

## **“Fun and Friendship Revisited”**

By

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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. ACA really appreciates the positive comments, encouragement to continue, and contributions from callers and dancers all over North America and 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 and segregationist dance programs.

This month's ACA Viewpoint looks at situations dating back 30 to 40 years and probably in the future. Yes, there are and were many issues facing square dancing as it grew over the years. Today, there is one issue that square dancers and leaders just “can't get their fingers around the “Jello.” Some of the issues that have not changed much are problems of leadership, fewer volunteers, low retention rates, dress codes and “aging images.” Many of these issues could not be rectified any more than schools and universities can fix similar problems. In summary, square dancing has had these issues continuously for 40 years during the period of growth and during the period of decline. Due to decreasing numbers

of square dancers, they may be more prominent and pretentious today than in the past.

Still, there is one issue that has made a complete 180 degrees reversal. Roughly from the late 1950s to the late 1970s square dancing was growing despite these weaknesses. Beginning in the early 1980s and up to the present, square dancing is declining in the number of dancers, recruiting and retention. The same aforementioned problems exist as before. In statistics one would judge that these problems are not statistically significant as they were present during both the growth and decline of the number of square dance participants.

If these issues are not statistically significant or appear to be neutral at best, one must conclude that other variable came into play. There appears to be two major variables leading to the decline in the number of square dancers, one of which is uncontrollable and one is controllable.

The first variable is change in life styles / leisure time competition. With the advent of the Internet, Cell Phone Text Messaging, Cable Television and Satellite Television with its hundreds of stations, potential square dancers began to spend more time watching and less time participating in people to people activities.

To digress a minute, look what has occurred in the shrinkage in the numbers of movie theaters and the growth in video stores. All of it points out to more people watching and less people to people participation. Unfortunately, the growth in Cable and Satellite Television, Cell Phone Text Messaging, and Internet entertainment is called in marketing an “uncontrolled variable” or in a Strength

Weakness, Opportunities and Threat marketing analysis as an Uncontrollable External Threat to square dancing. Yes, these hurt square dancing.

What then is the controllable variable in this scenario? If it is based upon the fact that as life styles were being manipulated and changed by television and the Internet etc., square dancing was moving contrary to life style changes in that, we developed and force fed dancers more complicated and stressful programs and absurdly long lessons upwards of two years. Instead of following the changes of in society, square dancing ignored them and made it complicated to become a square dancer. In order for a person to be able to dance with fun and relaxation in today's square dancing, it takes about the same amount of time that it takes to earn a Masters of Business Administration or a Masters of Public Administration.

Square dancing leaders of have denied the problem of lengthy and stressful dances while some acclaimed callers blamed club callers. In reality, the PRODUCT is the problem. The worldwide decline in the numbers of square dancing lies at the recruiting and retention level.

Let us look at why people join square dance lessons and clubs. They join because of new friendships and to enjoy the: "fun" that square dancing offers. If either of these is missing, new dancers drop off. To deny the fact that the absurdly long period of square dances lessons take for new dancers and the

stressful and unequal and segregated dance programs awaiting new dancers cause the dancers to leave square dancing is kin to “putting our heads in the sand”.

The American Callers' Association has an International One Floor Program which will keep everyone dancing together and can be taught in as little as three to four months. It is one answer to convert square dancing to the needs of today's society.

The One Floor Dance Program is a start to bring in excess of 95% of the dancers together by reducing and simplifying the current cumbersome and separatist dance programs.

The One Floor Dance Program was created to unite the vast majority of the dancers and to simplify square dancing. The American Callers' Association maintains definitions and provides of each call currently in use. The ownership of the all calls and the definitions are based in Public Domain and are not the property of any single organization. The Board of Directors of the American Callers Association unanimously encourages callers to teach movements as they were written, teach more than one approach to the maneuvers, and show patience understanding to their students. This way we can do more with less, reduce the stress on the callers and dancers and help stop the loss of dancers. In addition, the square dancing ABC program appears to be a good start of the solution to reduce the stress and time consuming lessons. Recent square dance editorials advocated that upon completion of the ABC program that these dancers could be merged or absorbed into the lengthy square dance programs.

Unfortunately, this wishful thinking does not solve the problem of long-term lessons and stressful dancing and will lead to an ABC program failure as an activity. It has potential but only if the ABC program could be merged into severely downward revised program replacing the current Mainstream, Plus and even the ACA International One-Floor program. Why not work together in this direction? Why not create a square dancing one-floor program of say 50-55 movements that could be taught in as little as ten weeks? Why not structure federation type dances and jamborees into a one-floor dance program? ACA will support this initiative.

The American Callers' Association is dedicated to publicize, promote and preserve square dancing continuously invests all its assets, time and funds to communicate with callers, dancers, and associations to bring the dancers back together to dance on a one floor program and at the same time. The American Callers' Association stays tuned into the desires and needs of the dancers. The Board of Directors of the American Callers' Association invites each of you to visit our website and newsletters at [americancallers.com/news](http://americancallers.com/news) and communicate with us. Give us your ideas "We Will Listen".

The American Callers' Association does not and never has claimed that the ACA International One Floor dance program is a cure all. At the same time the American Callers Association is committed unifying the dancers and to preserve square dancing recognizing that the ABC program can become the Square

Dance Renaissance by unifying the dancers into a one floor program. ACA will work with caller organizations, square dance organizations and others to reverse the growth and energize square dancing.

Any individual, club, caller, or association who wishes to communicate his/her opinions on this subject is encouraged to contact the American Callers'

Association [mac@americancallers.com](mailto:mac@americancallers.com) or Dr. Patrick Demerath at [pdemerath@uwa.edu](mailto:pdemerath@uwa.edu). Please visit our website and newsletters @American Callers.com/news.

Until next time, happy dancing.