

LEADING AND FOLLOWING

NOTE: The following article by Millard & June McKinney is reprinted from the December 1988 issue of APART POINT Magazine with the permission of Mike & JoAnne Schmidt, editors. We hope it will benefit the DRDC members who do not have the special training undertaken by the teachers, and we ask our teachers to pass it on to their dancers. The article reads:

Perhaps the most difficult "Science" in the "Art" of dancing is to be a "good leader", and for the woman to be a "good follower." Sometimes the leading does revert to the female gender, and then the man has to follow.

The single most important requirement for the "leader" is to be confident in the purpose of leading. If you can't make up YOUR mind how to lead, how can you expect your partner to FOLLOW? Uncertainty is the most common cause for the female to assume the "leading role." Face it! If the woman doesn't get a good strong lead, she will develop a "take over" attitude.

A man just cannot lead unless he knows what to do. The first consideration in leading is to "know the dance." Following is the woman's responsibility. Some say the woman learns the figures more quickly than the man. Perhaps so, but they MUST NOT usurp the lead! The woman has the obligation to maintain the contact, or resistance to feel the lead signals from her partner. There is no leading through a "limp" arm.

Posture and position are necessary for good leading results. If the woman "drapes" herself all over the man, he will need a "handle" or a "halter" to get his lead signals to work.

The three major tools in leading are arm position and contact, body position and contact, and "eye attention." As long as the man has at least one of these tools he should be an effective leader. When performing a "solo waltz roll" all leading tools are lost, and when the dancers are in a BACK TO BACK condition, it's strictly "automatic pilot" for two beats.

Leading also involves "traffic control." In round dancing we are all doing the same steps at the same time, BUT, some people use smaller steps, and some people tend to 'under turn', so we do experience traffic problems. In this area the woman can be of great help if she can communicate an approaching problem so the man can make the lead to avoid a bumping situation. In ballroom dancing the problem is most severe and requires constant attention.

For the most part, the man will find himself facing line of dance and can observe the traffic problems. Good leading to the outside of the circle will create space in front of his partner, while leading to the inside will shorten the space and offer a fine position to "overtake" the slower couple.

Leading does not have to be "brutal" to work. Subtle pressures, and arm moves can create the signals without erratic, or brash moves. In all cases, twirls, swing, lariats, etc., if the arm is raised, the lady will go under. If the arm is too low she can't make the proper move. Swing dancing is a very fine point of the arm position being a "lead" as to the underarm or throwaway action.

Be receptive to criticism. Try dancing with another partner and ask for evaluation on your "lead." Your partner may be unable to locate the faults. The woman can also try dancing with another partner to ask for an evaluation of her ability to "follow." Respect whatever comments that are made, and try to improve your leading or following techniques. Discuss the problems with your instructors.

Dance Is Everything!

