

## Handling Structural Failures/Why Squares Break Down

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Most callers want to call smooth, flowing choreography which will allow the dancers to succeed. At our home club, we can work toward dancer success with building blocks which allow dancers to rehearse unfamiliar choreography so that we callers can also make the dance interesting. When we call for less familiar clubs, or for student dances, we often feel the need to stick to “safe” choreography or call more slowly. Calling more interesting choreography can cause the dancers to fail. How can we callers work to allow the dancers to succeed without calling only “clichés” with stop-and-go timing.

In New Jersey, eastern Pennsylvania, Delaware and New York, where I call the most, many dancers are not used to choreography that moves from one call to the next without stops. That means that I need to be aware of my timing to give an extra beat to allow dancers to “catch up”. The fact that dancers are used to coming to a halt after every call means that they are not used to connecting immediately with the dancers on either side to establish lines or waves, or even couples. We callers can promote dancer connectivity by what we call. If dancers are in waves, call “Hinge, Centers Trade”, “Centers Run, New Centers Trade” or “½ Tag, Centers Trade”. Each centers trade called forces the centers to connect. If a caller does similar combinations throughout the dance, the dancers will be more inclined to connect in waves or 2-faced lines at least for this dance. When dancers are in facing lines, isolate the centers to work as a couple, so they connect with each other.

Callers need to be aware of what calls are most familiar to the dancers and what calls or combinations of calls are less used. When a caller starts a dance at a club for which they do not always call, the caller needs to build dancers’ confidence. Start with familiar choreography patterns. If the dance is a student dance, start with calls that were taught earlier in the classes. Build up to the newer calls, and set the dancers up to succeed. For example, many new dancers struggle with recycle. If the caller uses Recycle so that the dancers finish facing their corner for a Left Allemande, the dancers may be able to find the corner for the Left Allemande. That Recycle is also the most standard application, so other dancers in the square will not falter in completing the call.

Callers also need to be aware of standard uses for most calls and how to create variations that will enable the dancers to succeed. When two out of four dancers are not in a standard arrangement, the dancers who are in the standard position will be confident and may be able to help the others. If we callers are aware of the expected ending formation, we can give hints to help the dancers. After a non-standard Spin the Top, the statement “Grand Wave - 4 boys in the very center,” will either reassure the dancers or allow them to create the expected FASR. “2-Faced line with girls in the center holding right hands” should be a good hint, but not all dancers are aware of what the formations are called, so they cannot make the FASR. Callers can set the dancers up to make a recovery by what they call. If most squares have a starting Double Pass Thru position with the 4 girls in the center, I try to put the boy who is in the center near the girl who is on the outside so when I say “All 4 girls are in the center” the dancers can easily change places. Quick hints such as “Facing Lines,” “Parallel Waves”, “Standard Couples” can help the dancers to know things are fine or to make a recovery.

Callers need to be aware of how helper words can mislead the dancers. Common examples are “Centers Zoom”, which can make the dancers forget that the call is a leader/trailer call. If the caller uses a variation such as “Girls Zoom” the need to be prepared to help – “Lead Girl back, Outside Girl forward”. Incidentally, this application can be used either from a Starting Double Pass Thru formation, or a wave or 2-faced line with the girls on the ends. The caller can choose what they think the dancers will best understand.

When calling the first tips for a new club or new dancers, keep the sequences short. To Mainstream and Plus Dancers, the Allemande Left and Right and Left Grand is the treat. If you can create an easy "At Home" ending, it can be a special treat! Be careful to Grand Right and Left endings from parallel waves – the boy in the center facing out can easily turn in the wrong direction. One surprise ending that many callers like to use is "Recycle to a Right and Left Grand" has pitfalls of which callers need to be aware. The arrangement for that ending is non-standard, so many dancers can fail. An alternate ending is to call – "Ends/Girls Cross Fold". Then the girls are facing their partner and ready to start the Grand Right and Left. Remember that dancers are not excited by surprise endings if they (the dancers) do not succeed.

Singing calls are important! Often callers use the figure that came with the music. This figure may not be appropriate for the dance for various reasons. The figure may use calls from the Plus Program and the Dance is Mainstream or for students. New dancers cannot complete a closely timed figure because of response times. Callers need to be able to vary a figure so that it fits the music and the circumstances. For newer dancers it is often helpful to use a figure which is shorter than the 64 beats allotted by the music. When the caller has flexibility with their singing calls, the caller can choose music to excite the dancers without being afraid that the figure will be too hard. The dancers will respond with excitement!

Callers should be watching the whole floor not just their pilot square. Often weaker dancers congregate in the back of the room and stand un-noticed until there are facing lines or a Left Allemande to help them get back to dancing. If squares are broken, set them up as lines or get the others to a Left Allemande soon. The next choreography should be simple to rebuild confidence. Keep an eye on the squares with problems to make sure they succeed. Then the caller can return to the idea that they were working and try to analyze the calls or combination of calls that caused problems. Break the choreography into small steps to lead to success.

Unless the choreography is totally standard and predictable, no dance will be totally empty of dancer failures. Callers can help to minimize the dancers' failures by using the above techniques and keeping the dancers success as the most important factor in the dance.

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