

“Issues, Answers and Reality”

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 issues and situations dating back 30 to 40 years. 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 Jell-O.” Some of the issues that have not changed much are problems of leadership, fewer volunteers, low retention rates, dress codes and poor teaching techniques. 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 number

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 / entertainment times. With the advent of cable television and satellite television with its hundreds of stations and VCR and DVD recordings, potential square dancers began to spend more time watching more television

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 television than before. In addition to geometric increases in the number of television shows being watched, we also have the Internet as a great source of entertainment. Unfortunately, the growth in televisions and Internet entertainment is called in marketing an "uncontrolled variable" or in a Strength Weakness,

Opportunities and Threat marketing analysis as an uncontrolled External Threat to square dancing. Yes these two hurt square dancing.

What then is the controllable variable in this scenario? If is based upon the fact that as life styles were being manipulated and changed by television and the Internet, square dancing was moving contra to societal trends; in that, we made the dances more difficult with 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 other 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 s look at why people join square dance lessons and clubs. They join because of the new friendships and to enjoy the: "fun" that square dancing offers. If either of these is missing, the 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 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.

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 and communicate with us. Give us your ideas "We Will Listen".

The American Callers' Association does not and never has claimed that the 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 Renaissance can begin by unifying the dancers into a one floor program and seeks to 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 or Dr. Patrick Demerath at pdemerath@uwa.edu. Please visit our website and newsletters @American Callers.com/news.

Until next time, happy dancing.