10 Characteristics of Dancers

Agnes de Mille once said, "Ballet technique is arbitrary and very difficult. It never becomes easy--it becomes possible. The effort involved in making a dancer's body is so long and relentless, in many instances painful, the effort to maintain the technique so grueling that unless a certain satisfaction is derived from the disciplining and the punishing, the pace could not be maintained."

Notice the words difficult, effort, long, relentless, painful, grueling, discipline and punishing. The bottom line: Dance is hard. To dedicate your life to dance means developing certain personality traits that will enable you to maintain focus and stay committed to your dream.

A characteristic is: A feature or quality belonging typically to a person, place, or thing and serving to identify it. So what characteristics identify a dancer?

**Passionate**

In the musical "A Chorus Line" the performers say, "All I ever needed was the music and the mirror." It takes passion to see your dream and to continue coming back to it over and over again, when the rest of the world tells you "no, thank you." It takes passion to dedicate hours to training and rehearsing. These are hours away from your family, friends and community. It takes passion to remember why you do this during times of exhaustion, fatigue and frustration. Perhaps above all, dancers are passionate about what they do.

**Confident**

The dance world is always requiring you to stand alone. Choreographers, companies and teachers want to see your individual work. In auditions, they want to see your individual style, personality and talent. It takes confidence to believe in yourself and your ability. This isn't always easy, especially during times when auditions simply aren't going your way. It takes confidence to remind yourself that you can keep going, and for every 500 rejections you get, there will be one "yes, you've got the job!" Confidence is what pushes you to the next level in training and performing, and it tells you that deep down, you know you can do it.

**Meticulous**

Dancers pay close attention to details. For example, where are you placing your weight? (In the heels or in the balls of your feet?) Are you closing to fifth position? (Completely?) Where is your head, your shoulders, your eye focus? These are all questions that cross dancers' minds during class and while performing. A dancer's brain never rests while dancing. You are constantly evaluating and re-evaluating. This is what makes you better. Being meticulous is what leads to better, stronger dancing. It also comes into play when remembering details about companies, people or characters for auditions. Being meticulous is what helps dancers strive for perfection.

**Humble**

Dancers are constantly being humbled by their bodies, their peers and their teachers. If nothing else, dancers are humbled by the difficulty of the art. Ted Shawn once said, "Dance is the only art in which we ourselves are the stuff of which it is made." That means, each day requires dancers to assess their bodies, their minds and their emotional and mental status. Some days are good and some days are bad. Staying humble is important for dancers because it helps remind everyone that they can always do better. Not everyone has the opportunity or facility to do such things, and dancers should always remember it is an honor to be part of such an elite group.

**Stubborn**

This may seem like an odd characteristic to develop, but dance training and the dance life requires a slight stubbornness from those who wish to do it well. For example, sometimes you have to choose to believe in your dream even when others tell you not to. In class, you have to be stubborn about holding a pique arabesque high in the air, even when your body's weight wants to give in to gravity's pull. It takes a little stubbornness to return to auditions, even when you've been told "no" thousands of times. This stubbornness - when used for good - can foster within
yourself what is called "grit." Grit is defined as: A positive, non-cognitive trait, based on an individual's passion for a particular long-term goal. Christa Justus, a lifetime performer, once said, "If you want to dance seriously, do. You must think about it day and night, dream about it--desire it." Use your stubbornness wisely, and it will help you to succeed.

**Optimistic**

Merce Cunningham, American dancer and choreographer, said, "The most essential thing in dance discipline is devotion, the steadfast and willing devotion to the labor that makes the classwork not a gymnastic hour and a half, or at the lowest level, a daily drudgery, but a devotion that allows the classroom discipline to become moments of dancing too." Dance is always looking forward. Dance honors progress, growth and the hope for something better and more. Dancers attend classes each week in hopes that after each class they are a little better, a little stronger. Dancers believe each step is moving them closer to something grand. Just as ballet classes start small and move to large movements, so does the dancer's mind. Dancers hold within them an optimism so strong that they are willing to sacrifice their time, energy and bodies to their craft.

**Fearless**

Being in the dance world comes with a lot of fears. Questions such as, "What if I'm not good enough?" and "Why can't I do that?" haunt dancers almost daily. There is the fear of not having money, fear of injuries, fear of not being liked. Fear is always waiting to consume the mind and body. Dancers learn to overcome this fear. They learn to use fear as fuel to be better, work harder and stay focused. Dancers allow fear to drive them forward as they go leaping into the unknown.

**Dedicated**

Nothing can come between a dancer and their focus. When a dancer sets a goal, their mind is made up. Dancers know what it is like to sacrifice for their art, and they do - without hesitation. They will rehearse during odd hours simply because that is the only free studio space available. They will work everything around a performance, a rehearsal or a class. Dancers know what it is to give their all, and they do it every day. They "walk the walk" and they do it with tireless dedication.

**Independent**

Dance can be isolating at times. You, alone, have to train your body. You will have help from your teachers, but only you can take feedback and put it back into your dancing. You, alone, have to audition. You, alone, have to figure out how to keep going during times when you feel weak or find yourself questioning your talent. Through trying experiences, dancers become fiercely independent. They run their schedules, their life, while handling bills, scheduling classes, traveling, and sometimes working multiple jobs. Dancers learn how to make everything work: dance, work, life, friends, family. And they do it on their own.

**Conscientious**

Conscientious (adjective): Wishing to do what is right, especially to do one's work or duty well and thoroughly. Dancers wake up each morning with this initial desire. You hope for a good class, for a strong body, and for improvement. You hope to impress the teacher and to impress yourself. The desire to do well at dance is what runs through dancers' veins and helps start the fire of all of the other qualities. It is what drives dancers to defy gravity, to work themselves to and past exhaustion, and then say, "I'll try it again" without having to make the teacher ask. These ten qualities are what make dancers who they are; a fascinating group of individuals ready, willing and prepared for anything. Dancers care deeply, and they are willing to alter their bodies, minds, attitudes and schedules all because they love to dance.

Friedrich Nietzsche once said, "And those who were seen dancing were thought to be insane by those who could not hear the music." Many people have called dancers "crazy" for working so hard and for giving up so much of their time and energy to dance. But dancers do not see it that way. It is these ten characteristics that push them forward, that keep them hearing the music, when everyone else cannot.