



The **Number of Centers** in an individual dancer has become more clear since TV started airing “CORE” demonstrations. Logic tells us that an object has only one *Center* - and in my study of the “Psychology of Learning”, as well as Body Mechanics, I was fascinated with how those same **Rules carried over into the dance.**

We learn SO MUCH faster when we have only “**one definition for one word.**” **That was** my thinking - even before my detailed study. This same study confirmed my belief that **simplicity** is the key to **fundamental learning**. Many times, I have been asked to make a dance decision - deciding WHO was right and who was wrong. Fortunately, I am able to observe that both parties are frequently saying the **same thing** - but simply expressing it in a different way. NOTHING we do is technically wrong if we accomplish what we set out to do. The flip side of that coin is that “what we set out to do” might frequently be, less than the level of accomplishment that we are personally capable of achieving.

When it comes to *Centering* - or any other concept – MY main concern is seeing to it that we are making progress. In identifying a new concept, it is important that the student is able to **immediately apply that concept**, as soon as it has been presented or demonstrated.

We (GSDTA) have identified Four Body Zones: We actually recognize only ONE *Center*. However, we do acknowledge, and regularly refer to, **four separate Body Zones:**

Head Zone: Covers the entire head and neck, down to the **Centering Knob**.

Shoulder Zone: Covers the area from the top of the shoulder to the bottom of the rib cage.

Hip Zone: Starts at the top of the hip bone and ends where the legs connect to the hip.

Center Zone: (Core) Overlaps the lower edge of the rib cage - down to the upper edge of the hip bones. Center Zone provides stability by connecting the Shoulder & Hip Zones together.

Let’s assume that you have a wide support belt around your waist. (or - actually purchase one at your local drug store). Place this support belt tightly around your waist, with the top of the belt barely covering the lower ribs, as well as barely covering the top of the hipbones. This **Center Support** has now pulled the body all together into one dynamic **Dance Machine**.

Once the whole **Center Zone** is under control, you can confine the concentration to the top of the *Center Zone* (**Center Point of Balance - CPB - Core**). Concentrating on your *Center*, you will be able to MOVE your body from that center. You will start to feel the effect of **controlling** your *Center Zone*. This secure feeling is amazing when you first experience it. It’s as if you have suddenly gained a great deal of power & control over your entire body.

Using a support belt, you can experience this feeling rather quickly OR you can experience this same feeling (after training) simply by pulling all of your abdominal muscles up into your *Center*. This process takes a little time but I can guarantee you - It is worth the effort. We call this exercise “squeezing the banana”. It feels like someone squeezes all of your *Center* area - forcing your center upward & your shoulders back & down.

LOCATING YOUR OWN “CENTER POINT OF BALANCE” (CPB)

Unlike a **Center of Mass** (used in martial arts for a lower base stance) - or a **Center of Gravity** (which changes location with different body types) - our **Center Point of Balance** is located in the exact same place on every person. It is located in the **Solar Plexus (in your Core)**. It is nestled in the soft area, just below where the ribs come together. Let's do the exercise:

Stand with your feet together and you will find that you can move your “derriere” 4 inches forward - backward or sideways and still not lose your balance or have to move your feet. You can do the same with your head - shoulder - arm - foot. But NOW - Move your CENTER four inches in ANY direction - and you will find that you MUST move a foot. **Moving your Center moves your entire body to a new location.** You have moved your “Center Point of Balance,” and **BALANCE** is the whole point of Centering.

Try this: Another way to identify the location of your Center is to assume that your body is a mannequin. Place a fist into the Solar Plexus - that's the area just below where the rib cage meets - well above the waistline - and well above the naval. Placing a fist in the Solar Plexus area - we could lift the mannequin a few inches off the floor. The feet would fall directly under it's Center and the head and shoulder area would stay upright. If we placed a fist in the lower abdomen of the mannequin, the top half would fall over. If we placed a fist in the shoulder area - it would immobilize the shoulders - producing a total lack of flexibility.

INDIVIDUAL CENTERING

Being *Centered*, lines up the *Power Point* of the foot - through the knee - through the **Center Point of Balance** - and on up through the chin - in one coordinated movement. This allows the body to land precisely **ON** the beat of the music. **Individual Centering** produces great posture and a sense of strong Body Dynamics. It creates a look of confidence and a feeling of professional performance. The next time you have the opportunity to observe social dancing, where upper level dancers are simply enjoying the dance, pay close attention. You will be able to identify that extra element of *centering* by the tingle it creates in your own spine. I call that the “Goosebumps” reaction.

In evaluating the performance of a Ballet Dancer - or a Jazz Dancer - the same degree of professionalism exists. Movement is classified by how well the dancer moves from their *Center*. They are not evaluated by how fast they dance - or how complicated the material. They are judged by how well the body moves from the *center*. **FOOT follows FRAME.** The *center* moves first. Once you can control your *center*, moving on the “&a” just prior to a weight change, you will find that moving from the *Center* becomes the focal point for ALL movement. That one fact alone - immediately adds an extra “Dynamic” to your dancing. You will actually be able to FEEL the difference. It takes a little time before you can **maintain the feeling** - but just feeling it ONCE, allows you to know that the experience exists.

PARTNER CENTERING: - If the individuals involved are not well *Centered* as individuals, it is a bit more difficult to perfect Partner Centering. However, one partner that is well centered can have a positive influence on the centering and total performance of the other partner. This technique can be mastered by practicing in Stages.

STAGE ONE in learning *Partner Centering* is what we call the **Flashlight Technique** - This simply teaches each partner to aim their center either toward each other - or toward a destination. This will help even basic dancers to start the centering process.

LEADER: His "Flashlight" (Center Point of Balance) will be aimed either at his partner - or in the direction that he wants the partner to travel. This makes a strong connection - without the necessity for arm leading - and also maintains a sharper slot. (A wonderful feeling for the follower.)

FOLLOWER: Her "Flashlight" will aim at her partner's chin. This tends to lengthen her upper torso - which in turn develops better posture and centers her whole body toward her partner's center. As she rotates in various patterns, her "Flashlight" will return to him as quickly as the tempo of the music allows. This one technique alone can elevate any performance that lacks proper centering.

STAGE TWO of *Partner Centering* requires more control of each partner's individual *Center*. More than having each partner simply face each other - a certain degree of leverage (based on a tight control of the 4 *Zones* and a lifted *Center*) - develops a more professional attitude. This is the hallmark of the upper level dancer. When two partners are really *Centered* to each other, an astute observer becomes aware of each action that takes place in one split second. If you are part of the partnership - you should be able to feel each action. The leader's *Center* moves on the "&a"- and the follower *Reacts* to that lead. This allows both partners to land - at the same time, precisely on the beat of the music. Both partners may choose to dance different rhythms - even different syncopations - and still be totally *Centered*. They are connected from one partner's *Center* to the other partner's *Center*, *as if by an invisible rope*.

Competition Observation: *Centering* yourself toward the judges is not considered good taste. There are times when *Centering* to the judges is part of the natural unfolding of the routine (when both partners are actually facing the judges). However, there are times when either the Leader or the Follower seems to center their "Flashlight" toward the judges instead of toward each other when it is not appropriate. In judging circles, we refer to that as "**Mugging the Judges**". It is particularly noticeable if the lady faces the judges on every anchor instead of facing her partner. It not only detracts from the performance - but also loosens the connection of the partnership.

Teaching Technique: I frequently use slightly flexible ropes to show how the *Center*, rather than the arm, does the leading. The lady holds on to the end of the rope while the rope is wrapped around the man's *Center*. He finds that he can move the lady easily, simply by moving his *Center* in the direction **that he wants her to go**. (hands are not connected- & yet it works.)

In the real world, the lady frequently compensates for an arm lead just by knowing where she is expected to go. However, the fault is not always his. Many ladies strong-arm their partners. It is sometimes impossible to determine who did what to whom. **Arm leading** leads to **arm following** and perpetuates the problem from both sides. **MOST** patterns are best led with body leads, coming directly from the leader's *Center*.