



LET THEM LEARN!

WHY CONSTANTLY “HELPING” A DANCER DOESN'T HELP

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When a new or struggling dancer is in your square, it is natural to want to help. You may see them miss a call, hesitate, or look confused and think, “They need me to help them through this.” Also consider that the dancer may actually be doing just fine. What you interpret as confusion may simply be focused concentration as they listen to the caller and work through the dance on their own.

Before stepping in, remember an important principle:

Helping someone complete a dance is not the same as helping them learn to dance.

The assumption that they need you

We sometimes make assumptions that sound reasonable:

- “They obviously don't know what to do.”
- “They'll never get it unless I show them.”
- “I'm just giving them a little reminder.”
- “I'm helping them keep up with the square.”
- “If I don't guide them, they'll feel lost.”
- “They seem to need me.”
- “I'm an experienced dancer, so I know what they should be doing.”

The problem is that these assumptions can lead us to take over their learning process.

A dancer who is confused may need more opportunity to listen, watch, try, make mistakes, and figure things out—not another person constantly telling them what to do.

Guidance can become a crutch

Learning to dance requires the dancer to develop their own ability to hear the caller, recognize patterns, make decisions, move their body appropriately, and recover when they make a mistake.

If another dancer continually provides the answer, the learner doesn't have to do as much of that work.

Research on motor learning has found that excessive physical guidance can improve performance in the moment while actually reducing learning efficiency. Constant external feedback can also cause some learners to rely on the guidance rather than developing their own ability to recognize and correct their movements.

In other words:

**They may look like they are doing better while you are helping them—
but that doesn't necessarily mean they are learning better.**

It isn't just verbal instruction

“Teaching” doesn't have to mean talking.

Pointing, pulling, pushing, steering, turning someone in the right direction, physically moving them into position, grabbing their hand to make them move, or repeatedly signaling what they should do are all forms of instruction.



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Even when you never say a word, the message can become:

“Don't figure it out yourself. I'll tell you what to do.”

Or worse: “You obviously aren't smart enough to figure it out on your own.”

That can interfere with the very skills the dancer needs to develop.

Mistakes are part of learning

Every dancer needs the opportunity to make mistakes. New and struggling dancers will make lots of them. Even an experienced and good dancer makes mistakes. Learning to recover from a mistake is an essential part of becoming a confident dancer.

Dancers need to discover:

- “Oh! I was supposed to go there.”
- “Now I understand what the caller meant.”
- “I missed that one, but I caught the next one.”

Those moments are learning.

If someone immediately pulls them into the correct position every time they hesitate, the dancer may successfully get through the tip—but they have lost an opportunity to solve the problem themselves and thus move forward to expertise.

Imagine trying to listen to the caller while someone beside you is simultaneously talking, pointing, pulling, pushing, turning you, or signaling what you should do.

Instead of concentrating on the music, the caller, the people in the square, and the fun of dancing, you are concentrating on the person who is trying to help you.

That can be distracting, embarrassing, and exhausting.

A new dancer may even begin to think: “I must be really bad at this.”

When what we want them to think is: “I'm learning this—and I'm getting better.”

The best help may be giving them room

Being supportive doesn't mean doing the dancing for someone.

During the tip, let the caller teach. Give the dancer time to listen, watch, experiment, make mistakes, and find their way.

Smile. Encourage them. Dance with them. Don't make them feel abandoned—but don't take control of their learning either.

If they have a question after the tip, that's the time to help.

A useful rule is:

Don't solve a problem for a dancer that they are capable of learning to solve themselves.

Our goal isn't to get a new dancer through one tip without making a mistake.

Our goal is to help them become a dancer who eventually doesn't need us.

And that's one of the greatest gifts an experienced dancer can give a beginner: the confidence and opportunity to learn to dance for themselves.

And the result? A new club member that will keep coming back.