



Foot Follows Frame

by Harold & Meredith Sears



We recently ran across a "well-known rule of movement in dance: foot follows frame." Experienced dancers follow this rule. They move the frame, their torso, and *then* move the foot. But beginners do the opposite -- they move the foot first and then the torso. In dancing, beginners think of the steps. They think of their feet first, and so they lift their feet too high, they step too far, and the body is then dragged onto the feet. So it looks like marching, or a game of hopscotch, or a camel. (This writer was cruel.)



But experienced dancers think not of the foot but of the frame. They move the frame first, and the foot follows along naturally. If they do think of the foot, they think of the supporting foot, which is under them, not the free foot, which will move and eventually take the weight. The supporting foot is the "sending" foot, and it pushes into the floor and moves the frame on its way. Then we move the free foot, the "receiving" foot, and at the proper moment (on the beat?) we lower it to the floor, as the frame (in motion) passes that point. The receiving foot takes weight -- we have taken the step.



But notice how different these two approaches are. Our hypothetical beginner reaches forward with the free foot, contacts the floor ahead of the frame, and then drags himself onto that foot. The thought sequence is receiving foot, then the frame, and maybe there was no thought for the sending foot at all. The result is jerky, even

clumping. In contrast, the experienced dancer thinks about the sending foot first, initiates movement of the frame, and, yes, he has a thought for the receiving foot, but he keeps it under him. He doesn't reach out and then leap onto it. The body's center is centered over its support. Move your center first, and your feet will follow. The result is smooth, flowing, and continuous.

One of our teachers offered us an image -- think of a chair being moved from here to there across the floor. The legs are solidly under the mass of the chair at all times. The chair never gets out in front of its legs, and the legs never step out in front of the chair. The chair is centered over its legs always.



Both in moving a chair and in Smooth dancing, we want to keep our frame centered over its support. The feet are moving, but in the Smooth rhythms, it is really the frame that is dancing. The frame is progressing, turning, spinning -- this is the dance. **The feet are in the service of the frame.** We don't want the foot moving and the body trailing along behind it or catching up to it. Such a strategy will feel jerky and feel off the beat. It's not that we never reach out with the free foot. We reach for a Right Lunge and for a Contra Check, but we don't take weight until the frame is in position.



Dance is turns, more than linear motion, and during turns too, foot follows frame. The body moves first, preparing for the turn, and then the turn occurs. During a foxtrot Reverse Turn, the man steps forward, initiates upper-body turn, steps side and forward with foot turn (lady Heel Turn), continues upper-body turn until his center is facing RLOD, and then steps back to complete the foot turn. **At each step, the frame turns first and then the foot.**

So, as you dance, think first about your solar plexus and second about your feet. There really is substantial time between any two beats of music. Use that time to move your frame forward, to move the man's right shoulder forward into a Reverse Turn. As your frame dances, your feet will be there to carry you along, and your dance will flow more smoothly.



Idea from *Every Man's Survival Guide To Ballroom Dancing* by James Joseph, p87, 2010.