



American Caller's Association

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WEB PAGE - AMERICANCALLERS.COM

JULY, AUGUST, AND SEPTEMBER 2022 NEWSLETTER

Letter from Bill Chestnut...

Be careful when the phone rings, it may be someone wanting you to do something. My phone rang and Mac Letson asked me to write an article for the newsletter. I am not a writer and I shall prove that in the next few paragraphs. It is an honor to serve on the board of ACA and I hope to get to know many of you much better. As I said, I am not a writer, but I do love this activity of square dancing and its associated partners of rounds, lines and contra. I started dancing as a kid in the 60's and calling in 1966. I enjoy dancing and calling as much today as I did then. As we all do, I miss the full halls and large classes and dances we had a few years back. I believe there is a bright future for square dancing and I believe we have to create opportunities for new dancers to find us and join in. I also think we must find and develop new callers to help us spread the word. Covid certainly knocked our already declining numbers for a real loop.

What is the direction we need to go to overcome the loss of dancers that are still away? Where did they go? Some are still afraid of the disease; some have found other recreational activities to replace dancing. Some have had health issues and will be unable to return and some have made that final trip to the great square dance in the sky. (We certainly have lost some great callers so talent for dancing is overly abundant.)

Where can we go to find the dancers to replace the ones we have lost? Many clubs started with church groups over the years. Some were started as a recreational activity for large corporations and businesses. Service clubs and civic clubs are looking for programs that we as callers can provide either with dancers or just using the history of our dance. Is there a military base in your area that you can approach the USO or the recreation officer and offer lessons? Ask your dancers what brought them in and let's try some of the things that used to work. There are lots of caller discussions about the use of calls and "stretching" the definitions. Should we use the calls from all possible places or should we stick to "standard" positions? Maybe we need to ask each of our clubs what they want. Do they want more calls presented in a challenging way, or do they prefer more vanilla. One topic that always comes up is how many calls we need. Bobby Keefe, Gary Shoemake and I worked up the ACA short list a few years ago. Our friends at Callerlab have started the SSD program so there are fewer calls to teach. Either list allows you to run multi classes each year. But if we are not getting people to the classes it doesn't matter if there are 10 calls or a 100 on the list.

I know that we all hope and are willing to work towards full halls, big classes and happy dancers. All of us need to find out what our dancers want and expect. Dick Barker was one of my mentors when I started in this calling world. Dick passed away a few years ago, but his advice remains very timely. Dick told me that no matter how many dancers were present, 1 square or a 100, we owed each dancer the value that they paid at the door. It is easy to get excited when the crowd is big but make sure you show your best stuff at the small dances as well. Keep 'em square and have a good time.

Bill Chesnut

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Nurturing and Retaining New Dancers

By Patrick Demerath

The American Callers Association appreciates the positive comments, encouragement to continue, and contributions from callers all over the country and to continue these initiatives. The American Callers Association will continue to provide information that will help the square dance community recruit, retain and retrieve square dancers as well as encourage new dancers to complete the lessons, stay with their clubs and at the same time to speak out on the cumbersome dance programs. That's the reason so many new people drop out before they complete the classes.

As clubs recruit new dancers and progress them through lessons, it is critical to be aware of the ways we should be thinking about ways to keep people involved and to stay in square dancing after the lessons and to stay with their clubs after graduation. For at least one year after they complete the Class. When the dancer lessons started the club members were there to help the new dancer with lessons before graduation. After graduation it becomes the new dancer duty to stay in the club for one year. Are until you pay back the help that was given through the class when you started. We might create a strategic plan and forget about what everybody else is doing that does not work or try something that has been proven to work. This is the way it was done when all the levels were started The American Callers Association gets calls and emails all the time from callers that are trying different things to recruit new dancers. We have to do things differently this day and time if we are to get people to be a part of square dancing.

One very sobering thought is that if square dancing had the biggest advertising campaign in the world; if we had a spot on television every hour on the hour; if we had corporate sponsorships that would spend mega bucks to promote square dancing; if we had lobbyist supporting square dancing; it might not attract new dancers. This is not intended to dissuade advertising, but to encourage club members to invite people. Flyers, brochures, and square dance name cards placed in doctors', dentists', veterinarians', store windows, and church bulletins and bulletin boards are reported to us as the most effective promotion and advertising.

The First Hidden Secret is that the most effective way we will ever get new people in square dancing is "People to People." In order for this to happen we must have club members with the intense desire to bring new people into square dancing. The members and the caller must be friendly and patient to make the new dancers in lessons feel WELCOME AND WANTED.

The Second Hidden Secret is once we get them there, we must impress them with the fun and friendship of square dancers. This is not a time for perfection. Get them dancing and having fun. That first impression will bring them in or drive them away from square dancing.

Nurturing New Dancers Suggestions

The New Dancer Open Houses require leaders or a caller who is a good teacher, exceptionally patient, but can provide a pleasant reassurance to everyone present. A caller must be 'Prepared' to organize the full evening of fun activities, and be able to change the program when the time arises. If you have children present, include them in your program. If you make everyone happy, your evening will be a success.

REMEMBER, New Dancers not only come to learn and to Square Dance but also for fun and friendship. Therefore, club members must offer Fun and Fellowship and new Friends who make them feel Welcome.

NOW THAT WE HAVE PROPOSED THE THEORETICAL, HERE ARE THE PRACTICAL WINNING APPLICATIONS TO APPLY EVERY TIME.

- 1. KEEP THE EMPHASIS ON FUN, FUN AND MORE FUN**
- 2. GET EVERYONE INVOLVED DANCING EXPECIALY THE NEW DANCERS.**
- 3. CALLERS KEEP IT SWEET AND SIMPLE & EASY & FUN**
- 4. USE FUN-FILLED MUSIC**
- 6. DRESS PROFESSIONALLY WHETHER IN SQUARE DANCE ATTIRE OR NOT**
- 7. BE FRIENDLY & PATIENT & ENCOURAGING**
- 8. CLUB MEMBERS MAINTAIN A FEELING OF ONENESS WITHTHE NEW DANCERS.**
- 9. DON'T OVER DO IT – LET EVERYONE LEAVE WANTING MORE AND WANTING TO RETURN.**

For more information, please read the Editorial Article by Bill Boyd in the October 2016 Issue of American Square Dance Magazine. It has some very excellent and encouraging suggestions.

Any individual, club, caller, or association who wishes to communicate his/her opinions on this subject is encouraged to contact Mac Letson at the American Callers Association at loumac@aol.com or Dr. Patrick Demerath at pdemerath@hotmail.com If a dancer or caller has any ides of successful opinion on retaining new dancers in lessons and new dancers after graduation, please contact us and ACA will publish it for you. Please visit our website and newsletters at American Callers.net. You are always welcome. *(If you are a dancer or a caller and have something you would like to have included In this newsletter, contact Dr Pat Demerath at pdemerath@hotmail.com.)*

Until next time, Happy Dancing and Think Fun and Friendship.

The purpose of starting a new square dance class is to teach people to square dance in a way that will lead to many hours or even years of dancing fun and enjoyment and to encourage them to bring all their friends into Square Dancing. They will if you let them have FUN and don't keep them in a class too long.

Remember the time when you started Square Dancing? How nervous and inexperienced you felt? We should never have people feel apprehensive about joining a Square Dance Class.

We should explain that Square Dancing is one of the easiest forms of dancing in the world to learn, because you learn a few calls then dance them for a time and then add two or three more calls. The learning process is FUN.

We believe that this method of teaching will allow classes to be taught in less time with fewer lessons plus a better and more capable dancer for the future of Square Dancing.

We have gone through the experience of starting classes for many years, more that we would like to count and hope that by sharing with our experience and insight that we have had for so many years we can make your class experience more pleasant, satisfying, and enjoyable for you and your new dancers.

Some callers will use the big circle and you can teach many calls for the big circle.

I think the quicker you can get people into the square formation the better off you are because they will do very little dancing from the circle after they become square dancers. If you have a better way, use it.

Good Luck with you new class!

Mac Letson

RETAINING THE CLASS DANCER

From the first night of class there are forces beyond our control that will work against each class member's goal of completing the class and becoming a Square Dancer. These forces such as job change, illness, family problems etc. will force some folks to drop out of class. The "Drop Out" due to forces we have no control over, we must accept as part of any class program. The ones that leave our class because we have "PUSHED" them our dure to poor teaching, trying to teach too much for them to learn in a short period of them, a short teaching fuse, lack of dancing for fun and success to build up their confidence and many other aspects of class, WE DO HAVE CONTROL OVER.

IMPORTANT ASPECTS FOR THE RETENTION OF CLASS DANCERS:

1. Be aware of the feelings, fears and mixed personalities of those who are attending the class especially during the first month or so.
2. A good teacher will have lots of patience.
3. A strong regard for the feelings of others.
4. Add humor to the program.
5. Get to know the class members by name as soon as possible.
6. Avoid a tone of voice that show you are annoyed with them.
7. Create an atmosphere for learning that is relaxed and positive.
8. Have ways to gain their attention without being offensive.
9. Avoid singling out an individual who is having a problem.
10. Visit with the dancers between tips. Avoid visiting with the same few dancers, move around the floor to various locations.
11. Show your enthusiasm throughout the length of the program. It shows you really enjoy calling and teaching.

IMPORTANT OF TEACHING SQUARE DANCING:

1. Be prepared for the night's lesson. This includes what needs to be reviewed form previous lessons either in dance or form a walk thru.
2. Short and to the point explanations, A good clear "teach".
3. Teach form the Heads and the Sides.
4. Make your presentation without having to learn another call in order to get started learning the "feature" call.
5. Have several simple dance routines ready for practice with a quick return to a Left Allemande.
6. Provide LOTS of practice dancing using the new call and as the call becomes well understood mix it into routines with other WELL know calls.
7. Do not rush thru the teaching program at a pace only the best in the group can keep up with.

8. Prepare a lesson plan that provides for:
 - A. The introduction of new calls.
 - B. A review of the past two weeks calls.
 - C. Time for dancing for fun and practice that simulates “dance” not a class.
 - D. Teach the basic styling as you teach the mechanics of the call.
 - E. Form experience, note the trouble spots in each call.
 - F. Note mistakes made by some dancers so they can be smoothed out either by a bit of talking while calling or a walk thru between tips.
 - G. Your plan must be flexible to allow for “Good” and “Bad” nights.

DEVELOP SEVERAL WAYS TO TEACH AND EXPLAIN HOW TO DO A CALL.

USE DEMONSTRATIONS SO ALL CAN SEE THEIR PART OF THE CALL.

A PICTURE IS WORTH A 1000 WORDS.

USE THE TWO-COUPLE MOUNTAIN STYLE CIRCLE TO MAXIMIZE THE PRACTICE TIME AND AS A MIXER.

PROVIDE EQUAL TIME FOR THE HEADS AND SIDES TO START OFF THE ACTION.
USE HELPING WORDS THAT DANCERS CAN HANG ON TO.

TEACH FORMATION AWARENESS. HAVE THE DANCERS LEARN THAT IT IS IMPORTANT TO KNOW IF THEY ARE ENDS OR CENTERS OF LINES OR IF THEY ARE FACING IN OR OUT IN WAVES, IN AND OUT FACING COUPLES IN TWO FACED LINES ETC.

PAT THE DANCERS ON THE BACK AT EVERY OPPORTUNITY AND BE POSITIVE WHEN THINGS GO BADLY.

ALLOW THE CLASS TIME TO ASK QUESTIONS.

TAKE TIME TO TALK A BIT ABOUT OUR ACTIVITY, THE HISTORY AND HOW THE AREA FUNCTIONS WITH CLUBS ETC.

DEALING WITH ANGELS:

There are several viewpoints on the use of angels. If you use angels be sure to spend time with them on how to “be an angel”.

CAUTION ANGELS ABOUT:

1. Showing off with fancy twirls, kicks etc.
2. Over helping, allow the class dancer to make mistakes.
3. Being the teacher, that is your job.
4. Dancing with the same couples all the time.
5. If used for demonstrating a call show them what you are planning so they know what to expect.