

ACA VIEWPOINT for January 31, 2010
Porter's and Dickens' Journey to Success
By Ray Brigance
President

It is with the greatest of enthusiasm and optimism on behalf of the Executive Board of the American Callers Association that I would like to wish all square dancers and callers a very happy and prosperous 2010. Charles Dickens once wrote "it was the best of times; it was the worst of times." We in the American Callers' Association are afforded the best of times because we are given opportunities to call and serve thousands of square dancers worldwide. At the same time, callers worldwide are faced with the tragic problem of significant decreases in the numbers of square dancers, square dance clubs, callers and square dance associations. Additionally, we are faced with the most serious economic downswing / crisis in decades with over 5 million Americans unemployed.

Americans in general and square dancers in particular are a strong willed and dedicated fun-loving people. We may have all weathered these "worst of times" . Thanks to all square dancers, clubs, callers and associations we are making the most of a difficult situation. The American Callers' Association is working hard to look for ways to recruit new dancers, retain current dancers and return former dancers to square dancing focusing on peoples wants and desires.

ACA was formed twenty years ago with a firm belief that square dancers and callers are under too much stress as they attempt to recruit, teach and dance too many movements with too much teaching. The "fun and friendship" was replaced by "dancing perfection" and "dancing challenge" merging into "dancing stress." The number of Square Dancers is critically low as is recruiting new dancers and new callers. The American Callers' Association's answer is and was and is to simplify the square dancing program and to encourage all callers to try new approaches leading toward increasing the fun and decreasing the stress. Let's share the information on what the prospective dancers will accept. Please let us know your preferences and desires. We will listen and publish both in this ACA Viewpoints and on American Callers' Web page and on our ACA database.

Throughout the past ten years ACA has continued to grow and has earned a respected place in square dancing. The ACA philosophy is "**Offering More Fun and Friendship by Reducing Stress on the Dancers and Callers particularly new dancers and new callers.**" Another way it could be said is the anachronism "**KISS**" – "**Keep it Sweet and Simple.**" This means to continue to communicate with the square dancers, non square dancers and callers to ask what they would like in a dancing program from no experience needed to three to four months of instructional fun.

In 1979 Dr. Michael Porter of Harvard Business School developed a five forces model that determines the competitive intensity and attractiveness of a market. An unattractive market is one where the five forces drive down overall profitability/participation such as stressful and cumbersome dance programs. The Five Forces are" The **threat of substitute products** increasing the propensity of people to switch from square dancing or not desire to participate. An example is cable television. The **threat of the entry and expansion of new competitors** increases the propensity of non dancers to reject square dancing. An example is the Internet, email etc. The **intensity of competitive rivalry** further increases the propensity of non-dancers not to choose square dancing as their leisure activity. The **bargaining power of customers (square dancers and prospective square dancers)** is the ability of the customers/square dancers to put square dance callers and associations under pressure if the institutions are wise enough to recognize it. Many new dancers vote with their feet by leaving square dancing during and soon after lessons. It has been somewhat popular to blame the club callers who are the teachers. ACA understands this and advocates that it is the cumbersome and complicated dance programs that is the problem. The **bargaining power of suppliers (square dance and callers associations)** must listen to the customers and use all of their abilities to

communicate and meet their needs or the propensity of the dancers and prospective dancers will be to leave or stay away.

The ACA service strategy is to read and understand the applicability of Porter's Five Force to square dance and moves the activity toward meeting square dancers' needs and desire.

This was exactly what ACA did twenty years ago and has repeated several times. The ACA **"One Floor International Square Dancing"** program enables a club to have two to three "New Dancer" programs per year.

The ACA **"One Floor International Square Dancing Program"** can be taught in as little as 16 weeks as it is a composite of popular mainstream and plus calls. Calls not being used were either discarded or moved to the Advanced / Challenge Programs Experimentals.

The foundation and philosophy of the ACA **"One Floor International Square Dancing"** program is to reduce the number of calls to be learned by the dancers; thereby **reducing the stress and strain** on the dancers as well as **increasing the fun, friendship and fellowship** level. To say it another way: **"In order to get more dancers and keep them, we must reduce the stress by creating a program based upon fun, friendship and fellowship."** Let's reduce the number of calls and the length of classes to successfully recruit new dancers, retain recent graduate dancers and club dancers, and retrieve dancers who have dropped out. History can repeat itself to enable us to manage a program and build a solid broad based **international "pyramid" based on a one-floor program**. This must be done before we spend a lot of money advertising and promoting our product. To say it another way: **"We must fix the problems, which caused great decline in square dancing, before we spend a lot of money trying to advertise and promote square dancing**. Expensive promotion and advertising programs might give some temporary relief, but they will not sustain the relief if the dancing product is sick. We must make the **product well and healthy** first, and then **promote and advertise**.

The ACA **"One Floor "International Square Dancing"** program further stops the **segregation, separatism, and division** of. It further enhances the **"Sociological Traditional Core Values of American Society,"** where Americans are opposed to being second-class citizens unlike other foreign cultures, which embellish groups of royalty, caste systems, and serfdoms. The **"Sociological Traditional Core Values"** confirm that all **Americans strive to be equal and accepted**. Unfortunately in square dancing we have a **"separate and unequal" system for the majority of dancers**, which violates our American Sociological and Historical Core Principals. It is not surprising that square dancers have voted with their feet over the years and square dancers, clubs and callers were victims along the way.

Let's join together to REVITALIZE square dancing. The executive board and the members of ACA are most willing to work together with all square dance groups to improve the world of square dancing. We can move forward together to simplify square dancing, gain "more dancers and eliminate separatism and segregation of square dancers and clubs. **New dancers can come into the world of square dancing and be able to dance with their friends from the first night through their instruction period and continue with them** afterwards. As we move in this direction this time is truly a time to be **optimistic and joyous** about our future as Charles Dickens wrote as the "Best of Times.

Any individual, club, caller, or association who wishes to communicate his/her opinions on this subject is encouraged to contact the American Callers' Association Loulet@aol.com or Dr. Patrick Demerath at pdemerath@uwa.edu. Please visit our website and newsletters @AmericanCallers.com/news.

All the members of the American Callers' Association wish each one a joyous and a

Until next time, happy New Year and Happy Dancing

