

A yellow starburst graphic with the text "SQUARE DANCE REVIVAL!" in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

GROWING SQUARE & ROUND DANCE CLUBS: PRACTICAL ADVICE

By Allan Hurst: Caller & member of CALLERLAB Marketing Committee

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This guide summarizes practical lessons from experienced callers and club leaders about what attracts new dancers, what drives them away, and what successful clubs are doing differently.

The goal is simple: help clubs move from merely surviving to growing again.

The Biggest Misconceptions to Overcome

- Many younger people believe square dancing is only for older adults.
- They associate it with traditional costumes and 'hokey' music.
- Clubs must actively show that dancing today is fun, social, and welcoming.

The #1 Way People Start Dancing

- Word of mouth is the most powerful recruiting tool.
- The most effective invitation: "Come try it once. If you don't like it, you never have to come back."
- Encourage members to personally invite friends, coworkers, and neighbors.

Create a Welcoming Culture

- Greet newcomers immediately when they arrive.
- Introduce them to other dancers and the caller.
- Provide clear guidance about how to find a partner.
- Name badges and friendly conversation help people feel included.



Treat Squares as Eight Dancers, Not Four Couples

- Insisting that dancing requires couples discourages single dancers.
- Singles should be welcomed as an asset, not treated as a problem.
- A mindset of 'eight dancers per square' creates a more inclusive environment.

Update the Image of Square Dancing

- Avoid using traditional square dance attire in promotional materials.
- Show dancers in casual clothing enjoying themselves.
- Highlight fun, laughter, and community rather than tradition.

Use Music That Feels Relevant

- Younger dancers respond better to recognizable music.
- Excessive use of old-time fiddle and banjo music can reinforce outdated stereotypes.
- A mix of contemporary and familiar music helps make dancing approachable.

Focus on Fun, Humor, and Informality

- If dancing isn't fun, people won't return.
- The caller sets the tone—humor and encouragement reduce anxiety.
- Dancers should support beginners kindly and help them succeed.



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Help Beginners Succeed

- Strong one-on-one interaction with experienced dancers (“angels”) improves retention.
- Classes around 90 minutes tend to work best for modern schedules.
- Use review tips or short review sessions to help dancers who miss a class.

Recruit Within Reach: The 'Decade Rule'

- Marketing works best when aimed at about 10–12 years younger than the club’s average age.
- For example, a club with an average age of 50 should focus on people in their 40s.
- As the club becomes younger over time, recruitment can gradually target younger groups.

Be Visible in the Community

- Attend community events, parades, and festivals.
- Hand out simple cards or flyers with a QR code linking to class information.
- Visibility in local communities strengthens word-of-mouth recruiting.

Leadership That Encourages Growth

- Enthusiastic newer dancers can make excellent board members.
- Leaders should guide by example rather than authority.
- Discuss new ideas individually with long-time members before introducing changes publicly.



What Clubs Should Stop Doing

- Stop insisting that dancers must bring a partner.
- Stop treating single dancers as a logistical problem.
- Stop using traditional costumes and imagery in marketing materials.

Signs of a Healthy Club

- New dancers feel welcomed immediately.
- Experienced dancers actively help beginners.
- There is laughter, encouragement, and a strong social connection.

Final Thought

The greatest risk facing many clubs is refusing to adapt.

Clubs that evolve to meet the needs of today's dancers can grow again.

Those that refuse to change often disappear.