



By Silver Rose

# CHANGE YOUR FOCUS CHANGE YOUR LIFE

## Step Four *Dancing with Change*

**Step One** in learning to dance with change is to accept that which cannot be changed.

**Step Two** is: choose whether you are going to dance or sit this one out.

**Step Three** is: Determine how much of this new dance you already know.

Today we will cover the next step in Learning to Dance With Change. **Step Four** is:

### **Determine your role—are you the Lead or the Follower?**

Before you can start dancing with others, roles need to be determined. If two people get out on the dance floor and both try to lead, the dance does not go well. If both decide to follow, the same is true. Without determining your part before joining the dance, you will step on many toes and the dance will be painfully awkward.

The same is true when implementing change. We've all heard the expression, "Too many Chiefs and not enough Indians." When everyone tries to take the lead on a project, chaos ensues. Things don't get done because there is an assumption that someone else took care of it. On the flip side, there is often duplication of effort because the right hand doesn't know what the left is doing.

What dancers will tell you is that the Lead does not have any more control over the dance than does the Follower. The Follower is being led but the dance is a partnership; they dance together, making each other look good. When one falters, the other makes up for it.

This is also what happens on a good project team. It is up to the Team Leader to set the tone and structure; the Team members then make sure that each performs their part well so that the overall project is successful.

Too often we think it is up to the Lead to take up the slack on a project. When you approach it in the spirit of partnership, then you realize that if s/he falters, so do you. Just as s/he would take up the slack for you, it is up to you to do the same for your Lead.

**We're fools whether we dance or not, so we might as well dance.** ~ Japanese Proverb

When you find it difficult to follow (or lead, for that matter), it is often due to a feeling of vulnerability, of being exposed. When I was a teenager my father tried, in vain, to teach me the Fox Trot. He finally gave up in exasperation because I could not or would not let him lead. Like most people, I am extremely uncomfortable being in a situation where I feel out of control and I

thought that following while dancing was one such situation. Each time I felt uncertain, instead of letting him guide me, I tried to take over. (The story of my life, by the way!)

Years later, I took formal dance lessons with the explicit goal of learning how to follow. My inability to do so had become a social embarrassment so my motivation was high. Today, I can relax and let the other person lead. Of course, the better I know the dance, the more relaxed I am and the more I enjoy it. When my partner starts to take me into unknown territory, my knee-jerk reaction is to take over but I'm now able to take a deep breath and relax into it.

I find myself applying these same concepts to being on a project team. When I was in my twenties, I wanted to run everything. I was of the personality type someone once brilliantly described as "a massive ego coupled with an inferiority complex." My reaction to feeling vulnerable was to take over. It was never pretty and it didn't do my career any good, either.

Now that I grasp the concept of partnership, it is much easier to accept the role of Follower. I finally understand that no role is better than another on a project; all are equally necessary to get the job done.

When you are considering whether to take the role of Follower or Lead, the questions below are useful. Please consider them in the context of *this specific* project because the answers are different depending on the mission:

- Where would your skills be most useful?
- Thinking back to similar projects of the past, in what position would you have delivered optimum performance?
- Are there gaps in your knowledge that a different Lead might have?
- Who could take the team to the finish line the fastest while achieving all the objectives?
- Could you be the Lead for one component of the project and Follower for the rest?

Whatever your role is on a project, remember that, just like dancing, delivering a good performance depends on all parties. If the Follower doesn't perform his/her role consistently well, the best Lead in the world won't be able to make up for it.

Whatever your role, it is your responsibility to give it your all.

February 2, 2011

Silver Rose works with individuals and organizations to optimize their ability to dance with change.

Reach her at [Silver@SilverSpeaks.com](mailto:Silver@SilverSpeaks.com) or 877-840-5416