

Bad Dancing, Submitting, and Surrendering

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

When I was in college, I used to hate going to parties where there was a lot of dancing. In fact, I did everything I could to avoid it. If I took a girl to a party and she insisted on dancing, I would generally have one of my friends dance with her because I disliked it so much. I am not sure what it is about dancing, but it is just not something that gets me all that excited, and it never has.

If I really have to, though, I will dance. I am so bad at dancing that people often imitate my moves on the floor. One of my worst dance moves I have heard several people refer to as "the chicken" and it involves flapping my arms like a chicken, bobbing my head, and butterflying my legs. My dancing is so bad that people often form little circles around me and start cheering because they think it is so funny. I have had too many embarrassing and humiliating moments to count. Imagine walking by girls in the school hallway and having them flap their arms and imitate your chicken moves. Or imagine standing around in a group of people, having a serious discussion about this or that, and being asked to demonstrate "the chicken dance." I also remember another one of my patented moves, "the lasso dance," wherein I moved my hand over my head for the entire duration of the dance; that one has certainly earned a few remarks over the years.

Several years ago, I went to a highly regarded professional coach with all sorts of degrees, to bounce business ideas off of. Although we never talked about my dislike of dancing, or about the humiliating experiences I had had dancing in the past, one piece of advice that he kept giving me blew my mind:

"You should go get dance lessons. Preferably from a sassy black woman with a lot of rhythm. She'll bring out your groove."

"What the hell are you talking about?" I asked him.

We were sitting in a very serious sort of office and the bookshelves were lined with all sorts of books by various important figures in business and personal development. There were various statues around the room and a nice oriental rug on the floor. It looked like the sort of room we could be smoking a couple of cigars in and sipping scotch. The coach was well dressed in khakis and a nice pressed shirt. He was also a very serious sort of guy, and in case you are wondering, he was white. Very white.

"Dance lessons from a black woman who knows how to get down will help you loosen up and get more in touch with your body, mind, and spirit. You are resisting everything right now, but when you dance you will learn to surrender."

I never went for dance lessons. I have no idea why he suggested the dance instructor needed to be "black and sassy," but he really meant it.

What he was saying, I think, was that I was an uptight white guy, and that I needed to loosen up and learn to get into the groove, whatever that meant. For the longest time I thought that was some of the crappiest business advice anyone could possibly give someone. I could not believe that this was the sort of professional advice I spent a lot of money on, and took up a lot of my time to get. I was looking for some advice about how to be a [better businessman](#)--not how to shake my booty. I had the following sorts of reactions to what he was saying:

- Withdrawn
- Skeptical
- Pessimistic
- Critical
- Judgmental
- Stubborn

These are the sorts of reactions we all have when we are resisting something. I flat-out resisted what the man said because it was not what I wanted to hear. It represented a part of myself I was not interested in. If he had instead said, "I recommend that you spend two weeks at a seminar at UCLA Business School about cross-border transactions in Russia. It is important that you understand the relevance and importance of cross-border trading with Russia to our modern economy," I would have run right out and signed up for the course--despite the fact that I have never had anything to do with Russia in my business or career. However, when being advised to learn how to shake my booty, I was very resistant.

This Saturday I went to see a rock concert with my wife, and like at all rock concerts, there were people there who had been dragged along half-willingly by others. There were a lot of confused, uptight people like me there because it was a small and private benefit concert being put on by the rock star father of one of the kids in my daughter's preschool in Malibu.

While the rock star is very well known, the concert was small and numerous parents of the preschool kids all showed up in the little auditorium at Pepperdine University in Malibu, with no idea who the performing rock group was. I am sure they had all heard the band's songs on the radio throughout the years, but many of the professional white-collar sorts who were at the concert did not know who the group was. It was fun watching various parents stand there stiffly while they watched the band perform. Most of the other parents got into it, though, and had fun. I was terrified of dancing because I did not want other parents making fun of my dancing. The last thing I wanted was people flapping their wings at me if I were to run into them at the grocery store or at my daughter's soccer practice. After all, I am grown-up now.

I was one of the ones who stood there stiffly at the concert, at least for the first forty-five minutes or so. When you are one of the people who is not dancing at these sorts of events, you are typically looking around at the other people not dancing, making faces to each other that say things like:

- *What the heck are all these people thinking dancing!*

- *We are all far too cool and professional to be dancing.*
- *Has the world lost its mind? Look at all these silly people dancing!*
- *I cannot believe that person is moving around like that!*
- *This band is out of control. What a bunch of freaks!*

If you are part of the group of people who are not dancing, you are in good company. I have been at giant concerts inside of stadiums that hold 100,000 people, and if I am not dancing, I have always spotted someone a couple of rows away, not dancing; we invariably instantly connect and exchange glances about the absurdity of the situation, clearly sharing an impression that everyone in the audience should be uptight like we are. If you are one of the people not dancing, you will always know who the others are who share your ability to be uptight.

After forty-five minutes or so, my wife started poking me, trying to get me to dance. As I do at most of these events, I started to dance but without doing the chicken, or any other number of moves that would bring me certain humiliation. I was half-dancing to the best of my ability, as an act of submission.

There is a difference between *surrendering* and *submitting*. The act of submission is more akin to the act of a slave than anything else. When you submit to something, you do so as an act of weakness, in response to pressures around you. You are acting because you are being dominated by outside forces, not really based on your own free will. You are a victim when you submit and are not really in control at all of your life. You are trying to look like something you are not, to someone else. As a victim, or as someone who is submitting, you are not really changing or enjoying what you are doing at all. Instead, you are simply acting a certain way or doing a certain thing because you feel that you should--that it is expected of you.

When you do not act in the way you want to, or a way that is natural to you, there is going to be covert resistance, an inability to put forth your full effort. Fear of action, hostility, and all sorts of other negative emotions will overtake you. You become hostile because you are not really acting in a way that you want to. The way you really want to act lies festering beneath the surface, suppressed.

When I am at a wedding and someone tries to get me to join a conga line, I tend to get a little bit hostile and resistant. As you might guess, I do not enjoy this very much. I might reluctantly motor around the room with the other wedding guests, but I never put my full effort into it. I don't exactly *go for the gusto*.

There have been a few times in my life when I have been truly excited and have put my full effort into dancing. I enjoyed those occasions; however, in those instances I was surrounded by people I knew well, so I was not as self-conscious. I have been at seminars, for example, where the seminar leader got everyone to jump up and down and scream about how excited they were, and I have gotten into this and really let go. I love going to seminars and getting pumped up at them, as opposed to engaging in public dancing. I am not sure why this is, but I think a lot of it probably has to do with the fact that I am more inspired by concepts and ideas than music and rhythm.

When I am at seminars where I am jumping up and down and excited, I am doing something far different from when I am dancing at a concert or in a bar. When I am jumping up and down at a seminar, I have *surrendered*, and when I am dancing at a concert I have most often *submitted*. Understanding this difference could change your life and career. The odds are very good that there are areas of your life where you have *surrendered* and are doing well, and other areas wherein you have *submitted* and are constantly sabotaging your own success.

The act of surrender is something that we choose to do. When you surrender, you are letting go and allowing whatever is to just be. Surrendering is a conscious decision and choice. When you allow what is to be, you open yourself up to whatever may come along. This defines the act of surrender.

- Surrendering could be as simple as, for example, allowing yourself to be close to another person.
- Surrendering could be deciding that you are ready to make the most of yourself and to start applying yourself.
- Surrendering could be allowing yourself to experience what is, instead of resisting what is.

The stiff people who are standing in the audience at rock concerts (like myself) are all resisting. When they start dancing, they are generally just submitting. You can always distinguish the movements of people who are dancing in a submissive way; they are awkward. They do not move their body a lot. They are just going through the motions, not really accomplishing much with their dancing. Most of all, the people who submit are not really enjoying themselves all that much when they are dancing, which you can determine by their facial expressions. *They are only dancing because they feel they should be doing it, others are doing it, someone is forcing them to do it, or they want to avoid being different....*

In contrast, the people who are dancing freely and willfully have allowed themselves to "surrender" to the music. They are not self-conscious; they are simply feeling the music and living the music. They may dance with their eyes closed and move their bodies, totally oblivious to those around them. They are completely "into the music," having a great time, and feeling very good about what they are doing.

- *Someone cannot be a good dancer unless he or she surrenders.*
- *Someone cannot really fully enjoy himself or herself at a concert, unless he or she surrenders.*

In fact, unless you can learn to surrender, you will never be good at anything and you will never become anything of significance. If you cannot surrender, you will never have the career you want, or the life you want. Many, many people go through life not surrendering, and instead they continually resist.

For example, some people enter each relationship they are in resisting commitment. Other people enter various jobs and resist committing to the job because they feel they should be doing something else, or something better. Some people resist applying themselves because they feel that if they apply themselves they will have *submitted* to a certain type of lifestyle or career.

What are you resisting in your life and your career? The odds are very good that there is something that you are resisting, and whatever it is that you are resisting, it is holding you back. You will never reach your full potential and be all you are capable of unless you pick someone or something to which you can comfortably surrender.

One of the most exciting things in the world is spending time around people who have achieved great things, or, more simply, people who are incredibly happy. I do not care if the person is a rock star or an attorney; I absolutely love spending time with very successful and/or happy people. The reason is that in almost every case there is a certain vein that runs through the

histories of the most successful and happy people: They have found a profession, a person, a way of life, or a calling to which they have surrendered. They have surrendered their life to something and have allowed whatever it is to, in a major sense, define how they run their lives.

You can always tell when someone has surrendered to something in their career. They base their life around the profession and are enthusiastic about it. They do not lament how they wish they had another job, wish they were doing something else, wish they lived somewhere else, or wish they were with someone else. Instead, the person who has surrendered has achieved a greater level of focus, commitment, and spirit for their way of life than most people ever do.

I love looking at how rock star musicians dress. The rock star I saw on Saturday night looks tough and has long hair, but he also wore a Scottish kilt at one point during the concert. He did not care how he looked. He had surrendered to be the person and the persona that he wanted to be.

The people in the audience who were getting down and having the best time had also surrendered to their experience.

The people who had not surrendered, or who had submitted, were resisting the music and just waiting for the end of the show.

Resisting and thereby not allowing one's self to surrender is often the reason behind mediocrity or failure, in almost every profession, and in life. When you are resisting, you are never able to apply yourself because your heart is not completely *in the game*. You are a slave to a job, another person, or the life you are in. You let the life you really want to stew beneath the surface, although you would much prefer to be somewhere other than where you are.

What is the secret to surrendering? I think the secret to surrendering is finding something that you respect and can surrender to. When you respect a profession and hold it in esteem, you can easily surrender to it. You do not need to resist the job because it is something that you want to be part of.

When you are doing something you are interested in and feel comfortable doing, you are doing a job that you have *surrendered* to. When you are doing a job that you do not feel comfortable doing, which is not in accordance with your values, you are doing a job that you have *submitted* to. No one can ever do very well in a job they are submitting to, and if you take a job like this, you will likely never amount to much in your career.

Are you in a profession to which you have *surrendered*? If you are not, you need to be.

THE LESSON

You must surrender to your profession, doing work with which you are comfortable and in which you are interested.

Conversely, you have submitted to a job in which you are uncomfortable and which does not conform to your values; nobody thrives in such a situation, and such a job is unlikely to advance your career. When you hold your profession in high esteem, however, there is no need to resist your job and you can easily surrender to it.