

**Ask Diane “I’ve Outgrown My Teacher” May 25, 2009**

*Dear Diane,*

*I’ve been taking ballroom dance lessons from “Joe” for two years. I had never danced before but Joe was a kind and supportive teacher, and pretty soon I fell in love with ballroom dancing.*

*Now dancing is my life! I take four private lessons a week and study ballet and yoga as well. Joe and I travel to DanceSport competitions in and out of state. We regularly work with a visiting choreographer to help us prepare our routines.*

*My problem, incredibly, is that I think I’m getting better than Joe. The choreographer spends half the time helping Joe with his part, while I write everything down because Joe can’t remember the routines. I also have to pay double for this lesson; I pay the choreographer and I pay Joe his regular rate for his time.*

*In our private lessons, Joe spends a lot of time watching DVDs of the figures we’re working on. It seems that we’re about at the same level, and I’m starting to feel resentful about paying the choreographer and paying Joe for training we both need.*

*I’m so grateful to Joe for introducing me to dancing, but right now I feel stuck in a situation that is limiting my growth. Would it be wrong to ask Joe to pay for half of the choreography sessions?*

*I don’t want to hurt or insult Joe, but I want to move forward. I really appreciate any advice you can give me.*

*Sincerely,*

Marilyn in Maryland

Dear Marilyn,

Congratulations! It’s wonderful to hear how dedicated you are to your dancing and how much you’ve already accomplished.

Your situation with Joe is very common and the solution seems clear: it’s time for you to move up to a new teacher. As you say, Joe was a great teacher for you when you were just starting out. In fact, Joe’s early support helped you to discover your love of dancing and your desire to pursue it more seriously. Unfortunately, it doesn’t seem that you can continue to grow if you stay with Joe.

I wouldn't recommend asking Joe to split the choreographer's fee because that blurs the line between teacher and student. *Dance partners* split the fee, but that is not where you and Joe are at. No matter how friendly you are with your teacher, there always needs to be some professional boundary, or teacher and student can end up in murky ethical waters.

It's almost unheard of for a serious dancer to stay with the same teacher for her entire career. There are beginning teachers and then there are progressively more advanced teachers. It's time for you to start working with a teacher who has the capacity to take you to the next level. All dancers benefit from working with a wide variety of teachers with different backgrounds and skills.

Ideally, Joe would recognize the situation and say to you, "I think I've taught you all that I can." Since that doesn't seem likely to happen, it's time for you to initiate the conversation. Remember that your intention is to be grateful for all that Joe has taught you, and honest about your goals for the future and your need for a different teacher.

Joe has done his job. A beginning teacher who instills a love of dance in his students has given them a gift that will stay with them throughout their lifetime. I know that you are clear about this, and at the end of your conversation, Joe should be as well.

I'm proud of your hard work, Marilyn, and look forward to hearing about the next stage of your career. Let me know how things work out.

Warm Regards,

*Diane*

*Diane Jarmolow welcomes your questions and comments. She is available for consultation on a wide range of issues involving dance teacher training, BDTC-in-a-Box, studio management, and studio culture. You can visit her web site at [www.teachballroomdancing.com](http://www.teachballroomdancing.com), and can contact her at [diane@teachballroomdancing.com](mailto:diane@teachballroomdancing.com).*