



Kelly Casanova

West Coast Swing!

Just Say Yes (maybe...)

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"Would you like to dance?"

These are the five most common words heard at any swing dance, yet for many people the emotions that come up when they ask this optimistic question are overwhelming. Face it, no one likes to be rejected. I know from personal experience how challenging it can be to deal with the negative responses that can sometimes follow when asking someone to dance. When I was in high school and college, I was NEVER asked to dance. Since I had the distinct misfortune to have very beautiful friends, whenever a guy approached me I soon discovered that he usually wanted the name or phone number of one of my girlfriends. Consequentially, I soon learned that if I wanted to dance I would have to ask the guys myself. So I did. And most of the time they said, "No." They really did! My mother tells me I was just a late bloomer...

Since a lot of people have told me they are terrified to ask anyone to dance, and they feel like leaving when someone does reject them, I thought that repeating some of the more colorful rejections given me will help folks realize that most of the time a rejection is a reflection on the other person's character, not theirs! As I've become more confident and secure, I've learned to be more amused by people's rudeness rather than to "own" their comments. And, lest anyone think that once someone has been labeled a "good" dancer no one will turn them down or be rude to them, think again. My amusing list of rejections were said to me *after* I had won *two* US Open Swing Dance Championships, and I had been judging and teaching for over ten years!

Since I dance (primarily!) with guys, this column on first glance could be misconstrued as a slap to the guys. My position, however, is that rudeness is not gender-biased. I firmly believe that just as many women have said rude things to guys as guys have said to the women - maybe even more! So, for the sake of harmony between the sexes, let's assume the following comments are not gender specific.

My question: "Would you like to dance?"

Nah-I'd rather smoke a cigarette.

Ask me later.

Only if you can follow.

No, I haven't seen if you can dance yet.

Are you any good?

Only if you are in the next contest, I'm dancing with competitors only.

I don't dance with people who don't take from my teacher.

Only if you've been dancing longer than a year.

As long as you don't try to lead.

No, I think _____ is going to ask me to dance.

Not now. Come back later and I'll see.
Maybe...are you with anyone?
No, there are too many really good dancers here that I want to dance with.
No, you'll make me look bad.
No, you make me nervous.
How come you are asking *me*?
I don't dance with locals when I'm at a convention.
Are you sure you want to dance with me?
No, I learned from someone else.
Does this mean you want to sleep with me?
No, not until I've finished my drink/cigarette.
Um, well, uh...ok, I guess so.
Maybe, who do you take from?
Might as well, there is no one good here tonight anyway.
No, I was just about to ask _____ to dance.
No thanks, I'm tired and I'm saving myself to dance with the good dancers.
I don't dance with teachers/students/competitors/judges.
I'd rather dance with _____, will you ask her for me?
Only if you'll tell me the name of that woman over there.
Only if you're single.
Maybe, how long have you been dancing?

And last, but not least, my all time favorite,
"I don't know." (What the heck does *that* mean?)

When someone asks you to dance, remember it's only about 3 minutes. No matter how inexperienced a dancer you might be dancing with, I can almost guarantee that the experience will, if you let it, be a positive one. Perhaps the experience will bring a new friend, a work contact, or an opportunity to work on timing or social skills. A dance doesn't always have to be about the dance. So, what can someone say to make a partner feel good about the risk they've taken by asking for a dance?

Here are some of my favorite responses:

I'd love to.
Thanks, I was hoping you'd ask me.
Of course!
Sure!
I was just going to ask you!
I'd be delighted.
Yes, thank you very much for asking.
I've been waiting all night to get the nerve to ask you!

...Well, Almost Never

When I discovered the swing dance scene, I learned that everyone asks everyone else to dance, and guess what? Having been rejected all those years, I vowed I'd *never* say no...well, almost never. Over the years I've modified my "never" to allow me off the hook under the following circumstances:

1. The person asking me to dance is under the influence of a reality altering substance to the point of being dangerous.
2. The person asking me to dance has been emotionally, verbally or physically abusive to me in the past.
3. I am tired or ill and have stopped dancing for the night. In that case, I ask them for a raincheck and remember to find them the next time and ask them for a dance.
4. I want to finish watching some incredible dancing. In that case, I say I'd love to after the current song is finished. I also invite my future partner to sit with me and watch the couple I'm captivated with finish their dance.
5. I can't dance the dance they want to dance to the music that is playing. So I ask for the next dance.
6. I've already promised the dance to someone else. So I arrange to find them later.
7. I am on a date with my husband and I want to spend time just with him. In this instance, my husband and I do not go to a swing dance-we go to an out of the way place where we don't think we'll see anyone we know. If I do see someone I know and they ask me to dance, I explain that I'm spending time exclusively with my husband, and then I make a point of asking them to dance at the next swing dance.
8. I am in a deep conversation with someone. In this case I explain that I'd love to dance with them as soon as I finish my conversation. In order to keep the person from hovering awkwardly, I ask where I might find them in 20 minutes or so. That also serves as a gentle hint that my friend and I require a little privacy. Usually if I want to have a deep conversation with someone, I position myself with my back to the dance floor, as far away as possible from the dance floor, and limit my body language to include only the person I'm talking with.

So in conclusion, if someone rudely rejects your offer to dance, feel sorry for them! However skilled they might be as a dancer, they obviously have few social skills and are probably very unhappy with themselves. On the other side of the coin, if you look at each person who invites *you* to dance as an opportunity for learning more about people, the dance, and yourself, I'm confident you'll have more fun and the rejections you do get won't bother you as much.