

Don't Teach on the Dance Floor

by Jeanne DeGeyter

Various comments have been made regarding the “sharing” of dance advice in class and on the dance floor. Social dance etiquette can be breached even by the best intentions. Whether you are the ask-ee or the ask-or on the social dance floor, leave your advice off-stage. And as a student, never correct other students in the rotation.

Particularly on the social floor, it is not acceptable to offer your opinion or “show” someone how to “do it right” while on the floor. This is social dancing, not practice, not lessons. If, and only if, your partner asks you for help or an opinion, walk to an area off the floor. Although, not as offensive, asking for help while on the social floor may also not be a good idea. This is social dancing, not lessons.

In the classroom, some students may consider themselves a “helper,” and provide advice to the newer dancers. However, talking while the instructor is trying to teach creates a disturbance for those around you who are trying to listen, and your words of wisdom might not be the correct ones. Beginner students DO often ask the more experienced dancers for their input. Here are a few suggestions when asked for your opinion or help:

1. Explain what you are “feeling” during the move or “what you need” in order to improve the move or connection for yourself. Avoid the word “you.” For example, a follower might say, “I feel like I turned a little late.” Or, “I need a bit of an earlier lead to get through that turn.”
2. Go with the new dancer (together) to the teacher and explain the difficulty. Help the teacher get the new student through the explanation. Such as, “We are having problems with her footwork in the spin. Can you watch us and see what we need to do?”
3. In a small class, openly ask for help, since others might also be experiencing the same problem.
4. Limit your suggestion to one piece of information. One thought. ONE sentence, not an editorial.
5. Sometimes, just say, “I’m not really sure.”
6. Above all, FIRST assume that you could do something to improve the move yourself, before you offer advice.

Most of us started dancing for the social interaction. Dancing can earn you many friends, or it can isolate you from the very people you would like to know. Enjoy your time in class and on the social floor and let others enjoy their time as well. Remember there are many people out there who are not obsessed about dance (unlike some of us who compete). They just like to spend a few hours every now and then moving to music, having fun, and socializing. They don't care about correct steps or proper technique or the slot or whatever. Do what you can, and enjoy what you do, and put “fun” first.