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Principles of Dance.  
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## I. Women's Rules.

1. **Follow Your Hand.** In general, your hands and arm tension tell you when to go, where and with what step. Keep in mind that most turns are led. If you follow all of the led turns, you are doing well. However, conventions are patterns that are learned, practiced and memorized, and not necessarily led.
2. **Drag Your Arm.** In general we always want to be in touch contact. If it is logical for you to drag your arm across my body, then anticipate where your magnetic hand should catch on my body, to create a different pose or dance position. If we are cross-armed, doing an arch, and I lead you around back to wrap around my neck, I generally expect that we will catch around my neck and pose. Nothing but common sense tells you to catch on my neck. My neck does not grow little hands and stop your hand. Because your hands are magnetic, they should naturally attach to my body, unless I pull them off.
3. My Hands Are **Magnetic.** Err on the side of holding onto my hands. My hands are magnetic. If your hands touch my hands, they want to stick. Of course, this is in part due to my magnetic personality (and attractive ego). If I want you to let go of my hand, I will pull it away. If I don't pull it away, hold on lightly.
4. **Rule of Continuation.** If you start in a direction, keep going in that direction until stopped. Find the flow. Go with the flow. Part of this deals with the always assume that you are doing right rule. If I start you spinning, keep spinning until I stop you. Only foolishness would tell you, he spun me once, and since he is a dork, he probably missed the catch.
5. **Open Hand Rule.** Look for my open hand; grab my open hand. Over a decade ago, a smart dancer from Fort Collins, named Barbara, said that she always looked for both of my hands. If I had my hand out in front of her, then she would walk up and grab it. If I had my hand behind her, she would walk back and grab it. If I had my hand behind my back, she would reach back with her free hand and grab it. This simple rule makes a number of complicated turns, very easy. You really don't need to know how to do a horseshoe switch or the rocking horse. You just look for my left and right hands and I can lead you through it.

6. **Look for the Catch.** If I make you let go of my right hand, then we both have one free hand. As long as we have one hand still connected, your free hand should be looking for a reconnection. Look for the open hand. Start anticipating how you will reconnect with my free hand.

7. **Length of Stride.** Take normal size walking steps. Do not take tiny steps, unless you are led into that. Do not take giant sized steps, unless you are led into that.

8. **Grace.** Grace is often thought of flowing motions and smoothness. Understand that there are no leads, which I want you to respond with a jerk, a sudden step or any rapid movement. If I tug on your arm to speed up, take one normal step, one half-way faster step and then one fast step. If you are on the wrong foot, take one step, think about how you are going to correct and don't panic. In a sense, a smooth double twirl involves a chosen axis of rotation and no wasted motion. Do not get out round and then you do not have to take a corrective step to return.

**Smooth.** Be smooth. Stay balanced. Glide rather than run.

**Extraneous Movements.** Do not twist, shake, look away or move any part of your body that is not in line with the flow of dance and your core being. One dance teacher defined grace as economy of motion. Do not waggle your feet, or make unnecessary arm movements. I like this definition, and I will think about it.

9. **Don't Change Steps.** If you are on the wrong foot, I will compensate. I may have changed steps intentionally to get into the sweetheart position.

10. **HiJack.** In West Coast Swing, women are supposed to lead some turns. You are not supposed to follow through an entire song. Take the initiative and lead your own turn two or three times per song.

11. **Double and Triple Spin Rule.** Particularly on a whip, double and triple spins are not really led. After I whip you around once, think about spinning twice or three. Just hold your hand up and keep twirling. A smooth, balanced double turn looks great.

12. Things to Avoid. **Spaghetti Arms.** I had a couple down in Denver who took three levels of my Kunsmiller Adult Ed country dance classes. He was Italian and when his schoolteacher wife had too little arm tension, he said that she had spaghetti arms. They were too limp meaning that the spaghetti was overcooked. My understanding is that spaghetti needs to be *al dente*, meaning that it can be strained through the teeth. It must be stiff enough to stick on the wall when thrown to see if it is ready.

By contrast, avoid too much arm tension. It makes for a slow lead. Too much arm tension makes you stiff in your upper body. In the martial arts sense your chi is too high, it is off balance. It should be centered around your waist where your balance and spirit

are located.

## II. Men's Rules.

1. **Don't Try to Change your Partner on the Dance Floor.** You cannot make your partner dance the right steps. If they choose to two-step, bounce or triple their way through everything, there is no easy way to get them to stop.
2. **Rule of Immutability.** Men and even dance teachers cannot change Rule #1. Doing so requires active cooperation by the woman. A dance class setting is more appropriate.
3. **Criticism** is not teaching or feedback. Several women tell me that so and so told them that they did not know what they were doing, which I believe leads to the unnecessary rule not to teach on the dance floor. Sometimes I count out steps. Sometimes if they seem interested, I tell them the basic foot patterns. I explain that each walk-walk lead series begins with the women's right foot. The first walk is with your right foot and the first triple starts with your right foot. Often I tell them, "Start with your other Right Foot." Believe it or not, I think that my feedback is constructive teaching, not destructive criticism.
4. **Leadership and Responsibility.** There are two fundamental types of turns. Ones that are led well, and are accordingly easy to follow, and others that are not. If I cannot get the woman to do my bidding, then I must not have led it right. Failed turns are my responsibility. I do not shift the blame and act like my partner screwed up. This is also a function of enlightened leadership, maturity and responsibility. Lead by example. Patience and repetition are more powerful than criticism.

## III. Couples Rules.

1. **Still Standing Rule.** It will take you around fifty practices to make it look smooth. While you are first learning a turn, if you complete the turn and both of you are still standing, you should consider that turn to be a success and positively reinforce your partner.

I advocate the "still-standing rule;" I told students that, if they were "still standing" at the end of a turn they learned in class, they should congratulate and positively reinforce each other and continue joyously practicing. It might take fifty times, doing the same turn over and over again, before they look smooth. However, students should avoid arguing with each other after each new turn. In reality, their new turn was progressing at a reasonable pace, if only they could realize that they were headed toward the promised land instead of, as Dale used to say, just about to "trash the turn." Students and learners need to take into account the learning curve. At first almost every new turn seems awkward, different and they feel clumsy. Only with repeated practice will any complex turn feel natural, smooth and groovy.

2. **The Look.** Look to the center on your posing moves. Stare at your partner and give them “the Look!” One dance teacher says that the “Look means that you are in love, in lust or in like.” I think that “in like” is too wimpy, instead go for the whole enchilada. If couples need to utilize their acting skills, so be it.

3. **Balance.** Keep your feet under your shoulders. You might lean back slightly to establish proper arm tension. You might settle back into your heels to establish leverage. You might settle forward into your toes to establish compression. In general, you do not want to lean so far forward or back that you would lose your balance if you let go.

4. **Natural Opposites.** In most dance positions, we use our natural opposite foot. Men steps with his left foot and woman steps first with her right foot. Doing the reverse feels awkward and wrong, men step with his left foot and woman step with her left foot. Women need to stretch out their conscious feelings. Use your arms to feel which foot he is on, what count he is on and what step he is doing. Use the force, stretch out your conscious feelings.

5. **Conventions.** Conventions are turns that are not led. They work because you have practiced these turns in the past, And you signal that you are going to do them by touch, visual or audio clues. The half turn on the window is a good example.

6. **Exchanges and Switches.** A switch changes sides, from the right side to the left side. An exchange changes sex; we go from the man's basket to the women's basket.

7. **Proper Focus.** Focus on what you are doing right, not what you are doing wrong. I keep telling women that this is one of the rules in my books. In general, you want to build from the positive, instead of being hard on yourself and scolding yourself. Positive reinforcement is more powerful than its counterpart.

A huge part of looking good on the dance floor are attitude and confidence. Bill says that he wants “definite movement.” Commit yourself to the step, strut confidently. Kevin says, “Don’t be on a mission,” whereas I say, on many turns, you want to be on a mission. You should be on a mission to get to the end of the slot.

Confidence. Do not hesitate or doubt yourself. Travel down the floor with each walk. You own the slot.

8. **Mistakes.** Mistakes are a part of life. Focus on what you are doing right; not what you are doing wrong. Rely on your natural ability, common sense and enjoyment of life to fill in the rest of the blanks.

One of the best qualities is that when you make a mistake you laugh about it. You don't blow it off, because you need to be able to focus to become a good dancer. However,

you don't want to become gun shy. You need to step confidently rather than worrying about trying to avoid mistakes.

The late Jim Allharsh said that everyone gets better when they dance. They get better at different rates and they may not meet your expectations, but they all get better.

**9. Always Assume that You Are Doing Right Rule.** My general rule is always assume that you are doing right. There are deep philosophical reasons for this. Focus on what you are doing right, not what you are doing wrong. I keep telling women that this is one of the rules in my books. In general, you want to build from the positive, instead of being hard on yourself and scolding yourself. Positive reinforcement is more powerful than its counterpart.

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If I make a mistake, or you make a mistake, the last thing that we would want, is for either one of us to make that long face, start arguing and stop dancing. Right or wrong, we should both keep smiling. We should both act like we intended to do that and then start compensating. Beside, you look better when you dance, if you confidently strut. Act like you know what you are doing. If you are still standing, after a turn, act like that was precisely what you intended to do. You should have a look on your face, which says to the world that you amazed yourself as to how well you did it.

The following permutation might help to explain.

#	Attitude Assumption	Footwork
1	You are doing right	You are doing right = nirvana
2	You are doing right	You have the right basic idea but you have style differences, which make it feel a little awkward at first. You need practice to iron out the bugs. Both of you approaching these bugs, with a confident attitude, will make it more likely that you both

		will succeed.
3	You are doing right	You have a good basic approach but you need to practice to add polish.
4	You are doing right	Your feet are wrong = no harm done You are in a receptive learning state to learn the right way.
5	You think you are doing wrong	You have minor style differences
6	You assume that you are doing wrong	You are in need of polish
7	You assume that you are doing wrong	You need practice to smooth it out
8	You assume that you are doing wrong	You are doing wrong = Bad attitude. This negative attitude does not help either one of you, or your dance teacher, diagnose what is wrong and prescribe how to fix it.

Comments: #2 and #3 combine the right attitude with the right step. This is the right way. This is a receptive learning state. It promotes self-esteem and confidence. This helps give you the confidence to go out and practice. We go out to practice and get better (polish). We do not practice to get good.

At worst #4 does no harm.

#5, #6, and #7 are unhappy endings. They are on the Road to Ruin. They foster incongruity in the university. Entropy and chaos are the end results. Couples convince themselves that they don't know what they are doing. They muse that they have no business on the dance floor. They begin to question my brilliance as a dance teacher (alas!).

At best #8 does no good.

Always assuming that you are doing right may be a problem in nondance settings because it might foster closed mindedness and conceit. However, always assuming that you are doing right works well in dance classes. Trust me, I'm an Attorney.

**10. Steal Moves.** Watch other dancers. Steal their moves. Copy their moves. Watch contests and steal their moves.