

Ask Diane “My Studio Is A Gossip Mill” November 25, 2009

Dear Diane,

I've been taking lessons at my studio for four years. I love dancing, and up until the past year, have also loved the family atmosphere at my studio. But now I'm considering leaving the ballroom world altogether.

Last year the studio got a new owner who loves dance but has little business experience. She's either not at the studio, or holed up in her office at her computer. Things within the studio are falling apart. The garbage cans are always full and the customer bathroom has been broken for weeks.

Worse, the instructors now stand around the front desk, drinking lattes and gossiping with the students, even during lesson times! I've heard them talk about other instructors, the owner, and even other students. The most recent rumor is that the owner doesn't have enough in her bank account to cover the next payroll, and all the instructors' paychecks are going to bounce.

I've been with my teacher for four years and like and trust him, but he's started to make side comments during our lesson about “working for free” and not being able to pay his rent.

This is all very upsetting to me. I don't want him to work for free, but I don't know if these rumors are true. Should I pay him under the table? Are the teachers making fun of me when I'm not there? When are we going to get back to working on my Medal test?

I used to love to dance, but all this gossip makes me feel sick.

Please help.

Sincerely,

Ruth in Florida

Dear Ruth,

Thank you so much for your question. I am very sorry to hear about the disturbing situation at your dance studio. It seems that your whole studio community is suffering from a crisis of leadership and direction. The relevant question here is: what can you as a student do about the problem?

First, the practice of teachers standing around gossiping with students during lesson times is completely and totally unacceptable. It shows a serious lack of professionalism on the part of the instructors, regardless of the situation with the studio owner. While you as a

student cannot stop the instructors from gossiping, you can refuse to be a part of such a destructive conversation.

As a writer once said, gossip is a snake that poisons everybody. I have always had a zero tolerance for gossip in my studio and in my personal life. It is seductive and corrosive and has the capacity to ruin businesses and wreck friendships. Because gossip can be so insidious, you need to take a conscious stand against it. Just standing and listening is equivalent to being an active participant.

As a student, you should refuse to participate in the instructors' latte-time stories. You can do that by simply walking away, or by telling the gossiping teachers that you are not comfortable with the conversation. If your own instructor is gossiping during your actual lesson time, you can either change the subject or tell him directly that you are not comfortable with the conversation. You are a serious student and your learning should not be compromised by sneaky, back-handed stories that may or may not be true.

Another possibility would be to discuss the situation with the studio leadership. This is a good option when there is an involved and responsible director, which may not be the case at your studio. If you do decide to go this route, you should discuss your concern with the gossip per se, and not the actual stories you've heard. It is not a student's place to ask the studio owner if he will be able to make the next payroll.

The rampant gossip at your studio compromises the integrity of everyone. While you as a student can't fix the larger studio problems, you can maintain your own integrity and refuse to participate in the pernicious stories. If the gossip persists despite your efforts, the best solution may be to find another studio. You should never, ever have to choose between dancing and your own integrity.

I know you will choose the right path, Ruth, and I wish you all the best.

Warm Regards,

Diane

It has been an honor and a privilege to be a part of Dance Notes for the past two years. We would like to thank the editors of Dance Notes for their support and for the opportunity to be a part of such a fine publication.

"Ask Diane" will continue in a new format. Be sure check our web site, www.teachballroomdancing.com for news about future columns. You can also email Diane Jarmolow directly at diane@teachballroomdancing.com. She is available for consultation on a wide range of issues involving dance teacher training, sales, BDTC-in-a-Box, studio management, and studio culture.