**“Say that again” - Hearing**

When I enter a studio or event, my senses immediately pick up the music. I have always felt dancing comes from the beat of the music stirring the heart and communicating through the body in motion. Listening is an important discipline. Each instructor has their own personality and thought process. They know where they’ve been and are trying to teach you where to go. The instructor fashions the lesson to include your level and style of learning. Remember to “Train the brain to listen and retain.”

**Watch the Mirrors - Seeing**

Let’s deal with reality. Are you observing dance patterns or technique demonstrated out, or are you distracted by the pretty girl or handsome guy on the other side of the ballroom? Lessons are costly; let’s consider some guidelines to keep our interest headed in the right direction. I have found three points of interest when I watch dance in action, 1) feet to the floor, 2) foot alignment to body movement, and 3) the foot interaction between partners. Remember my notes come to you as an amateur. I have had 20+ years of dance experience, but I am not a certified instructor. Please take my comments as suggestions. Here we go . . .

1. Keeping my feet in touch with the floor is something I personally need to backtrack on. If you are not maintaining contact with the floor your balance suffers and so does your partner.
2. Knowing the direction your feet are supposed to go is primary to ballroom dancing. You may notice sometimes your feet go one way and your body or your head go another. As a professional couple perform, watch long enough to see their differing foot/body movements (including arms and head styling) through various patterns.
3. Then comes the all-important element of coordinating with your partner. What you see as a complete picture is hopefully a couple dancing in unison. If you watch closely, you will notice their movement or their feet are sometimes parallel or matching but more often they are blended, not the same but complimenting one another.

I encourage students to ask questions if you don’t understand what you are seeing. Remember, those mirrors in the studio are to promote our visual learning! The instructors use them; students would likewise benefit.

**Where is your Focus - Reading?**

When was the last time you read or studied a book or instructional syllabus on dancing? In our era of *INSTANT* everything, we are lured into the “right now” form of information intake. Have you become gullible to believe and copy whatever you see on the internet, in a popular dance magazine, or video on social media?

We need to be cautious, to train ourselves to read through dance contracts, event programs, and our instructional syllabus for the dance(s) we’re working on. Oh, did you even ask for a copy of the syllabus, or check the origination of the course work for which you are paying a substantial amount? It is my responsibility as a student to maximize my learning process. I take written notes during each lesson and review to practice before the next. Trust me, all this study doesn’t minimize the fun of the footwork; it enhances it. **Read your contract; Read your syllabus; Read and re-read your lesson notes!** If timely and thorough, it will stir you to increased progress and pleasure in your dancing.

**Doing -The Right Thing**

Some dance socially; others are interested in an occasional performance to showcase what they’ve learned. For a serious competitor, doing it right is not only a desire but a requirement for professional success and personal satisfaction. Whatever your objectives are, doing the steps correctly usually brings the most enjoyment to your partner and to you personally.

Following the line of dance is one of the basic right things to do in dance etiquette. I am fortunate that my instructor/partner is a master at floor craft, not only following the line of dance but always being aware of other couples and maneuvering to keep us moving in the right direction. At a competition, being on time for your heats is a first in “doing it right” as well as coming off the floor in an orderly fashion. Remember, what you do (or don’t do) affects your partner, fellow dancers, and the audience.

Respect and communication are basic to doing it right, whether in the dance venue or in public. The evening following my performance at an international competition, I went into town for dinner with a friend. A family stopped by our table, recognizing me from the dance event. I realized I was in the spotlight whether on the ballroom floor or a casual encounter. A trophy is important, but “doing . . . the right thing” is not only a dance style but a lifestyle, the effects going way beyond an awards ceremony. Whether you dance as an amateur, professional or pro-am, people are watching. Doing the right step is primary as a dancer, but “practicing / doing” the right thing (i.e. basic courtesy) is an extension of your identity on and off the dance floor.

<http://www.amberibis.com/ballroom2.html>