

## **ACA Viewpoints**

### **Let's Reverse the Loss**

**By**

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The American Callers' Association in its attempt to be of service to all callers, dancers, and associations provided current, timely, and effective information on new dancer recruitment, winning ways to retain club dancers, and pitfalls to drive square dancers away from 2001 through 2017. ACA really appreciates the positive comments, encouragement to continue, and contributions from callers and dancers all over the country and from abroad to continue these initiatives. ACA will continue to provide information that will help the square dance community recruit, retain and retrieve square dancers as well as encourage the dancers to speak out on the cumbersome, antiquated and deleterious dance programs.

The ACA Viewpoints articles for the past sixteen years in American Square Dance magazine have focused on the American Callers Association's commitment to help clubs and callers by researching and relating current and successful recruiting activities that clubs are doing and sharing this information with the American Square Dance magazine readers. In the year 2000, square dancing had an approximate participation membership decline of 10 % a year. The American Callers' Association is and always has urged that the current stressful and lengthy dance programs must be

simplified to allow for a more dancer friendly entry and unified dance program.

Marketing research suggests that perspective non-dancers want to have clubs where they can learn to dance in as little as three months and then dance wherever they wish for as long as they wish.

Perhaps, it is now time to realign our thinking. Look around your town as you drive through it. Do you see many 1940, 1950, 1960, and 1970 automobiles? The drivers of today's automobiles, pick-ups, and SUV's have updated their vehicles to stay with the changing life styles. Why hasn't square dancing done this to reflect the needs and wants of the non-dancers? In fact, it can be argued that square dancing has gone from being empowered by the dancer friendly dance programs to being starved and imprisoned by complicated and stressful dance programs.

We can look with reverence for the past, but we must focus on the future. In visiting with new dancers who have recently left square dancing, several of them stated that they believed that square dancing has no place for new and struggling dancers recently out of lengthy and stressful lessons, nor would they recommend square dancing to anyone as some veteran square dancers will not dance with them or tell them to dance at the back of the hall with only new dancers in their squares to allow other dances to have their 'perfect pat or pet" squares. Some square dancers have chided the new dancers and told them that they did not belong at the dance because they could not dance well enough. How can some veteran square dancers push them out of the activity knowing that square dancing is in nothing short of a crises decline?

The complicated and cumbersome dance program and treatment of new-dancers contribute to tragic losses of new dancers. We have to remember that the square dancers' entrance and exit continue to turn both ways. When it becomes easier to go out the door than stay, the new dancers leave, and square dancing appears to be a declining activity with an average declining attrition rate of 9% to 10% per year.

This month's ACA Viewpoints describes the in and out process encountered by many square dance clubs as **New Dancers** come in, and **New Dancers** quickly leave. Square dance organizations bemoan the declining membership. Despite the fact that, ACA and other organizations have continued to publish examples of recruiting activities that are working here and now and have provided positive results to clubs that have tried them. The real question is, in the long-term, how beneficial were they? In other words, what happened to the coveted new club dancers?

Let us encourage an active positive approach. Let's welcome them and invite them to dance in **all** our squares and not relegate them to dance at the **rear of the hall** with other new dancers. On the contrary, veteran square dance members should bind together to teach and assist the new dancers. Make new dancers happy to be there. Applaud them, encourage them, and dance with them. Then they will tell others. Activity creates activity. We can make the exit portion of the revolving doors revolve in not out if square dancers welcome new dancers and offer a simplified dance program. Then and only then could square dancing cease to be in a critical decline. The decline of the square dancing life cycle will not correct itself or bottom out and begin growing

without **changes in the dance programs, changes in attitude of square dancers,**  
and a **commitment of all organizations to work together.**

ACA is committed to working with square dance groups to improve square dancing. Let's move forward together to simplify square dancing, gain more dancers and eliminate separatism and segregation of square dancers and clubs, and pay the price for success not the price of failure.

Any individual, club, caller, or association who wishes to communicate his/her opinions on this subject is encouraged to contact the American Callers' Association at Mac@Americancallers.com Dr. Patrick Demerath at pdemerath17@gmail.com.

Please visit our website and newsletters Mac@AmericanCallers.com/news.

Until next time Happy Dancing.