the music. Dance music is metronomic, but human movement and especially couple movement can't be so precise. The next music beat comes inexorably, but you might not be quite ready

or your partner isn't quite in position, and you need to wait just a moment for the next step. We need to **compromise** on this matter of time. We speak of "stretching a beat." This is spending a little longer on one step or movement than is strictly "allowed" in the music or on the cue sheet. If you need the time, use it! It's okay. It's simply true that some steps in a figure are easier or less important than others. In a waltz Hover, dance it 1 **2** 3. Stretch the 2. This is where you are rising and blending to semi-closed position. It needs the time and it deserves the time. The first and third steps are just forward -- they can be emphasized less.

In our dancing, we need to be flexible and forgiving. Dancing isn't a team sport, but it is a couple sport, and we need to work together. In every dance that you do, remember the Three C's -- cooperate, collaborate, and compromise. Your play together will feel so much better.

