



By Silver Rose

The steps of learning to dance with change:

One: Accept that which cannot be changed.

Two: Choose—will you dance or sit this one out?

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

Four: Determine your role—Lead or Follower?

Five: Focus on learning the *new* dance.

Six: Start with the frame—it's *everything*.

Seven: If you step on your partner's toes, apologize and *keep dancing*.

Eight: Find partners who are better at the dance than you.

Step Nine: **Once you've mastered the steps—practice, practice, practice.**

Learning anything new, whether it's a dance, a new computer system or how to work with a new boss can be awkward at first. Think about the first time you tried to use a computer mouse. I couldn't keep track of where the pointer was on my screen! I didn't think I'd ever be able to control it and yet today I use it well without even having to think about what I'm doing.

In dance they call it muscle memory and it comes with practice—lots and lots of practice. In learning anything new, you cannot escape memorization. Once you've memorized the steps and you practice repeatedly, you cannot help but get better at whatever you are trying to learn.

We see examples of this every week on the show ***Dancing With the Stars***. At the beginning of the weeks-long process, we look at some of the contestants and wonder how they will keep from embarrassing themselves once they perform. In rehearsals they trip, they fall, they cry and they get angry. Sound familiar? Don't we all do some version of that when we are learning something new? Masters are those individuals who continue to get up, dust themselves off and try again. The before-and-after videos of the contestants are often amazing. It's hard to believe we're watching the same awkward dancers we saw at the beginning when, at the end, they dance so beautifully on stage.

I make a lot of speeches. For years I resisted the concept of practice. In my arrogance, I convinced myself that I was so good speaking "off the cuff" that I didn't need to rehearse. Don't get me wrong, I always *prepared* but I

CHANGE YOUR FOCUS CHANGE YOUR LIFE

Step Nine *Dancing with Change*

refused to *practice*, thinking that doing so would make my speeches seem stiff and too formal.

How wrong I was! There are stories I tell in my presentations that I have been telling for years. The more I repeat them, the better they are. I was, in effect, practicing in front of live audiences. I've stopped doing that. Today I spend hours alone practicing my talks. The more I practice in front of a mirror, the better they sound when I finally get up on that stage. And because I practice, my speeches sound relaxed and friendly, not stiff and formal, as I'd feared.

Think of some of the things you do well today as a result of hours of practice:

- ✓ Walking
- ✓ Driving a car
- ✓ Writing on a piece of paper
- ✓ Reading
- ✓ Keyboarding
- ✓ Playing a sport
- ✓ Singing or playing an instrument
- ✓ Using all the capabilities of your cell phone

At first you were terrible. With practice you got better! Why is it, then, that we expect immediate expertise when adapting to a change?

When faced with learning something new, ask yourself, "What would I need to practice in order to get good at this?" Some things will be obvious, others not. For example, when dealing with a difficult co-worker or boss, what you may need to practice is *responding* to situations versus *reacting*. This involves proactively imagining a situation in which the other person does something that is certain to "set you off." You then visualize how you will respond and you practice that response over and over until you know it like you know how to breathe. The next time that person does something that would normally aggravate you, you will then be able to respond calmly, just as you practiced. The alternative?—Skip the practice and do what you normally do—blurt out the first thing that pops into your head or say nothing and spend a sleepless night staring at the ceiling thinking, "I should have said this or I should have said that."

Practice is the key to mastery and you have already mastered many things. Why stop there? Why not apply the same learning process that enables you to walk, use a computer and talk on the phone to the new challenges you face? In this way you will be practicing ***Dancing with Change***!

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