

AMERICAN CALLERS' ASSOCIATION VIEWPOINTS

By

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The Upside Christmas Tree and Dancers' Resolutions

The American Callers' Association in its attempt to be of service to all callers, dancers, and associations has provided current, timely, and effective information on new dancer recruitment, winning ways to retain club dancers, and pitfalls that drive square dancers away for most of 2000- 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 dance programs.

I would like to take this great opportunity to introduce to all the callers and dancers to Mac Letson, the ACA Recorder and Founder, who has voluntarily managed the American Callers' Association from its beginning in the early 1990s. Very few people know how hard Mac works and how much time he has devoted and continues to devote to square dancing, square dancers, and the American Callers' Association. To Mac Letson: THANK YOU for all the great work you have done and do now to support square dancing. THANK YOU ONCE AGAIN!! YOUR EFFORTS ARE INSPIRATIONAL.

Square dancing is a fun-filled, healthy and social activity which for the past 35 years has greatly declined in the numbers of dancers, clubs and callers. It can be argued that part of the causes of the decline are due changes in life style and technology most of which are called uncontrollable variables in statistical research. On the other hand, if one looks at the when the decline quietly began, it was around 1980. This was the period when more and more square dance movements and programs were continuously added increasing stress and time for square dance lessons, stretching callers' quantified not qualitative calling skills and the inevitable aging of dancers. Recruiting of new dancers, drop out of current dancers and students leaving square dance lessons or departing soon after graduation became the norms. Square dancing has two separate forces working against it from Without: Life Style and Technology Changes and from Within: the rapid and continuous expansion of dancer movements aka levels and programs. Both make it difficult to recruit and retain potential graduate square dancers. Currently square dancing appears to be like an upside down Christmas tree with a very narrow base at the bottom of new dancers and a large broad top with too many maneuvers and programs. The base of new dancers is narrowing each year as is the number of square dancers in the population.

This month's ACA Viewpoint also offers a thought that that dancers are the sole group that can come up with recruiting ideas that make people think despite the life style and technology changes and the cumbersome and stressful dance programs. Sometimes problem arise when the new dancers get on the floor and haven't a clue as to what to do because they have not had sufficient time to practice in class and digest

what they were learning. Students get frustrated, discouraged and do not return resulting of clubs losing members in instead of growing.

One club communicated that their club dances twice a month, but still have lessons on the night they dance and the off-nights as well. The lessons are for one hour preceding the club dances and for two hours on the off weeks. On dance nights in addition to the one hour lessons, callers call at least two student level tips starting with the third week of lessons. The students are encouraged to stay to dance the student level tips. The club members socialize with them during the dances as well as at lessons. The club reported that they are having a higher percentage of students staying with the club after graduation because they have been made a part of the club, gotten to know the club members, learned the square dance movements, and have fun. Lest we forget: "Fun is the Center of Square Dancing." In order to do this the upside down Christmas tree must be step by step modified so the base to be expanded with a strong international one floor program keeping the dancers dancing together. Merely attempting to expand the base without a consistent and stabilized unified dance program likely would not stop the decline in the number of dancers, clubs and callers.

Perhaps it can be argued that square dance clubs and callers need to think outside of the established boxes and borrow innovative/successful ideas from other organizations. Currently there is a movement starting with the millennial age group of people joining fraternal organizations that their baby boomer parents abandoned long ago. Let's look to see how we can attract them.

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

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Please visit our website and newsletters @American Callers.com/news.

Until next time: Happy Dancing