

and truly appreciates experienced “angels” dancing with newcomers. Just because you’ve already learned the figures, kindly do not sit out during the walk-throughs. Beginners benefit greatly from your movements and eye contact as supplementary prompts. The Regency period had a grace and an elegance that has never been surpassed. Aristocrats of the time believed in “nobless oblige”: the inferred responsibility of the privileged (in our case, more experienced) to act with generosity and nobility toward those less privileged (less experienced newcomer).

If you recognize yourself as a sufferer of Intermediate-itis ask yourself this: Why be a mediocre dancer when you could become a superlative one? All it takes is a willingness to improve, to grow, and to apply oneself. If you challenge yourself, not only will you become a better dancer, you shall certainly savor the flavor of English Regency dancing.

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Taking Someone Aside

by Jeff Kaufman

Many dance organizations act as if they have two options in the face of bad behavior: “do nothing” and “full ban.” With a choice between ignoring it and overreacting, it’s not surprising that we often end up implicitly allowing behavior we shouldn’t let continue. If you can become comfortable taking someone aside to talk you can handle small problems before they become large ones.

When I go into one of these conversations, at a surface level my goal is for them to stop doing the thing. The deeper goal, though, is that we can end the conversation with them understanding and accepting the reasoning behind why they need to not do it, as opposed to just feeling capriciously limited. Not only is that more likely to stick, they’re also more likely to stop doing other more subtle things we didn’t directly discuss.

Now, there are cases where I really think a good outcome is unlikely. Maybe they’ve been doing this thing for a long time and seem very set in their ways. Maybe they’re really solidly convinced this is an ok thing to be doing. Still, a general principle of giving people a chance to improve has a lot going for it. One aspect is that you may not have as good a read on them as you think you do, and perhaps they’ll change. Another is that it’s really important to have a fair process you consistently follow: banning someone without warning isn’t going to feel fair to the banned person or your other dancers, however sure you are that a warning won’t change anything. So I find it useful to approach all of these conversations as if the person is going to understand and stop. That way I’m leaving things open, with the opportunity to be pleasantly surprised.

The first consideration in talking to them is deciding who should be the one to do it. Ideally you have someone who can be calm, patient, and firm. It helps if they’re demographically similar (men talking to men, older people talking to older people). I also think one on one conversations tend to work better, because the person feels less set upon, but if none of the organizers are up for that then talking to them as a pair is still worth doing. Another consideration is picking a good place to talk. Ideally there’s somewhere out of the way a bit, where you won’t be overheard and where it won’t be embarrassing to the person to be seen getting a talking to. You don’t want them to be feeling defensive or humiliated. On the other hand, especially if you’re worried about physical violence, you don’t want to be fully secluded. A good place can be somewhere where if you raised your voice you would immediately be heard, and where the other person won’t be between you and an exit.

Then you want to think about a good time to talk. At dances the break is generally good, though if it’s more urgent you can come up to someone immediately as a dance is ending. I’ll tell them I need to speak with them, motioning in the direction I’d like to move. If they don’t want to, I’ll tell them I need to talk to them before they can do any more dancing. I don’t try to get into things while walking over to where I wanted to talk, though I’ll do some small talk if that feels like it will work.

Once we’re in a good place, I briefly summarize the concern (“several people have come up to us to say that you keep asking them to dance after they told you to stop asking them”) and then ask them what’s going on. My experience is they’ll usually have a lot to say. Maybe

they feel like they've been wronged, maybe they think it's unfair that you're talking to them about this, maybe they're confused why things keep going poorly. I let them talk, trying to understand their perspective as well as I can. People like to be listened to and get their side out, and they're going to be most receptive to guidance on improving if they feel like they've been heard out.

Listening is also useful for figuring out what you can say that is most likely to get them to stop doing the thing you need them to stop. Maybe there's something they don't understand about how their actions are perceived by others. Maybe they have one set of preferences on something and don't know what it's like to have different ones. When you're lucky this gives you what you need to help them improve.

(Another reason listening can be good is that occasionally people will talk at length in a way that just makes it really clear they shouldn't be at your dance. Giving people plenty of rope can go that way.)

After they start to wind down, I'll try to give a memorable summary of what they need to not do ("When someone asks you to stop asking them, I need you to stop asking them"). As much as I can, I'll follow up by connecting this to what they've said and addressing their concerns. They often want to talk more, and I try to still give space for that, but I keep bringing us back to the change we need them to make and the reasoning behind it.

These conversations can be awkward, and aren't especially fun for anyone, but you really need to have them in your range of responses. If your only options are "do nothing" and "full ban" then you often end up implicitly allowing behavior you shouldn't let continue.

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