



American Caller's Association

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Newsletter October-December 2024

Hello Fellow Callers,

Here we are again finding ourselves at the end of another year. I hope you all have had a great year of dance so far and have more plans to come together through the holiday seasons. This is a good time for all your dancers to come together with themed dances to make it more interesting and exciting for them.

As your Executive Officer, I have asked a few of our ACA members, that are still out there hustling to make square dancing current and not a thing of the past, to submit letters telling us how to get square dancing back to where it used to be. So many are having great success and I thought we could all benefit from their thoughts on how we could rally together to make this happen.

Happy Holidays.

Mac Letson

October 2024

Hello my calling and dancing friends,

As I write this there has been a major storm that has released a fury of disaster in Western North Carolina. No matter how much planning had been done, nothing could stop the disaster from occurring. This will be a minor setback for the residents as their roads are rebuilt and their electric gets restored. It is great that we have dedicated servants that make life better for everyone around.

As a youngster in upstate NY, I recall reading the Sets in Order magazine, it was the highlight of my month when a new issue came out. Several callers and dance leaders were warning back in the 1970's that we need to do something or our dance as we know it will no longer exist. Unlike the storm mentioned above, things were attempted to fix our problems. There were many more clubs, callers and dancers then. I am sure that the leaders pondered every problem, they took what they thought were the necessary steps. Did they really improve square dancing? Our numbers have steadily declined as the numbers of clubs, callers and dancers have fallen off. With their efforts so we have more or less dancers today? We will never know.

So again we face the fear of our dance activity getting even smaller. Covid 19 surely took a toll on our activity. Some clubs folded and others are struggling. So what do we do?

The largest national convention in California had about 40,000 dancers. Today we struggle to get 3,000 dancers to our national convention. Times were different then when our main competitions for our potential dancer's time were going out to the theater or bowling. With the internet and cell phones in our hand, we can stay home and have all of the entertainment we want. We still provide a wholesome family activity that would get people interacting with one another. When we get them dancing, we must not discourage them by putting them on the road to disaster. Let us make sure that every instructional segment is fun and entertaining. If we focus on getting them through the classes at record speed, their survival rate is greatly reduced. For years we have asked our friends and coworkers to come and try our passionate activity. This time-tested way has worked. Or has it? Word of mouth can also work greatly against us. If a new dancer gets discouraged and not having fun, they will tell their friends that our dances are a waste of time and money. We cannot afford losing the potential dancer and their friends.

Look at the number of new dancers that come into your first night of open house. Compare that with the number of dancers from that have joined your club. Some leave due to health issues, work schedules, and family matters. Some leave from frustration.

As callers we partner with our clubs to keep as many dancers as possible. I strongly urge you to help our activity by slowing down our pace. The clubs will tell you that classes strain the budget. This is true if we lose fifty percent or more of the new dancers. If we kept ninety percent, our club treasure admission price at the door and should have equal opportunity to dance. If they only dance mainstream or whatever entry level program you have, how much time do they have with alternating plus with rounds at their dances? Maybe 40 minutes out of two hours. No wonder they leave us.

As dedicated servants to our square dance activity, let us focus on the new dancers and not let the storms of life discourage them. In closing let's slow down, let the dancers dance and we will retain more dancers from each class we run. We need to let them WIN!! Go get them, and keep them!!

Marty Northrup

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American Callers Assoc

When I got the call from Mac asking me to write another article for the ACA newsletter, I was very honored. Writing causes me to research and as a general rule I learn a bunch in order to put out a little information. Hopefully someone reads it.

Having been involved in square dancing and calling over 50 years, I have seen tremendous changes in my chosen favorite activity. The class I took in 1965 was 12 weeks long. We learned square dance moves and we met a bunch of great people. The caller, Scotty Thomas, told us how to do the moves, we danced them and enjoyed each other. The club members were in charge of everything but the actual dance. The clothes were festive and no one argued about the exact definition of a call. Did I mention we had a lot of fun?

In today's world of square dance, we work hard as callers to teach X number of calls in a designated time period. In most cases, we rush dancers through the class so they can join our regular dances. We tend to discuss calls in caller talk such as "is it hinge $\frac{1}{4}$ or just hinge?" Many dancers don't care, they just want to dance and have fun like we told them to get them into classes.

Back in the good old days, like most callers, I would come to the dance, setup my equipment, socialize with the dancers, call the dance, pack up and head home. The dancers did the rest of the work. I like working for dancer run clubs. In today's world the callers have had to pick up more of the responsibility for the dances and as a result, the dancers don't feel "ownership" of their clubs. We have more caller run clubs and the dancer has one basic job – come dance. If the dancers have more of the responsibilities, would they be more inclined to try to find more dancers to help with the jobs?

There are ideas being circulated to help make classes shorter. We have experimented with the ACA short list called square dancing, the Callerlab community dance program, the social dance program and now we hear about a new proposal. I look forward to learning more about that. When I came in to the activity, we had one level called square dancing. Lots of people danced. The definitions were standardized and levels created. It made it easier to dance as you traveled around. We taught the MS program in a class and had our dancers dance at that level for a year before taking plus lessons. The new dancers were encouraged to bring in new dancers and be the "Angels" for the next class. Then we would introduce plus to them. As dancer numbers have declined, we get them through the MS program and into plus as quickly as possible. Can we do something to change that trend?

I still do an occasional party dance for non dancers. They show up to dance for a couple of hours, enjoy the music, the easy calls, the motions, the fellowship and then go home. Some of these parties have big crowds. The people come out for fun. Are we doing that at our clubs? No matter what the number of calls or the length of the class, what can we do to get more people coming through the door the first time? (I will skip my normal insertion on the effect of square dance clothes as advertising.) Then when they show up the first time, what can I / We do to get them coming back?

Let me know if you have thoughts on anything in my articles. I want to learn from you.

Keep 'em square and in case you forgot, wash your hands.

Bill Chesnut

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SQUARE DANCE LEARNING TIME

For the callers that are still using a twelve-week class-STOP! You are doing a disservice to your students and the square dance activity. You are also ruining your own reputation. If you are wondering why you start a new class of three or four squares and you graduate two to four couples, you better take a look at your teaching techniques.

If you want better results don't put a time limit on your classes. You tell your students they have sixty-eight moves to learn and they will be able to dance anywhere in the country! Your success rate will be much higher.

Here are ways to improve your teaching methods. First use more ends and centers, leaders and followers. There are just a few moves that are boys and girls (star thru, slide thru, right and left thru) and ladies and men sashay.

Next, please teach more than standard position. You don't have to go into great depth but at least try to do a couple of setups of each move. Later on you can do a workshop with more in depth portions to each move.

Regards,

John Carlton/ACA Vice-President



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THROUGH

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AMERICAN CALLERS has two schedules: Fifty Dances or Less and Fifty-one Dances or More. (No restriction over Fifty or More.)

The fees apply **ONLY** to Callers, Round Dance Teachers, Contra Prompters, and Clogging Instructors.

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For all or any part of the year. The fees listed below are for **Caller, Rounds Teacher/ Cuer, Contra Prompter and Clogging**

50- DANCE EVENTS - per year (OR LESS) \$ 187.00

51-DANCE EVENTS - per year (OR MORE) \$ 249.00

The fee's above are much less than most other Association charge for Insurance, License and membership. ACA will always try to get the best price we can for our members. We are working for you.

Note: All information on insurance must be directed to the ACA office Member or spouse badges are: \$20.00 each for pin back and \$23.00 each for magnet back. Price includes postage. Badges will be shipped direct from our badge maker to you. Please allow 30 days for receipt of license. Please feel free to copy and distribute this application to other dance instructors.

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