

Why Beginners Quit Dancing

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A popular dance instructor has told me that out of 1,000 folks who think that they might enroll in a dance class, perhaps 50 will actually do it. Of these brave 50, only 30 or so will finish the beginner series. Of the 30, only 20 will return for intermediate classes and after one year, maybe 10 will still be dancing.

Why such a high turnover? What makes it so hard to stay with it? Let's examine the top five reasons why people give up before they really get started:

Newbie Anxiety

Adults don't like to look stupid! That's the bottom line. We adults know how to walk and we don't like to crawl. When new student "John Doe" walks into that first dance lesson, he is no longer Mr. Big. At that moment, gone is the respect of family, friends, church and co-workers. Zero is the value of his BA, MBA or PhD. Years of jogging, golfing, skiing, skating and batting will not help. Suddenly he's a kindergarten child again, a little kid, a "baby" dancer, a newbie know-nothing. This is simply not a condition that adults like to be in.

Newbie anxiety is absolutely normal and completely unavoidable. New students can increase their odds of staying with the dance by realizing that this is the price that every single person must pay. Just ask other beginners, intermediate or advanced dancers and your instructors to share their newbie stories with you. You are not alone, John Doe!

Fear of Rejection

It is human nature to seek acceptance and avoid rejection. New dancers enter a world of Leaders and Followers who seem to know everything, while they know virtually nothing. To a newbie, the dance floor is so scary that it might as well be made of ice. Fear of rejection by experienced or even other beginners is very real. New dancers, take heart! A very high percentage of experienced dancers will say "yes" to a beginner Leader or Follower if asked politely. Tell the person that you are just starting and don't worry about anything fancy. Followers, you must ask too. In dance club environments it is perfectly acceptable for Followers to ask Leaders to dance.

If you are a beginner Leader, give clear leads and never force your partner. Stay with the basics and do not forget to smile! Remember, three basic steps done well are better than a hundred fancy moves done poorly.

If you are a beginner Follower, keep cool and relax. Listen to the music and let the Leader put you in place. If you miss a lead, just laugh and keep dancing. Don't apologize or freeze up. Just relax and follow. Leaders and Followers always thank your partner regardless of relative skill.

Bad Planning

Lots of dancers quit because they fail to plan for dancing. Dance lessons and social dancing takes time and special planning. Baby-sitters, practice partners, phone calls to find out where dancers are gathering all take time and energy. Without planning, dancing loses its priority status in our lives.

If you find yourself thinking, “I’ll go out next week”, you may be on your way to quitting. In the beginning it’s important to discipline yourself to attend classes and social dances. Plan for dancing, Don’t lose your momentum.

Failure to Practice

Failure to practice is a major cause of frustration for all dancers. That which is not practiced will not be remembered. Studies have proven this. Material should be practiced within 10 minutes of learning, then practiced again within two hours. More practice must be done within twenty-four hours. Weekly practice then is needed to maintain the material and advance the skill. This schedule of practice is only a minimum amount...just enough to make us remember. We need even more practice with partners and coaches in order to get better or perfect a new skill or dance technique. Learning is hard but practice is essential.

Stop and Start

Years ago I taught martial arts classes. Over a seven year period I observed many students who dropped in and out of classes. With each return effort, these folks demonstrated beginner bravery but lost learner momentum. With each return they dropped out sooner and returned even later. Every one of these “stop and starters” quit before obtaining any significant skills.

A body in motion tends to stay in motion. If you are a beginner who is serious about dancing, don’t stop. If you miss classes and social events, then dance in your home or motel room. Do not stop as it greatly reduces your odds of reaching your goal of becoming a good dancer. Find a way to dance every day.

Conclusion

If it is true that only ten out of 1,000 who start dancing stay with it, then it is a huge accomplishment to be one of those ten. If you are a beginner and you stay with it, you will soon become a member of a special community of brave souls who did not quit. You will enter a world of folks who did not give up when the newcomer anxiety bug struck. You will join a group of people who overcame their fear of rejection and kept dancing. You will see people that did not forget to plan to dance, folks who practiced Hard and stayed with it every day; students who did not stop and start. In short, you will see yourself!