NON-VERBAL CUEING: THE NEXT LEVEL
YOUR TOOLBOX
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This manual is NOT a set of RULES. Consider this a fully loaded toolbox. Just as you don’t use every tool in the box for every home repair project, you won’t use every tool in this manual for every song or even every class. Then again, you may use many tools in one song. You will assess each song and situation and apply the tools as appropriate.

Non-verbal cueing is one of the primary cueing techniques in the Zumba® program to ensure and enhance the Zumba experience. This session and manual will focus on advancing your non-verbal cueing skills. We will introduce and identify skills for you to keep in your toolbox, which will include a plethora of non-verbal skills and some verbal cueing skills as well. As a Zumba Instructor, we ask that you go to your non-verbal cueing skills FIRST; verbal cueing is used in Zumba classes to enhance the experience, for safety, or to communicate something you could not have communicated non-verbally.

The key to successful cueing is to remember that you are communicating with your students. The purpose of cueing is primarily to prepare your students for a change in movement, encourage and enhance their experience, and keep them engaged. Cueing (of all kinds) is no small task, and like most skills is honed and perfected over time. There is always something new to be learned. Cueing in Zumba classes serves one master: your students.

1. The music makes your class.
2. The choreography takes the class from a fun to an efficient workout.
3. The cueing you provide makes your students successful and enhances the experience.

*Note: Teaching facing the class. Though teaching facing your students is recommended in Zumba classes, there are situations and types of students who benefit from other methods. In this manual, we will be working on the assumption that you are facing your students while teaching, as non-verbal cues are most effective when facing your class. You can amend this information to best fit your teaching techniques in your classes at home.

Doing It Right
Where does anxiety in our students come from? Our students come to class wanting to have a good time, exercise, party and enjoy themselves. At the root of that (for most of them) is the desire to do a good job (i.e., they want to do it RIGHT). The anxiety, intimidation or fear they feel often comes from being afraid
they can’t do the steps or can’t follow the instructor. They fear embarrassment, humiliation and even your disapproval.

Reminding your students that there is no “right and wrong” in the Zumba program (just safe and unsafe, for instructors to keep in mind) is important, but it won’t make their fears disappear. The desire to “do it right” is innately human. As you (the instructor) learn to communicate better with your students, the more confident and adventurous your students will become. The more your students trust you to clearly communicate, the more they will let go and give you more energy and intensity.

As the instructor, our job is to translate the music and movements into a language that the students can read and follow. The timing of your cues (before the change) is just as essential as the style and clarity of your cues. Cue too late and your students won’t have enough time to follow you. Cue too early and they will feel silly and frustrated trying to figure out when to make the change.

Cueing success begins at the door; you can manage your students’ anxieties and encourage their success even before the class begins.

**Setting the Scene**
The first step in making your students successful is setting the scene. Prepare your students for the journey ahead with your introduction to the class. They are about to embark on an experience and whether they are new students or existing ones, a brief introduction will prepare them for the ride.

Introduce yourself, the intermittent format, safety information (hydration, floor structure, bathrooms, etc.) and the non-verbal concept. Now is the time to set your students up to succeed.

**From Fairly New to Fitness Fare**
To properly prepare your introduction, let’s understand who you’re talking to. Some of the new students who wander into your Zumba class will be brand new to fitness. These students will be full of excitement and, most likely, some trepidation. They are likely to be the most easily intimidated, and it’s important to briefly introduce the concept of non-verbal cueing to prepare them for what’s next and ease their nerves about how to follow your lead.

Other students will have previous fitness or group fitness class experience. It is equally important to prepare these students for non-verbal cueing. In the fitness world verbal cueing is the norm. And in many group fitness formats, verbal cueing is absolutely essential to the success and safety of the student. In the fitness world, a sign of poor instructor skills is they don’t speak enough – or – they aren’t verbally cueing clearly or on time.
When you have experienced fitness students in your Zumba class for the first time, neglecting to give a brief introduction to the non-verbal cueing concept can create a negative first impression. During the full hour of their first class they are likely to relax and begin to enjoy the Zumba format; however, the instructor (you) will spend the first portion of the class working hard to overcome a bad first impression. This can rob the students of relaxing into and enjoying the class.

A SHORT introduction to the concept of non-verbal cueing can make a big difference to the experience of your students. And in the end the experience of the Zumba program IS the Zumba program.

**Beginner Instructors – Basic Non-Verbal Cueing (Overt Cueing)**
Instructors new to the Zumba program and/or non-verbal cueing usually start with the most overt form of non-verbal cueing. Overt cues are the non-verbal counterpart to verbal cueing. These cues include:

- Pointing
- Finger Counting
- Pantomime
- Directional Cues
- Sign Language (From the top, turn around, etc.)

This type of non-verbal cueing is easy to learn both for instructors and students. In terms of the party atmosphere/experience, these overt cues can become cumbersome and feel like a non-verbal lecture if overused in every change for every part of your class. Like strong spices, overt non-verbal cues are best used in small quantities to season a class well and make it more palatable.

As instructors improve, new skills/tools are added to the non-verbal toolbox in addition to the overt non-verbal cues.

**The Traffic Cop: When to Use Overt Non-Verbal Cues**
As you progress as an instructor, there are still times for overt non-verbal cues. Imagine a traffic cop at a busy intersection with no working traffic lights. Without clear signals that can be deciphered quickly and followed easily, you would have a traffic pileup or an accident.

As you have big directional changes, turns, directional variations of core steps, or situations where you need to manage the flow of traffic in your classes, these are the best times to be the traffic cop.

- Pointing
- Finger Counting
- Directional Cues
- Pantomime
Put it in Your Piggy Bank
The best way to ensure your students pay attention to certain non-verbal cues is to use them sparingly. If you wave your hands over your head 10 times every song to get their attention, that cue becomes less unique. Pick a few cues you will use as a traffic cop to manage your students in situations where they will need to pay close attention and use these cues sparingly – save them in your piggy bank. Thus, when it comes up in a class the meaning is clear and catches their attention immediately.

Avoiding a Non-Verbal Cueing Dictionary:
Using the same non-verbal cues over and over again is a good plan and creates consistency for your students. However, we do want to avoid creating a lexicon of Zumba-inspired sign language for your students to decipher. Zumba classes are popular because you don’t have to know fitness language, dance language, or even the Spanish language to participate. A complicated non-verbal language will scare your students away.

KISS! Keep It Simple, Silly!

Advancing Non-Verbal Cueing Skills (Subtle Cueing):
Subtle cueing will be less obvious to your students, but done correctly they will easily follow you, without even realizing you are cueing.

What You Need to Know Before You Start:
When embarking on the journey of more advanced non-verbal cueing it is essential that you have your music memorized. Know both your music and choreography plan inside and out. As you begin to play with the subtle methods of cueing you will be dancing less, performing less and TEACHING more. Your students will begin to learn less by mimicking and more through your tutelage.

Stepping into your next phase as an instructor will challenge your current skills. Wherever your skills may currently be, you’re here to be a better you.

Really?!? This Seems So simple:
Here are some simple techniques that may seem like common sense, but using these skills purposefully will make a noticeable difference to your students.
2. Finish one step before you start a new one!
3. Consistency!!!! Consistency leads to predictability, if you students can predict some of your moves or the direction you are likely to go in a turn, then they can focus on other aspects of the party and let go!
   Examples:
   a. Pick a lead side (right or left) and stick with it for the duration of the class (do make sure both right and left sides of the body are balanced).
   b. If you turn around to facilitate their learning – stay on the correct foot. Pay attention to your student’s experience.
   c. If you turn one way in the cumbia – do the same on the other side.

**Plan Your Cueing Choreography:**
Just as you will map out your choreography dance and fitness steps for your class, you can create a plan for cueing your students before class. This will help you learn your choreography and have a more polished product for your students. It will also clear your mind to be more responsive to your students rather than reactive to your choreography.
1. Identify the parts of the music.
2. Learn the music.
3. Choose the core steps that go with each part of the music.
4. Choose any variations you’ll use for your core steps.
5. TEST your transitions! Can you transition from one step to another easily? What do I do if my steps don’t transition well?
   a. Make a small change to smooth out the transition. Maybe a small change in arm patterns or foot placement will help.
   b. Add a transitional step between the 2 steps.
   c. STOP! Yes, it’s true! You don’t have to be in constant motion.
   d. Change the variation used with the Core Step to facilitate a smooth transition.
   e. Change the core step to facilitate a smooth transition.
7. Start a cueing plan – how you intend to cue your students.
8. Try it on your students... see how it goes! Changes may be on the horizon!

**Using Your Choreography to Cue:**
Taking your overt cueing to the next subtle level and stepping out of the traffic cop role, you can use your arm, body, and leg variations to help cue transitions and changes in direction, intensity, or core steps.

**Look Ma, No Hands!**
While hand and arm cues are useful, they are not your only tool. Let’s practice some hands-free approaches.
Body Placement
Telegraphing the moves
Emphasize a change in the step before the transition
Facial Expressions
Body Expressions
Showing the movement vs. dancing the step

Using the Music:
Teach one element at a time (core step, then add arm variation, then add another component)
Use a distinct sound from the music
Use sound to teach technique
Sing along
Challenge your students to dance without you
Get your students involved! Make them dance with you not follow you!

The Ability to Adapt
The best instructor with the coolest music, moves, and most amazing choreography plan in the whole wide world is still only mediocre if that instructor doesn’t have the ability to adapt their choreography and cueing plan in the moment to best serve their students. We all know the best-laid plans are often the ones that fail with the biggest SPLAT. What was spectacular in your living room may only be OK in the classroom. What one group of students can do and follow may not work for another group.

As instructors advance they develop the ability to recognize the need to adapt their plan as well as have the skills to make that adaptation on the spot. These are skills that take a lot of time and a lot of failure to cultivate, but your students will benefit immensely from your effort.

Stages of Engagement:

Level 1:
Level 1 is all about self. Have you ever been in a conversation and instead of concentrating on what your friend is saying, you are thinking of your own stuff, or even contemplating what you want to say in rebuttal? When you are in Level 1, you are totally focused on yourself. This can be an important aid when self-regulating, but can also cause a disconnection between you and your students and distract you from being at your best. When you are in Level 1, you are thinking about:

Your day
What you have to do later
What you forgot to do earlier
What you’ll make for dinner
How you feel
Did I do that step right?
And on… and on… and on!

When you catch yourself in Level 1 (and you will), recover and focus on Levels 2 and 3.

**Level 2:**
Level 2 is all about the other person. You can achieve Level 2 engagement when you let that internal Level 1 dialogue go for the moment and you are completely focused on the other person(s) you are with.

The benefits of Level 2 are connection with others, ability to focus on their needs and experience, and the ability to adjust accordingly.

The pitfalls include the fact that there are a large number of people in the class, which can be a challenge, and other factors and events occurring in the room, which may affect your class and need to be taken into consideration for a complete class experience.

**Level 3:**
Level 3 is the final stage of engagement where you are able to monitor your Level 1 (your own internal dialogue and needs) while connecting with the others in the room and keying into their needs and experience, AND taking in the environment around you and responding to it all at the same time. Level 3 is a true balancing act and often at any one time an instructor is bouncing between Levels 1, 2, and 3.

When you are able to master the task of Level 3 engagement with your students, you will be able to see to their needs and assess your plan of attack. The most CRUCIAL cueing skill (verbal and non) is the ability to adapt to your students needs.

You may have a wonderful cueing plan when you walk in the door, but it may not work tonight with the unique set of circumstances that make up that class. Being able to respond to your students’ needs by adapting your cueing plan or adjusting your plan of action, are beneficial skills to have available in your little toolbox.

Now take your toolbox and build something great!