

Is Your Body Language Holding Back Your Career? Communication doesn't end when the choreography is over.

Dancers are physical communicators. It is both our profession and our passion. But what happens when the music stops and there is a break in rehearsals? Our communication doesn't end when the choreography is completed. The truth is, the way you act at rest can make or break your career. Ballet masters, choreographers and artistic directors see meaning in all forms of body language, not just those that happen while the music is playing.

Maintain Eye Contact

Dancers need to demonstrate active listening skills. Even when you're not dancing, choreographers take note of who's watching what is being demonstrated. If your back is turned, there is an assumption that your ears are not open. Julie Kent, artistic director of The Washington Ballet, says, "A dancer should show an interest in learning not only their steps, but in whatever the stager, choreographer or teacher has to share with the room."

Watch Your Alternate

A pet peeve of many choreographers and stagers is repeating the same information to every cast. Remember: Listening to all the corrections given on your role saves both your studio leaders and your colleagues from having to hear every correction twice. Even if you are first cast, keep your ears open to new corrections. Peter Boal, artistic director of Pacific Northwest Ballet, often reminds dancers to keep working even when they are not dancing. "During that time, they can listen to corrections, learn from others' successes or struggles and review port des bras and timing while their legs get a rest."

Put Your Cell Phone Away

Cell phones have become a common item in most dance bags, but they should stay in your bag—not out in the studio. Unless you are researching a role or listening to music from the rep, phone use is usually aggressively frowned upon. "I want the entire hour and a half to be devoted to the shared process of learning and improving," says Boal. "Check your likes later." If you need to use your phone for an emergency, check in with the artistic staff.

Be Aware of Who's In The Studio

Every company culture is different and each studio leader will have a different interpretation of what constitutes attentive behavior. Tony Randazzo, ballet master of Boston Ballet, says there are so many inadvertent gestures that all dancers need to be aware of: "Talking, leaning on the barre, hiding in the back, sitting down, eating, poor posture, grooming and wardrobe choices are all behaviors that can send a negative message." Know who is in the front of the studio and be sure your behavior is an active representation of your inner ambitions.

Control Your Facial Expressions

There is most certainly a thing called RBF (Resting Ballet Face). This does not mean you have to smile at all times when in the studio; it just means you have to know yourself. Guard against those moments when you are simply at rest but look hugely displeased. Even if you are having a rough day, seek out inspiration in the room around you. "Don't waste time with negative mental distractions," says Randazzo. "Inspired, happy dancers absorb material and concepts more rapidly and do well over time."