



Attend To Your Partner

by Harold & Meredith Sears

There is some temptation, especially if you are an independent sort of person, well aware of your own knowledge and abilities, to dance your own dance. Each dancer can hear the music and cues. Each dancer has learned the steps that make up each figure and has experience with the figures and how they combine into sequences. Each dancer, whether man or woman, can do this dance. But number one in dancing is not the choreography—it is your partner. The cues, the figures, even the music are just the context within which you are "partnering" someone else, so it is important to attend to your partner.

It's so easy to focus too strongly elsewhere—on dancing the figure properly, on getting the proper rise and fall that you know you're supposed to do, even on other couples around you, maybe friends, or maybe "better" dancers, and you're watching to see how they do it.

Yes, pay attention to the various aspects of dancing and the dance, but reserve a major chunk of attention for your partner. Men, know what she is doing and what she will do next. Ladies, you too—feel his movements. Stay centered on his body.



As an example of ways in which we can think about each other, let's consider a simple **phase II waltz Wrap**. We might begin in open position, both facing line of dance with the trail hands joined and trail feet free. The man steps forward right, and already he is thinking about what his partner needs to do and about how he can help.

A quick aside — Has your teacher or even your partner ever told you not to "help?" that she can do her part, that she doesn't need to be helped? What they really mean is that she doesn't need to be forced. There is a big difference between forcing and helping. We do need all the true help that we can get.

So, we are in open position and the man is about to step forward right and already he is beginning to lower joined trail hands. This movement is not part of dancing his steps in the figure. It is his first "help." She will step forward left and begin to turn left, and he is opening the way for her to do that. If he stays square to line, she will encounter the inertia of his right shoulder and arm. If he moves that arm back and so begins to turn his upper body a little to the right, then as she turns, she meets complimentary movement on his part, and the two bodies flow as one. That is what dancing is—two bodies moving as one.

A second thing that the man needs to do during this first step is to raise his left arm. Again, this is purely a matter of attending to your partner. It is a visual lead to encourage her to turn toward him. It is a target toward which she can aim. Men, put your hand out there, and she will naturally want to take it—it is human nature. So now there are two things that are helping her to step forward and begin to turn left: his right arm going back and his left arm going up. We are very much doing this together. She is not turning by herself while he happens to dance down the line of dance, by her side.



"I'll start dancing like Fred Astaire, when you stop dancing like Nellie the Elephant!"

The second step of a Wrap is forward left for the man. The woman steps side and forward right and continues to turn. By this time, she will have taken his left hand, and he must raise joined lead hands to a position over her head. He needs to be deliberate about this and center lead hands over the axis of her rotation. If he is careless about this, he will pull her off balance. In making like a top, she will wobble. If he does center his support, she will be on balance and her turn will be smooth. Notice that this left-hand lead is aided by the right-hand lead that he did earlier. He brought his right shoulder back and so turned a little toward her. His body is centered on her turning action, and he can more easily reach her rotational axis.

The third step is a closing one, trail foot to lead foot. As we take this last step, he lowers joined lead hands to signal the end of the rotation. Now both are facing line of dance. She is wrapped into his right arm, his right arm behind her back and his left arm in front, her arms crossed in front, right on top of left. All hands are joined.

In a Wrap, we are very close. Next is maybe a Forward Waltz. How can we do that figure without binding on each other? First, the woman should focus her turn not on the man's side but on his center. She needs to aim for a position in front of his right hip, not off to the right side of it. As a matter of fact, the Wrap is really a good *closed* position—only she is turned half around. He will be able to reach around easily and not tug. The man needs to focus on this end, too, by keeping his steps small and adjusting his movement to the woman. Here, she is dancing in a circle, and he could easily outrun her and pull on her. He needs to think about that and avoid it.

Second, we will complete the Wrap with a little left-shoulder lead for both. We anticipated this feature on step one, when he turned a little toward partner, and this body slice allows us to dance forward in a more gliding and less clunky way. A third thing he can do to make the Wrap more graceful and less jerky is to keep his handholds very loose. We need to keep hand contact, but we mustn't grip. Just try to make fingertip contact so hands turn easily and no joints get twisted. His arms are around her, but don't bind her. Keep the Wrap a loose one. The Wrap is a simple figure—just three little steps—but there is so much we can do to make it flow smoothly. We can adjust the size and placement of our steps, the movement and positioning of our arms, and the amount of upper-body turn or shoulder lead. We can attend to our partner, and we will dance as one.