



SQUARE DANCING AT A CROSSROADS: WHAT CLUBS MUST CHANGE TO GROW MEMBERSHIP

KEY FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS WITH MIKE SEASTROM, HUNTER KELLER, JUSTIN RUSSELL, ALLAN HURST, MICHAEL SATTLER, AND THE LANG FAMILY

The interviews revealed remarkable agreement: square dancing does not have a product problem—it has a presentation and accessibility problem.

Clubs already offer many of the things people want most today: friendship, community, fun, physical activity, mental engagement, safety, and belonging. Yet many clubs unintentionally create barriers through outdated messaging, unnecessary requirements, and traditions that make newcomers feel like outsiders.

People may come for the dancing, but they stay for the relationships. As Mike Seastrom put it, the calls are the bricks, but social connection is the mortar.

What People Are Looking For

Contrary to common assumptions, younger generations are not rejecting square dancing because it is old-fashioned. They are searching for:

- Friendship and community
- A sense of belonging
- Fun experiences
- Safe social environments
- Physical activity
- Multi-generational interaction
- Authentic human connection

The Lang family repeatedly emphasized that community—not choreography—was the greatest attraction. Several interviewees also noted that loneliness and social isolation are increasing in society, creating an opportunity for square dancing to meet a growing need.

The Strengths Clubs Already Have

Interviewees consistently identified four major strengths:

Community

Many clubs provide what people increasingly struggle to find: a social home, support network, and lasting friendships.

Fun

New dancers often discover that square dancing is far more enjoyable than they expected. Laughter, movement, teamwork, and music were recurring themes.

Multi-Generational Relationships

Younger dancers valued connections with older dancers and appreciated being part of a larger community.

Safe, Sober Social Activity

Square dancing offers a welcoming social environment without alcohol pressure, filling a need many other activities do not.

What Clubs Need to Change

Make Newcomers Feel Like They Belong

Beginners should immediately feel welcome, included, and successful. Avoid creating "insider" and "outsider" distinctions.

Reduce Barriers

Dress requirements, partner expectations, and rigid traditions discourage participation. Celebrate traditions rather than require them.

Shorten the Learning Path

Long lesson programs were widely criticized. Successful clubs get people dancing quickly, create early success, and offer multiple entry points throughout the year.

Focus on Fun Before Perfection

People return because they enjoy themselves—not because they danced perfectly. Positive experiences matter more than technical accuracy.

Marketing Changes Clubs Must Make

The interviews were nearly unanimous that traditional marketing methods alone are no longer sufficient.

Clubs should:

- Maintain an updated website and Google profile
- Use Facebook, Instagram, videos, and photos
- Show real people having fun
- Present a modern image rather than reinforcing outdated stereotypes
- Share personal stories and testimonials

Most importantly, every interview emphasized the power of personal invitations. Recruitment cannot belong to one membership chair. Every member must become a recruiter.

Recommendations

Immediate Priorities

- Create welcoming hosts at every dance
- Encourage every member to invite friends
- Remove unnecessary dress expectations
- Increase beginner dancing time
- Improve websites and social media
- Hold low-commitment community dances

Long-Term Priorities

- Recruit consistently into younger age groups
- Develop younger leaders and callers
- Build partnerships with schools, colleges, and community organizations
- Create a culture focused on community as much as dancing

Conclusion

The central message from all interviews is simple:

- People are not looking for square dancing.
- They are looking for friendship, fun, belonging, and connection.
- Square dancing is one of the strongest vehicles for providing those things.
- Clubs that lead with tradition alone may continue to struggle. Clubs that lead with fun, friendship, community, and belonging have a tremendous opportunity to grow.

The future of square dancing may depend less on teaching better choreography and more on helping people walk into a room and think:

"These are my people."