

The Professional Dancer

First Edition

“The Business of Bellydance”

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- I Definition of Professional Dancer / Instructor / Choreographer
- II Defined the term "undercutting"
- III Bellydance Code Of Ethics & Professionalism
- IV Do's & Don'ts
- V .Education is the key

SECTION I: Definition of a Professional Dancer/Instructor/Choreographer

A Professional Dancer/Instructor/Choreographer is recognized as one who:

... has presented his/her work to the public by means of exhibitions, publications, performances, readings, screenings or similar representations appropriate to the nature of his/her work

... devotes a reasonable proportion of his/her professional time as an artist to promoting or marketing his/her work, including, but not limited to, presenting himself/herself for auditions, seeking sponsorship, agents or engagements, or similar activities appropriate to the nature of his/her work

... receives or has received, compensation from his/her work including, but not limited to, sales fees, commissions, salaries, royalties, grants and awards, any of which may reasonably be included as professional or business income

... has a record of income or loss relevant to the exploitation of his/her work and appropriate to the span of his/her artistic career

... has received professional training either in an educational institution or from a practitioner or teacher recognized within his/her profession

... has received public or peer recognition in the form of honors, awards, professional prizes or by publicly disseminated critical appraisal

SECTION II: Definition of Undercutting

... to diminish or destroy the province or effectiveness of; undermine

... to sell at a lower price than or to work for lower wages or fees than (a competitor)

... (verb) sell cheaper than one's competition

SECTION III: "Code Of Ethics & Professionalism"

This applies to those members of the belly dance community who play an ACTIVE & PROFESSIONAL role ... along with these PRIVILEGES come special RESPONSIBILITIES.

Professional Dancers/Instructors/Choreographers shall extend professional courtesy to all fellow professionals. For example, "standard rates" should be adhered to.

Professional Dancers/Instructors/Choreographers should keep a "Standard of Excellence" by continuing their dance education.

Professional Dancers/Instructors/Choreographers shall only offer services for which they are trained and qualified to perform.

Each Professional Dancer's/Instructor's/Choreographer's behavior reflects on public perception of the dance. Therefore, while in public and identifiable as a Professional Dancer/Instructor/Choreographer you must avoid behavior that clearly is in violation of accepted moral and legal standards.

Professional Dancers/Instructors/Choreographers shall not, under the auspices of Middle Eastern dance, incorporate the behaviors or practices of erotic dance, stripping, or related fields. They agree to maintain boundaries between these very separate vocations.

Professional Dancers/Instructors/Choreographers shall make every attempt to be aware of workplace and payment standards and not lower the standards of pay nor engage in workplace practices that degrade the respect for the art form, degrade working conditions, or reward it based on factors other than merit and ability in dance.

Professional Dancers/Instructors/Choreographers shall keep the physical and mental well-being of students as a primary consideration. For instance: Instructors will not restrict information about seminars or workshop events from their students when the instructor, sponsor, and material presented are ethical, accurate, and appropriate to the level of the student. Instructors may not forbid their students from studying with others.

Professional Dancers/Instructors/Choreographers shall agree to keep the students first. For example, Instructors shall never view students as "competition" but instead should help mentor those students with talent, interest, motivation and ethics into future peers who will be a credit to the field, and in general try to guide, help and address concerns. No one who is concerned about being "passed" by a student should teach. Being exceeded is what we all hope so that the next generation will rise higher.

Professional Dancers/Instructors/Choreographers shall not, through personal contact or through representatives, attempt to recruit students from another school or institution.

Professional Dancers/Instructors/Choreographers shall speak the truth about professional experience. For example, you shall refrain from making false claims to past fame or affiliations. You shall not falsify credentials. You shall not knowingly disseminate unverified or unsupported pejorative insinuations or statements about another professional.

Professional Dancers/Instructors/Choreographers shall respect the intellectual property of others and not represent it as their own or belonging to anyone other than the originator.

Professional Dancers/Instructors/Choreographers agree to credit sources for choreography, music, photography, and intellectual property in general when possible.

Professional Dancers/Instructors/Choreographers shall guard the individual rights and personal dignity of each student and not engage in discriminatory practices in regard to age, weight, religion, disability, race, gender, or sexual orientation.

Professional Dancers/Instructors/Choreographers agree to respect the privacy of all students served and responsibly use personal information gained from that relationship.

Professional Dancers/Instructors/Choreographers shall not monetarily manipulate their students. For example, instructors may not require their students to purchase products or services from them at a price that is substantially more than the market rate as a condition of their remaining in class. Instructors shall not promise students unrealistic guarantees of work.

Professional Dancers/Instructors/Choreographers, who adhere to the "Code of Ethics & Professionalism", are of high moral character and conduct themselves and their practice in a professional and ethical manner.

This "Code of Ethics & Professionalism" is a GUIDELINE ... that should assist us in UPHOLDING this art form & more importantly ... in RESPECTING EACH OTHER.

SECTION IV:

1 ... DO ... Let the other professional dancers/instructors/choreographers, especially the new ones; know what the fair and established pay rate is in your area, for classes, performances & shows.

2 ... DON'T ... Never make an offer to take over another performers current gig, especially at a lower pay rate.

3 ... DON'T ... If you are approached for a gig - never work for less than the previous performer was making. Don't do free demos, this will only lower your perceived value.

4 ... DON'T ... Don't badmouth other professional dancers/instructors/choreographers. You will get a rep as a "bad mouth".

5 ... DO ... Talk to other professional dancers/instructors/choreographers and build a support network. This is your best source of job information, referrals and help when you need it. And remember this is a two way street.

6 ... DO ... Be a total professional. Know your strengths & limitations. If you need help here, talk to those other professional dancers/instructors/choreographers in your support network. And always give friendly suggestions when needed and help when asked.

7 ... DO ... Share information with your fellow professional dancers/instructors/choreographers, especially about what "jobs" have problems and which should be avoided. You don't want friends to become victims too; "jobs" with a reputation for underhanded practices can be avoided.

8 ... DON'T ... There will always be different levels of talent - Don't promote rivalry, competition or cliques. It will hurt business in the long run.

9 ... DO ... Teach the new professional dancers/instructors/choreographers in your area this basic code. It is in your best interest to work in a field with other professionals. Some old ones may need a refresher course too. It is always better to have the other professional dancer/instructor/choreographer be your friend than a competitor and enemy. "We must learn to hang together or we will all hang separately." Even sharks don't eat each other.

SECTION V: Education is the key ...

Educating the public on what proper standards are is the only way to ensure a future of healthy dancers, create informed audience members, and promote a new generation of qualified teachers. The responsibility for standards will not fall on some national governing board. Rather, it spreads out from each of us to our students and the public at large. **THE RESPONSIBILITY IS OURS.**" – Cristy Fernandez