

CALLERLAB DANCER RETENTION

By **Bill Boyd**

Before starting on dancer retention let me cite from a few professional journals. Communication. This is probably one of the most important aspects of getting and keeping new clients. Communication, Is important for keeping existing clients. Making new and existing clients feel as though they are welcome and important to you and your business.

Do your students feel as though they are welcome and valuable to you and your club?

Do your dancers feel as though they are welcome and valuable to your club?

Due to time constraints we will only be looking at two aspects of dancer retention.

Item one

Student Retention

Item two

Dancer Retention

In order to keep dancers, we must get dancers, new dancers. There have been many articles written about and talked about and touched on for getting new dancers into the square dance program. Square dance classes, if you will. Once a prospective new dancers walks into our front door, then what?

There are key elements in keeping the students in our classes.

1. Every class should be a dance!
Someone enters our activity to take part in an entertainment venue. They want to participate and have fun. They do not want someone to conduct classes, teach new figures and never use them in a dance format. Introduce the singing calls on the first or second evening.
2. Angels must show enthusiasm.
Enthusiasm is contagious. When the caller puts the music on to play, angels should be up looking for those new dancers, encouraging them and dancing with them.
3. The caller must be enthusiastic.
When the caller starts a new class, he or she sets the tone for all future classes. If the caller looks and acts bored, with the attitude, I have done this so many times I no longer care, students will detect this and react accordingly.

I have been in classes where all or at least one of the above takes place. The caller works to generate new dancers. He does the advertising, promotion and on the first class night, ten, fifteen or twenty new dancers show up to learn this activity. The dancers, who are already there, do not dance with or encourage the new dances in any way. As the evening goes on and more dancers show up for the regular dance that follows classes, more of the same. The "experienced" dancers ignore the students. Net result, no matter how much fun the students have, no matter how much enthusiasm the callers show, the students may not ever return. I have been an angel in classes where the caller is so blaze or treated the new dancers so bad, the results are the same. The caller wants to call dances, but the caller does not want to take the time or trouble to teach. The attitude is consciously or unconsciously demonstrated to the floor and those students are not coming back. I have also attended clubs where the minute the callers drops the needle, OK starts the music from his laptop or IPod, the experienced dancers look for, new dancers and urge them onto the dance floor. They demonstrate that they, the new dancers or students are wanted. The caller welcomes them and in a short period of time has them dancing. By short period of time I am talking minutes not hours. Enthusiasm has been expressed as an outward expression of an inner feeling

on fire. It is not necessary to jump up and down and shout and scream to show enthusiasm. But, if you care enough about an activity, care enough about your club it be evident by both words and deeds and this will help keep new dancers on the floor. Where I have witnessed this enthusiasm and cooperation between the caller and the experienced dancers I have seen clubs maintain their current membership and even grow.

Section two

Once we have the new dancers incorporated into the club, then what? The laws of business states; that in business we will lose ten percent of our clients or customers every year. In order to stay in business, we must not only replace those clients, but grow by at least the rate of inflation just to maintain fiscal solvency. Consider Square dancing as a whole. We lose dancers for several reasons and we must replace those dancers to maintain club solvency.

1. Dancers pass away. This can be especially hard on clubs because if your dancer was always a couple, the partner many times will also leave the activity. My partner or spouse was the only reason I came. I do not feel welcome as a single now that I am alone. Your club is a couples only club. Yes there are still clubs that are couples only club
2. Dancers move away. No answer, just a statement of fact. If you lose a dancer to another city, you have lost them. One thing you can do is find where they are moving to and help them find a new local square dance club. Then it encourages them to stay in the activity.
3. The only reason I stayed in your club is because I danced with, name another couple, since they are no longer dancing with your club, I am not coming back. I have seen this and it means to me that maybe your club is not doing enough to make all dancers feel welcome.
4. I just completed class and they want me to be a club officer. This is a common complaint. I watched this drive people away from square dancing for years. Let the people dance and have fun. Later you can get them to help in some way, but, let them have some fun.
5. Club politics and club cliques. I don't have an answer I see this in most every social club that I am associated with. Church groups, civic organizations, Chamber of Commerce and others. Shouldn't be, but due to human nature there will always be cliques.
6. Dance apparel, another topic, another time; think about it as a potential problem. Form your own opinion (I have mine) and good luck.
7. I lost my partner and even though I dance the man's part, the club will not allow two women to dance together.
8. I lost my partner and the club does not allow for single dancers to attend.

There are solutions.

Keep the students. See the first section. Be enthusiastic about our activity.

Caller's responsibility: Be ready to go before the dance starts. Have some music playing and greet the dancers at the door as they come into the club. The caller should circulate during the breaks and mingle with the dancers. If within the callers capability, try and reduce friction between dancers. I know that this is not possible but, who knows, it might help.

Callers, keep your dances interesting. New material, new music, etc

Meet outside your dance venue, picnics, parties, outings, pool parties, etc.

In one sales seminar I chaired, I ask everyone to list five reasons someone should buy their product over a competitor. In square dancing, I would say list five reasons why we are better than other recreational outlets. Even if the other outlets are telling the consumer, get off your butts and do something. We are saying are saying the same thing, get up and do something. People have an aversion to leaving their

televisions and computers. When they do we are now in competition with any other activity that requires effort and a learning curve.

We have to be more interesting, more fun, and create a sense of belonging to a group, this will help us keep our new and experienced dancers.

A quick checklist:

1. Is your club location accessible and easily found? Do you have signs posted at your club? How about at street corners leading to your facility?
2. Do you list and advertise the program you dance either on a web site or prepared mailing list?
3. Does your dance start and end on time?
4. Does your club have a planned program for each evening of dance?
5. Does every member wear a name badge?
6. Are all guests and members greeted warmly at the door? Not only by the caller but by other members as well?
7. Do you maintain a friendly atmosphere throughout the entire evening?
8. Do your dancers make visitors welcome and encourage them to join with them in squares?
9. Are your announcements short and to the point? Do they interfere with the dancing?
10. As the caller, do you have a plan or program for the evening? Is it flexible in case you have to make changes? (i.e. several mainstream dancers show up at your plus program)
11. Are guests introduced during your dance announcements?
12. Do you contact dancers who miss (a lesson or dance)?
13. Do you encourage your club to go on raids or visit other clubs? You don't have to raid to visit other clubs.
14. Is your club tied into any of the national web sites?
15. Are you part of the problem? Are you willing to change and become part of the solution?