



Kelly Casanova

West Coast Swing!

Social Etiquette for Swing Dancers

by Kelly Casanova

This flier attempts to address the most commonly asked social questions I've received during 25+ years of teaching. Please feel free to contact me with your comments through my website: www.kellydance.com. Or you can e-mail me directly at kellycdancer@aol.com. Although some suggestions will obviously be more applicable to a private lesson or a group class or a general dance, I have grouped them all together for the sake of efficiency.

1. Personal Hygiene & Property:

20. If you do not have time to shower before going dancing, bring a change of clothes and a towel to the hall and make a quick stop at the restroom before joining others. This is especially important if you have a particularly physical or stressful job which results in excessive dirt and/or perspiration.
21. Brush your teeth, or help yourself to the mints made available at most dance venues.
22. Take care to insure that hands and nails are clean and that your nails are filed, not clipped.
23. Use deodorant liberally; use perfumes and colognes sparingly.
24. Wash your hands before your first dance, after using the restroom, and after your last dance.
25. Leave cumbersome jewelry and valuables in a secure location (e.g., the trunk of your car).
26. Remove your Bluetooth headset. Put your cell phone on mute or vibrate.
27. Store belongings well under a chair so as not to cause someone walking by to trip over them.
28. When leaving, double-check possessions to insure you are leaving with *your* coat, *your* keys, and *your* shoes.
29. Refrain from smoking in common areas, or where other dancers must pass to get to popular locations.
30. Refrain from chewing gum.
31. Keep the volume of your conversation appropriate to the area you are in.
32. Discard all empty bottles, cups, and other such items in an appropriate manner.

2. Pay for the private lesson, group class, or dance *before* initiating the activity. Greet the door person by name with a smile and have your money at hand so as to help the line move quickly.

3. Refrain from using technologies to video dancers unless you have the explicit permission of the proprietor and all the dancers you wish to video. Although professionals are accustomed to being on camera, they may not wish the move they are working on to become available to the world until after they've had an opportunity to showcase it in a contest. Many social dancers are uncomfortable being on camera and might shy away from venues that allow such activity. (Consider the plight of people in the witness protection program doomed never to go to a dance!)

4. Although dancing is a social event where people catch up with social information, refrain from engaging in malicious gossip. A good policy to ensure that such conversation is appropriate is to ask yourself if you would be comfortable with anyone in the room overhearing what you are saying.
5. Pay attention to the emcee or your teacher. If someone is talking to you, you can say something like, "May we talk later? I'm trying to hear what the emcee/teacher is saying."
6. Refrain from "helping" partners with instruction. What you may think is being constructive might be construed as criticism and cause people to avoid you. Keep in mind that the most popular dancers are the ones that cover for their partners' mistakes, rather than attempting to correct them.
7. Respond immediately to a request for a dance with a smile and an enthusiastic verbal response.
8. Ask dancers of all levels to dance with you.
9. If you came with someone, dance the first and last dance with them. If they are new to the scene, check in with them periodically throughout the dance to make sure they are having a good time, and introduce them to other dancing friends who you know will treat them well so they will have a positive experience and want to come back.
10. Avoid asking people engaged in intense conversation for a dance. Instead, ask those who look like they are available and who smile when you make eye contact.
11. If you would like to dance with someone you don't know (Dancer A) who is obviously at the dance with Dancer B, introduce yourself to both parties and ask Dancer B if it is alright to ask Dancer A for a dance. If Dancer B is agreeable, don't forget to actually ask Dancer A for the dance! Now you have made two friends instead of one friend and a jealous rival.
12. If someone turns you down for a dance, smile and say something like, "OK. Next time I'll let you ask me." Then, keep your word. If they ask you at another time, feel free to return the invitation, but if they don't, refrain from asking them again. Instead, try to engage the person in a friendly conversation without the intent of dancing with them. Some people prefer to dance only with people they know well socially. There are numerous reasons why a person might not want to dance with you that have nothing (or everything!) to do with you personally. If people consistently refuse to dance with you, ask your teacher before or after class for an honest opinion of why they think people are refusing you. Just make sure before asking that you really want to know the answer.
13. If someone asks you to dance and you do not ever want to dance with them, simply smile and say, "No thank you." If you are momentarily indisposed, understand it is up to you to ask them the next time. It is inconsiderate to repeatedly give lame excuses hoping they will "get the hint." When they finally realize that you are not being honest with them, they will most likely not feel at all kindly towards you and are very likely to share that opinion with other dancers. Besides, the minute you tell someone you are sitting out a dance, the partner of your dreams will approach you to dance as the DJ begins playing your favorite song!
14. Enter and exit the dance floor with consideration towards the other dancers on the floor.
15. Show consideration and respect for other dancers' territories and maintain a slot appropriate in width and length relative to the space available.
16. Stay alert to shifting slots of other dancers and adapt choreography and footwork to avoid collisions.
17. Profusely apologize for causing any injury or collision, and if necessary, walk the injured party off the floor to receive medical attention.
18. Respond quickly to a dancer in distress. For example, if someone falls next to you, help them up.

19. Pay attention to your partner and provide positive facial expressions and frequent eye contact.
20. Always take the opportunity to compliment a partner on anything they are doing well. Show appreciation either verbally or through facial expressions and body language.
21. Adapt your dancing to cover for your partner's mistakes without drawing attention to your compensations.
22. Place your partner's feelings and well-being above musicality, or the desire to display your abilities.
23. If leading, choose choreography that fits your partner's abilities and body type.
24. If following, choose styling and footwork that complements (vs. competes with) your partner's lead.
25. If a partner corrects your dancing, smile politely and say, "I can see that I need more lessons before dancing with you, so I'll catch you another time." And then walk off the floor. If they ask you to dance again, be prepared to be given another "lesson." If you don't want another "lesson," respond with the following when they ask you to dance: "I'd love to dance with you as long as you can refrain from commenting on my weaknesses. I don't dance well when I feel criticized."
26. If someone makes inappropriate comments or gestures towards you while dancing say, "I feel uncomfortable and need to stop dancing now." And then walk off the floor.
27. If you ask someone to dance and they look around to see who else is available and are less than enthusiastic, try saying the following before they respond: "Oh, I'm sorry. I can see you are looking for someone in particular. We can dance later when you are more available." And then let them come find you.
28. If you think you might become injured (physically or emotionally) dancing with someone, stop dancing immediately and excuse yourself from the floor. Simply say, "I'm sorry, I don't feel well. I need to sit out the rest of this dance."
29. Thank your partner at the end of the dance, and offer to escort them off the floor back to their seat.
30. Before leaving a dance, verbally show your appreciation to the band or DJ for their efforts.

Leaders: You may be bored with your material, but followers are never bored because they dance with leaders who all have different repertoires. Followers are wary of being injured or criticized. It is not your job to entertain them with fancy moves—it is your job to keep them safe and to be nice to them.

Followers: It is fine to experiment with styling and footwork, but always remember your primary job is to follow and to connect positively with your leader. If everyone learned to dance both lead and follow, no one would ever have to sit out and everyone would be a lot more empathetic towards one another!

Last, but not least, avoid having an agenda. The universe will let you know what you should be working on by presenting you with different challenges with each partner. Stay open to all the possibilities and pay attention. If you are dancing with a partner who is off-time, work on your own timing. If you are dancing with a person who likes to just stand there, work on your own footwork. If you are dancing with a beginner, make them feel good about themselves. Remember, the dancers in your community will most likely be in your life for as long as you continue to dance.

I Hope these suggestions help keep those dance relationships healthy and fun!