

Brian Nash: Creating a Whole New Social Network

A Personality Profile

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## Brian Nash: Creating a Different Kind of Social Network

### A Personality Profile

It's Saturday at Brian's studio. He's choreographing a dance step for a class of about fifty people. "Gentlemen, grab a partner and apologize for what's about to happen." It's one of Brian's standard lines. The group has just finished trying to learn a difficult dance step, and everyone nervously finds their partner to see how well they can dance it. Who knows if the men or the women are the most nervous: the men because they have to lead the step or the women because they have to follow someone who can't lead it. Many people experience the sweaty palms and nervous chatter that accompany a new social environment; add dancing to that mix and pulses race at double-time. Maybe Brian knows that humor lightens the atmosphere; maybe it puts people at ease; maybe Brian loves to create a social environment conducive to bringing people out of their shells.

Just what does an award-winning, accomplished, and respected dance instructor really love about dancing? Maybe it's the awards, which are prolific: numerous best teacher and best studio awards from all over the country. The plaques and trophies cover the walls and countertops of his studio. Who wouldn't love that? Brian loves it most when his students earn awards from highly competitive, high quality events. He's never had to cajole his students into competitions. Something about the dance environment drives them to excel and to perform. "Compete with yourself first," is the way he wants them to think of dancing. He knows that will also develop the social skills to be outgoing and confident.

As a younger man Brian never imagined a career in professional dancing and teaching. Soccer and basketball were his teenage loves. Then one day a girl entered the picture; she danced. Brian began Salsa lessons and soccer took a back seat. He moved into Hustle, the dance of choice in the early 70s; think John Travolta in *Saturday Night Fever*. A championship trophy wasn't long in coming, and his talent for observing the details and breaking down complex steps took shape the longer he danced. His

students love his ability to see the minutest detail in a dancer's posture, arm movement, and footwork. They are the kinds of details that turn even a modest, social dancer into a marvel among friends.

Brian has coached a dance team at Rutgers University for over twenty years. Their division 1A athletic program has a slew of top-notch coaches; even one of their former football coaches now coaches in the NFL. In the midst of all that coaching talent the university singled out Brian with a plaque for being the most dedicated coach they have ever had, high praise from a prestigious athletic organization. Only a real love for his craft and for his students would drive someone to attain that stature. It's one of his favorite awards. But even after the Rutgers dance team performed on "Dancing with the Stars," his biggest thrill wasn't the personal glamor and prestige of it all. Seeing the young people who are excited about ballroom dancing made it a worthwhile experience for him.

Back in the Saturday workshop the dancers mingle to find their partners. Forming a circle in the ballroom the size of a gym, they attempt the movements he has demonstrated. Brian knows he'll have to fix many of the dancers' steps. He is unfazed. He just wants them to learn. He seeks to connect in some way with everyone, to bring them together into something akin to a dancing unit, all couples performing the same steps with equal ease. He tries to assure even the new dancers. "Compete more with yourself," he tells them. "Don't worry about competing with others." He wants them to enjoy the music and the challenge of doing something new. Other dance teachers have recognized his talent for styling his students with precision and consistency, and they have commented on his gift for connecting with everyone and with bringing everyone together. It's all about the dancing, but it's also about the social network for Brian.

Looking around the room he demonstrates the new steps. He makes it look easy. With a smile, he offers words of encouragement. His true love of dancing is about to happen. "What I love most about dancing is how it changes people, develops their social skills, and makes them more outgoing and confident," he says. It's happening all around him at this point. Numerous couples are experiencing the

fun of ballroom dancing. As they move around the room to try the new steps with different partners, their confidence grows. By the time Brian turns on the music, most people have performed the steps adequately. Later the dancers get to practice what they've learned during several hours of social dancing. Brian may not be too sure at this point if he has fully succeeded in giving everyone a jolt of confidence, but he hopes so. For many people it opens up a whole new social network, and it's what Brian loves most about dancing.