



# American Caller's Association

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Web: [www.americancallers.net](http://www.americancallers.net) 2019 Newsletter April-May-June

Tom Roper



*From the President, my opinion and observation*

Greetings, I hope that this finds everyone healthy.

I am in the process of completing my 10<sup>th</sup> season as resident caller of Tower point Resort in Mesa, Arizona. This year, I have realized one of the main reasons our activity is declining is that no one wants to be known as **Square Dancers** anymore, we label ourselves as Plus dancers, Advance dancers, etc., and of course no one wants to be known as a Mainstream or Basic square dancer, what happened to the **Square Dancer**, is it because it's not **Cool** to be known as such. Today many people use the clothing issue as an excuse, that's just what it is, an excuse. If we don't look like **Square Dancers** no one knows that we are. When we go out to eat before or after the dance if we don't dress like **Square Dancers**, we just look like everyone else in the restaurant.

I have been in the Square Dance activity for over 42 years and have been a fulltime caller for 37 of those years. I spent 12 years in Harlingen, Texas at an RV resort and the last 10 years here in Mesa, Arizona at a very similar resort. I have watched the square dance activity decline for over 30 years.

My situation here in the Arizona resort is quite different from that of other callers. Many of the residents that come here for the winter come for only 2-3 months, some for 5 months and some live here fulltime. In my Beginner class I teach only Basics, if they are able to stay longer than 3 months we are able to teach the Mainstream list. For those that are unable to stay thru the Mainstream list, they can continue when they leave here, or do the Mainstream when they return the following season.

I am able to run 2 sets of Beginner classes, this year I had 5 Squares in the first part of the season, and 6 Squares in the second part of the season. My classes are **FREE** each and every week and they pay for a weekly dance, which I have each and every week beginning with week one.

I truly believe the reason my classes are successful is that we have **FUN** not only in the class but also at the weekly dance. We all must agree that the most fun we had was when we were new square dancers.

Sometimes I feel that we have chased away more dancers than we have retained. When the new dancer comes into the hall, they have no idea if there are 10 calls or 100 calls, we tell them that they have to be there for a certain number of weeks to learn it scares them off and they never return. If they do return, we take them thru Basic and Mainstream class, teach them a few Plus calls then let them go to dances. In some case they are not able to dance to the caller, which they blame for not calling what they dance, they get discouraged and quit dancing.

I recently watched a video taken at a weekend. It was advertised as a Plus weekend, the portion that I listened to had 3 of the 4 callers calling separately. A total of 4 plus calls were used, 1 of which was a combination of 2 calls, (follow your neighbor and spread), what happened to the other plus calls on the list? I have often said that 80 % of the callers only call 20% of the calls. If we are not going to use the entire list, then let's consolidate it. It's time that we as callers wake up, we are not being fair to the dancers.

Callers need to step up to the plate and do whatever it takes to teach people to **Square Dance**. There are too many that want to "pick the fruit off of the trees." It seems that not enough callers want to go the extra mile to teach new dancers. When one comes along and calls the entire list and the dancers are not able to do the calls, then they blame the caller.

Maybe we are not able to get young people or even middle age people into the activity, but what about the folks that used to dance? They may be 60-70 years old, but today that is not old, and think about it, they won't need lessons, just a few **brush ups**.

This is just my opinion and observation of what is happening to the activity that I love and even though I call and dance all levels, I am proud to say that I am a **Square Dancer**.

Good luck to everyone but remember this: "If you don't put water in the well, it will soon run dry."

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## **My Views as a Professional Caller... Why Square Dancing is Fading Away**

I have been reading a lot of different articles about square dancing and why they think it is failing. I have read things from Callerlab about how new dancers want a shorter program and how certain moves should be and are dropped from the list, and maybe break the Mainstream program up into three (3) sections or three (3) levels. They keep telling us that the new dancer needs this and the new dancer wants this and how the new dancers are going to react to certain things.

American Caller Association tells us that the 'One Floor' is the right approach or program, maybe it is. They also tell us that they are there to help the clubs. dancers. anything to do with square dancing. maybe so. This is what has brought me to write this article as a Caller for 58 years (1961) and I have taught 60~ 70 sets of lessons. I own my own record company, been all over the country. I think I know what I am talking about. What I have to say is we are very quick to point a finger at someone or something that is tearing square dancing apart. but as callers take a close look where the other three (3) fingers are pointing! They are pointing at us, we as callers are the biggest reason square dancing is declining! There are many reasons and I am going to try to touch on them.

One reason is that as a Caller we are no longer respected or viewed as a leader, we are just a paid employee, people no longer seek our advice or input on anything, we just go do our job. get paid and we're out of there and onto the next event to call. We give no customer service, no help to the people we have lost that as Callers. Yes! Yes! I know, I have been to dances where the Caller runs around to shake everyone's hand and say its 'great to have you here but trust me some dancers feel you are as fake as a \$3dollar bill. mix with the crowd and let them approach you, ask them their name, talk to them for a minute. be interested in knowing a little about them. that's customer service. Have you not gone into a store and had someone wait on you and talk to you to find out what you want and help you find what you're looking for and get the best bang for your buck? You are going out of that store feeling great about what you have got and you are going to tell people about your experience and what sales person to talk to. Well. as a Caller that's what we need to do for clubs. make people feel like they want to even go back to that club. We need to stop being a Prima Donna and start treating people like we want to be treated.

I was around when Callerlab was started. (1961) in fact my dad, Clyde A. Steele (a Caller also) took me to a couple of the meetings. and I met the great Callers of that time and you know what was nice, is they had time to sit down and talk to me and ask me what they could do to help me with my calling career, they never gave me the feeling that I was any less of a Caller than they were. I know for a fact, that would not happen this day and age! Well it happened to me at a Callerlab Convention. I was told that I was not important enough to be with these so called big name Callers, so that was the end of that! Well enough of that, moving on ... I could write a book about this.

**The second issue is ... New Dancers.** We keep gearing our programs to these 'New Dancers'. How can they be new dancers if we haven't recruited them yet? How do we know what they want? We don't even know who they are, we are gearing our levels and programs to the people that are already dancing, not the new dancers. As I said before, we are quick to point the finger at someone or something that is making our square dance activity failing, but again look were the other three (3) fingers are pointing, yes at us, we as Callers are killing it! These so called new dancers are not coming to lessons because you have shortened the program or you are only teaching a certain level or you are doing a club 50 program. They come for one reason and that is to have FUN! If that Caller can't make it fun then they most likely won't be coming back, so that doesn't mean to stand up and tell a joke, you have to make them feel good and as Callers we are seriously lacking in this field!

So many of our Caller's (nowadays) get a computer, put a couple of songs on it, plaster a badge on their chest and they tell everyone I'm a Caller and they know nothing! Oh! wait a minute, we are going to one of the 4-day Caller schools that is put on by these big name *Callers* so they can make more money and they turn them loose after only 4 days and tell them they are *Callers!* Good luck on that one! They get discouraged and quit, now we have lost them or even worse, they go home and try to teach a set of lessons and they have no idea what they are doing because most of them are not skilled enough to dance well themselves and if the computer does not tell them what to do, they are completely lost, yet we trust our new dancers to them! That would be like you signing up at the local college for a course and you go to the class where the person that is teaching reads everything out of a book, and when they ask a question, they can't answer you and they'd have to start over every time! I bet any amount of money you would go back to the college office to ask for your money back! Well that's what we are doing to our new dancers we are in trusting them to people who can't teach! You can't teach something that you do not know yourself!

This brings me to one of my main points ... we have no organization or body of people to police this kind of actions, all we do is set back and wonder what is happening to Square Dancing. You know these big name Callers do these four (4) day Caller's Schools, why don't we make them a Caller's Certification School? Make these Caller's be certified to teach, so we can keep these new dancers. You say, what are you talking about? Well, say you are taking your kids to school and you are trusting that all their teachers are certified to teach because the person that hired them made sure they were, but yet we let any old *Joe Blow* who picks up a record teach our new dancers to dance! It is no wonder that a class will start out with two (2) squares and end up with one (1) person

- 1) They know nothing about teaching
- 2) They can only call what they have written on their computer, if the dancers can't dance they don't know what to do and people get discouraged and don't come back.

3) They do not know how to teach the fundamentals! For example, I do a Mainstream Workshop every week open to all dancers, and I had a couple of couples come to my workshop who had graduated from a local club with one of those *wanna-be* un-skilled Callers. They did not even know how to number a square, they did not know that the head couples were 1 & 3 or the sides were 2 & 4 OMG!

In conclusion, I believe as a Professional Caller of 58 years, we are one of the biggest contributors to the decline in square dancing. We as Callers of both organization need to police who is teaching and if they are qualified or not! ***Just because they can call does not mean they can teach!*** We have no problem taking any body money for Bmi/Ascap but we do nothing to help the square dance activity. Where is our customer service? I hear complaints that we are losing Callers as fast as we are losing dancers. I believe for (2) reasons.

1) The people that are teaching are not capable of doing so, they get discouraged and quit.  
2) If it is not FUN why do this activity? When all the fun is gone! WHY? Because as Callers we have to teach not only the dance but how to have Fun. You have to get your Eyes out of the computer and ***watch your dancers, and*** (have some humor/interact) with the people and most of all let them know you are there for them, that they really matter. Another point is that we have lost our greatest advertising comes from the dancers them Selves! When was the last time you heard someone walk out of your saying what a great time we had! I have to go tell my friends! ***These people are our greatest sale force for Square dancing and we have to put in the effort to get it back.***

My last point as a caller is that we have to get the respect of the dancers. Take charge of the lessons and don't let the club tell you when you are going to graduate your classes. They need to know that you know as their professional caller, that you will know when they are ready and don't turn your class out into the square dance world without some Guidance, so stay with them and help them through the first few dances, If you can even a Few months of dances, whatever it takes to build and keep their confidence to make Their dance experience a good solid one and they will stay a dancer hopefully forever. In another wards, give them customer service, be a loyal dedicated caller to be therefor them, to help them through the transition of class, into weekly workshops that are on going Weekly in between actual dances, all to build confidence in knowing the foundation moves of square dancing.

Submitted by,

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Professional Caller Since 1961

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#1

Box 1-4

Boys diagonal Pass Thru  
Girls Run, Partner Trade,  
Right & Left Thru. (box 1-4)  
Boys diagonal Pass Thru,  
Girls Run, Partner Trade,  
Pass the Ocean, Recycle,  
Girls Walk, Boys Dodge,  
Left Allemande.

#2

Box 1-4

Girls diagonal Pass Thru  
Boys diagonal Pass Thru  
Center Boys diagonal Pass Thru  
All Trade and Roll, Pass Thru,  
Bend Line, (\*use one of the two get outs.)  
\*Pass Ocean, Girls Trade, Recycle,  
Sweep 1/4(1p2p)  
\*Pass Ocean, Swing Thru, Turn Thru,  
Left Allemande.

#3

Head Ladies diagonal Pass Thru  
Side Ladies diagonal Pass Thru  
All Single Hinge, walk by one to  
PARTNER, R & L Grand.

#4

Heads Touch 1/4

Just the Girls Pass Thru

Centers Square Thru 4 hands,  
others face- Partner Pass Thru,  
All- U- Turn Back, Pass Thru,  
Wheel & Deal, centers Pass Thru  
Swing Thru, Boys Trade, Swing Thru,  
Girls Run, Tag the Line Right,  
Couples Circulate, Half Tag,  
Walk & Dodge, Partner Trade,  
Pass the Ocean, Recycle, Pass Thru,  
Trade By, Allemande Left

Heads 1/2 sashay, Sides Square Thru 2  
Just the Boys Pass Thru.

Centers Walk & Dodge, outside Boy Run,  
Swing Thru, Cast Off 3/4, Girls Trade,  
Boys Run-----All Promenade

#6

Heads --Sq Thru 4, Sides 1/2 Sashay,  
Just the Girls Pass Thru, Center Walk &  
Dodge Outside Girl Run, Touch 1/4, Boys  
Trade, Split Circulate,  
All 8 Circulate, Right & Left Grand

#7

Heads Pass the Ocean, Girls Trade,  
Recycle, Pass Thru, Girls on a diagonal  
Pass Thru, All Cast Off 3/4, R & L Thru,  
Pass Thru, Wheel & Deal, Zoom,  
Centers Pass Thru, Girls on diagonal  
Pass Thru, All Trade & Roll, R & L Thru,  
Pass Thru,  
Wheel & Deal, Zoom, Centers Pass Thru,  
\*Touch 1/4 and Roll, Pass Thru, Right &  
Left Grand

\*Right & Left Thru,

Pass the Ocean, Recycle, Girls Walk,  
Boys Dodge, Allemande Left

#8

Heads Touch 1/4,

Just the Girls Pass Thru

Centers Right & Left Thru  
Outside Girl U Turn Back  
Centers Pass Thru, Star Thru,  
Pass Thru Wheel & Deal, Zoom,  
Centers Pass Thru, Slide Thru,  
Right & Left Thru, Dixie Style to a Wave,  
Girls Run Left, Ferris Wheel,  
Centers Touch 1/4, Allemande Left.