Mentoring for the Future

Traditional Mentoring involved an experienced caller who was willing to work with a new(er) caller to help the new caller develop their calling skills. Often it involved the new caller attending the experienced caller's dances to observe how the experienced caller conducted the class or dance. The experienced caller would possibly allow the new caller to call a tip and then give feedback and suggestions about how the new caller could improve their skills. The experienced caller would give assignments designed to help the newer caller to continue to develop their calling skills. Even after the newer caller was working on their own, the experienced caller was available for questions. Because the new caller was working with the experienced caller, it was expected that both callers would live close to each other.

Currently, technology allows for close communication without close physical presence. Newer callers can ask questions by telephone or text. Mentor and caller can communicate by phone, text, Scype and/or facetime. The new caller can record their calling and e-mail it for the experienced caller to review. Feedback can be given after the experienced caller reviews the recording and the experienced caller has the option of reviewing the recording more than once, so they can really see and hear the new caller's performance.

In past times, callers shared choreography by writing figures and sending them to square dance magazines or to other callers in a letter. In today's world there are many programs available to help the new caller create choreography. New callers can find figures on websites. Mentors need to help guide the newer callers to understand the choreography that is available.

In my opinion, it can be too easy for new callers to access and use choreography that they do not really understand. All they have to do is download it or scan it in to their computer and read it from the school. Modern day mentors have to work with the newer caller to help them understand how important it is for the caller to understand what effect each call has on the square. That is often achieved by "old school" techniques such as completing the Call Analysis Sheet and actually pushing checkers. I have seen (as far back as 1990) callers who used choreography generating programs, to produce sequences which were technically correct, but virtually undanceable. Since computer use is so ingrained in modern

society, mentors may meet resistance from their new calling students to the extra work of completing the Call Analysis Sheet or pushing checkers. I believe the extra work will pay off in the new caller's confidence when they understand the calls.

Finally, it is easy to download a singing call and read the cue sheet to perform the singer, but again, it is the job of the mentor to help the new caller to become flexible in the use of singing call figures. We all know that a singing call can be used at any program from the Beginner Party through Challenge. New callers who depend on technology will not be able to substitute choreography patterns into a singing call, unless the mentor can help them use a pattern which is not on the cue sheet that came with the music.

In conclusion, Mentoring is the same as it always was, the experienced caller is sharing knowledge with the newer caller. In today's society, the technology available has made it possible for mentor and new caller to be further apart. Modern technology has also made it easier for new callers to depend on the computer instead of learning for themselves. Modern mentors can take advantage of technology while helping the new caller to see that technology can be a crutch.

Betsy Gotta
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