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Dance Your Way to Success, While Eliminating One Thing Each Day

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Do you want to get ahead at work? Be on the fast track? If so, I have two counter-intuitive suggestions to offer you.

I warn you: you won't find these suggestions in any of the formal leadership books most folks will recommend to you. Yet both are based on solid research. (Remember, I'm trained as a researcher and hold a doctorate in public policy.)

My first recommendation is to take dancing lessons, and my second is to finish things you start.

"Dancing lessons?" you're probably asking incredulously. How can dancing lessons *possibly* help you get ahead in a career focused on calculating risk?

I admit it; it does seem far-fetched, but stay with me for a moment . . .

Recent research at the University of Derby in England found that dancing lessons improve people's social skills, lift their spirits and increase their self-confidence.

"Really?" you might be saying. "How can that be?"

In order to learn the "fancy footwork" dancing requires, one applies extreme focus—"mindfulness." This focus interrupts the negative thoughts that often plague us and contribute to anxiety and depression.

In a recent study conducted at the University of New England, participants who spent six weeks learning tango's fancy footwork recorded significantly lower levels of depression than a control group who took no lessons. In fact, the results were similar to those who took meditation lessons for the same six weeks. Think of dancing, then, as meditation: a meditation involving your partner, the music and yourself.

Then there's how you feel about yourself: In a recent German study of music and partner dancing, not only did tango dancers have lower levels of stress hormones, they also had higher levels of testos-

terone after dancing with partners. They felt more relaxed—and sexier.

Dancing also introduces you to an open, optimistic posture: When dancing, you stand erect, head held high, arms wide, while connecting with your partner.

Is dancing starting to sound any better to you now?

Harvard psychologists Daniel Gilbert and Matthew Killingsworth provide a rationale for the findings I've included: "Focusing on an activity makes you feel happier." In a study Gilbert and Killingsworth recently conducted of 250,000 subjects, they found that immersing your mind in a challenging activity—what psychologists call flow—prevents the mind-wandering that frequently makes people feel miserable.

In addition to uplifted spirits, debonair social skills and positive self-esteem, there's an additional benefit to be reaped from dancing: reconnecting with your partner and/or making new connections.

Are you sold now? Will you be brave enough to step outside your comfort zone and try something new? Will you Google dance lessons this very minute, including the name of your community? (Full disclosure: Writing this article has convinced *me* to take dance lessons, too.)

Before I sign off, I want to offer another recommendation for you to consider: Eliminate one thing each day. What do I mean?

You know the "thing" you've been walking by three times every day thinking, "I really should do something about that." Nevertheless, you continue to walk by it.

Yet, that unaddressed "thing" is taking up space in your mind, weighing you down. It contributes to an "I can't" mentality.

Sure, you can't get to everything *today*. None of us can. Each of us can, however, do *one* thing every day.

In October, I became aware of the many uncompleted "things" in my life and decided to address one each day. Like dancing, eliminating impediments both lifts your spirits and improves your self-confidence.

What kinds of "things" am I referring to?

Today, I took a photograph of a stain on the carpet in my hallway, in the condominium complex in which I live. When I finish this article, I plan to send an e-mail with the photograph attached to the management company asking that either the stain be removed or the carpet replaced.

Yes, I *have* walked over the stain at least 877 times and twice spoken to a representative of the management company. An e-mail with a picture will tell a more compelling story, don't you think?

Does my story resonate with you? What small thing have you been avoiding for months now?

I invite you to eliminate one thing today. And then one thing each and every day. For 170 days. And to post what you eliminate on my Facebook fan page titled: "Doreen Stern's 170 Days of Change." Every day I post what I eliminate, as do others. It's fun, invigorating and contributes to a "Yes, I CAN!" attitude.

Let me know how your dancing goes, too:
Docketor@DoreenStern.com. ●

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