

Learning the best relationship dance

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Joan Dickinson, ED.D. Life Coach

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“Dancing With the Stars,” I must confess I love it. I love the humor, the beauty of the dances, the absence of violence, but, most of all, seeing talent developed. Fun. But what else does Dancing With the Stars teach us? Keep an arm’s length distance for the best performance. Although some of the dances are seductive, you don’t see any of the body groping, reminiscent of the old glued together “slow dance.”

To be a star, it seems you need genuineness, to flow with the rhythm, move and be moved, yet let go within a disciplined structure of the dance style. Nice traits for any relationship success, I think. But even more key to being a great dancer is the ability to intuit where your partner is. Ahh, no stepping on toes allowed.

But step on toes we do. When we intuit the relationship dance correctly, we send and receive cues and clues to achieve the proper distance with our partners. The proper distance is one where everyone smiles and is comfortable. Can you remember the discomfort of dancing too close to an almost stranger? Yuck. Can you remember the sigh of relief when the song was finished and you could escape? Ahh.

Now, think of your dance partners as your family, friends and business colleagues. You can see there are different distance-closeness rules and structures for the great variety of life’s relationship dances. Would it be more appropriate to do a mambo with your spouse or your work colleagues? And what are the best business dances?

Our cultures have a lot to do with what we consider right and normal boundaries. I’m from Minnesota where we are very nice, want harmony in our relationships and prize please and thank you manners. Eastern harshness jars us. At the same time, Minnesotans have been called not so nice by newcomers because our best friends are our families and the people we grew up with. We have no need for new friends. Thus, I was floored by the genuine inclusiveness of Floridians, even the east coast transplants. The point is we usually like what is familiar.

Our personalities also determine our space boundaries. Extroversion vs. introversion, thinking vs. feeling, thoughtful processors vs. quick decision-makers, planners vs. spontaneous doers, intuitive vs. logical thinkers, sensitiveness vs. toughness...are a few of the many dimensions measured. These differences can be the spice of life or create problems.

The Myers-Briggs and other personality typology instruments are in great demand. We want to know who we are and how we can relate better to others. Why? Because we work better, have better marriages and friendships when we can appreciate and utilize our differences. We can expand beyond “I’m right, You’re wrong.” Or perhaps we don’t like to have our toes stepped on or have our privacy invaded. We don’t like to be teased by

others for being different. Simply, we want to be understood and we want to appreciate others.

Here are some boundary questions for you to ponder. Consider your family and cultural values.

- Where do you set your boundaries?
- Where do your personal boundaries come from?
- What do you consider respectful distance?
- What are your emotional reactions when others infringe on your boundaries?
- How do you know when you've invaded someone's turf?

To intuit better, and improve your relationships, rate your life dancing skills. What are the signs you and others give off? "Yuck," if you're too close; "Ahhh," if you feel a respectable distance. The clues and cues are usually unspoken, but clear beacons to the observant. Attend to your own and other's body language. Step back until you hear that sigh of relief. If you don't have that skill and step on toes, use humor. Make your relationship dances fun, look effortless, like dancing with the stars.