

CALLERS CORNER

A forum for the exchange of information
between Callers & Dancers

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Fall has passed very rapidly for all, especially our newest dancers! Sure hope that all clubs have a great new crop of new folks, because without them our activity cannot grow & prosper! So, to all our seasoned dancers out there, make sure you welcome the 'newcomers' and help them as they learn the 'Basics' and add to our enjoyment. They are the future of Square Dancing, so treat them well !!

Often though, our newest dancers don't realize just how important their first year can be. So to help them with that aspect, most of the column this month will be on the topic – "**Why is your first year so important**"

As I have said previously, if you have any questions that you'd like to ask any of the Callers, then talk to your own Club Caller first. However, if you haven't had the time or opportunity, then you can send them directly to me, either by email at: askthecaller@squaresandrounds.com or by "snail mail" to the Square Times Editor, who'll pass it along.

All questions will be answered and those that would be of interest to all will be published in this column, with anonymity ensured unless you request otherwise.

*Don't be shy & have a great dance
season !!*

Geoff



ASK THE CALLER

NEW DANCERS - why your first year is so important!

What is that new language I'm learning? Sure I've heard of a 'dosado' and 'allemande left' before, but 'right & left thru'; 'swing thru'; 'Alamo rings'.... What the heck are they? How do I remember what to do when I hear those strange words?

Something new every week..... I'll never keep up? Oh well, we're going away for a few weeks; I'll just catch up when we get back... right? I can always look up the moves in the instruction book & figure out how to do them.... I don't need to go every week, now do I? Can't I just watch the others & learn what I've missed?

Do you recognize any of these questions? Are you thinking the same?

Folks that are "new" to modern Square Dancing don't always realize just how important that very first year is to them, not only for 'now' but for many years to come. What you learn in your first year is the very foundation of all your square dancing experience, whether you dance for 2 years or 22 years. Your first year is your **MOST** important!

Why? - because you're learning on several levels.

1) **A new "language"** - not only combinations of words from English, French & German, but the words that the Callers use to 'link' the moves together. Along with that is the difference in the ways different callers deliver the 'same' commands (calls). Did you know that this 'language' of square dancing is the only one that's used universally throughout the world to all dancers in all countries? Learn it well in your first year!! To do that, you need to dance at least once a week, more if possible. The more you dance, the more callers you hear, the faster you learn & understand the language. And the better you understand the language, the better you can dance the moves!!

2) **Learning to listen ----- to the Caller!** Sure, we learned to listen when we were back in grade school, but over the years we've developed the ability to 'quasi-listen'... that is, listening a bit to what's going on around us, but thinking of other things at the same time. Oh, did I miss something?... no mind, I'll catch it later. Sorry, that doesn't work on a square dance floor. You have to stay **'focused' on what the caller is saying at all times**. Miss a word & you miss a move & your square... well, let's just say you'll find yourself somewhat out of place! So, yes you've got to "stay tuned" to the caller at all times, which takes practice! Hey, this is one time that you have to forget about the dishes, laundry, gardening - so that isn't so bad eh?

3) **It's a building process!** Like any new building, the foundation is the most important part of a strong structure. Well, your first year **is** the foundation for years to come & it needs to be built properly. When you came to your first open house you learned the first group of moves in what we call the 'Basic' program... or the 'foundation' program. Now for each successive week following, you will be learning at least 2 new moves until you complete the full Basic program. Each week builds on the previous by reviewing what you've learned to date & then adding new moves (building blocks) as we progress. So, as you can see, it's very important not to miss a 'block'...you need to be here each & every week if at all possible. If only one of you (in a couple) cannot make it, then the other should attend and then fill in (& help) their partner with the new stuff. For your first year, plan on attending each & every week, but if you are going to be away for more than 1 week, then speak to your caller about how you can catch up upon your return before you go.

4) **Learning to work with your partner.** Each square has 8 people in pairs of 2 that work as a partnership. Most 'partnerships' are 'couples' - ie: married etc. but some are partnerships created by solo dancers for either a single tip or for the evening. Whichever yours is, learning to work with a partner also requires practise. Most moves involve direct partner 'inter'-action (eg: partner trade etc) and each must know 'their' part well.

Again, practise makes perfect, either on the dance floor or at home!

5) **Learning to work with 7 other dancers.** Although you'll hear it said 'dance your own dance' - you are dancing with 7 other dancers & if you all work together & execute well, then the end result is great to see. So, right away introduce yourself to the other dancers in your square; that helps you to relax, know 'who's where' in your square and in particular, who's your corner? And if things don't work out well at some point, then work together to either get home or get into lines so that you can get dancing again quickly! **It's nobody's "fault"** - work with each other & have fun!

6) **Practise makes perfect! I cannot emphasize this strongly enough!** Especially in your first year square dancing extra practise makes an immense difference in how quickly you become comfortable & proficient on the dance floor. The more you dance the faster you learn the language and the moves. You thus become more confident & relaxed on the dance floor. AND... you'll be meeting more new friends & getting more fun exercise at the same time. What a bargain! As many clubs in our area are teaching new dancers every year, you could dance 5 nights a week, however I would recommend at least 1 more or 2 if you can. Ask your Caller where the Clubs are that you could visit. All these clubs are more than glad to have new dancers dropping in. So why not give it a try - you won't be sorry!!

7) **Meeting new people & making new friends.** The main reason we square dance is to make new friends isn't it? You may be a stranger when you walk into the hall, but within a few minutes you will have met someone new and they may well become a close friend for the rest of your life. Yes, it's happened many times here at the Kickers, just ask around! Not only meeting new folks here but at other clubs as well. It's surprising (not to us now) just how welcoming every one is and how many new friends you will make in just your first year!

8) **Becoming part of an 'extended family'**. As has often been said, square dancing is the best-kept secret around! Well, there's another 'secret' that becomes known to you once you get involved and that's the new family that you will acquire.... your 'extended' family of square dance friends. And this is a genuine family, one that cares about you & will help out when needed without being asked! As we have found out, this is not a superficial caring, but a strong family 'bond' of friendship that has each of us looking after each other! Talk to other club members & see what we mean and, oh yes,

Welcome to the family!

**WHAT THE
CALLER
SEES !!**



#2 Message to all Our Experienced Dancers!

YOU CAN BEST HELP OUR NEWEST DANCERS BY LEADING BY EXAMPLE!

BY THAT I MEAN:-

- Square Up as soon as the Caller asks. Don't wait to see 'who's dancing with whom' – form squares quickly and be sure that all your new dancers are on the floor with you for the Basic teaching tips. To keep the new dancer in your club you must dance with them, talk with them during breaks, encourage them.
- Don't talk in the square when the Caller is giving instructions. Listening to the Caller's commands requires concentration. No-one can listen to 2 people at the same time. If the new dancer needs help, bring them to the Caller between tips for further guidance.
- Do NOT push, pull, shove another dancer at ANY time. New dancers must learn to react to each command. To gently guide (point – not push) someone is fine, but we accomplish nothing for the new dancer if he or she has

been pushed through an action and doesn't know what was supposed to be done. If a new dancer is out of place then just point to where they should be or tell them. Most people do not take kindly to being shoved around AND they ***do not learn anything*** from that approach.

- Watch your Dancing Styles - Some dancing styles that dancers have adopted (eg: twirls) are out of place for 'Basic' new dancers. Basics should be kept in pure form. The proper Do Sa Do, hand and arm holds, a quick touch to acknowledge position.
- **No short cuts** will ensure new dancers of being in the proper position for the next call.
 - Do Grand Square in 32 beats
 - Don't cut the Promenades short.
 - Do Circle to a Line the right way.
 - Swing ONCE unless told otherwise.
- Do NOT take new Dancers to dances that are above their dancing experience. You will be surprised how many times well meaning folks tell new dancers "Come on, we will pull you through." Sorry, this will discourage many new dancers & may well have them quit!. Your caller will let them know when there is a dance at their experience level. Now is your chance to join them where both of you can have fun together.

Never Forget that "you were once a beginner too !"

AND SMILE, IT'S CONTAGEOUS !!



Until next time.....

Email: askthecaller@squaresandrounds.com

