

Working with Cuers (Originally written in 1993 and presented at the Callers Council of NJ. Additional thoughts added for Callerlab 2012)

The following (in no particular order) are some things to consider when working with cuers. Much of what is about to be presented is also applied to cuers when working with callers.

EQUIPMENT:

1. Speaker Placement: Some callers put the speaker (column-type) on the front of the table. For a cuer who uses cue cards (such as myself) this means standing behind or next to the speaker, neither of which gives an accurate sound profile. A sight caller simply moves around away from the speaker. Buy a stand!! That's the proper way to sound a hall anyway. (p.s. Not all cuers are this sensitive about sound, but most cuers haven't been married to a caller for 37+ years)
2. The caller's\cuer's table: Some cuers have a preference as to which side they like to work from. If you don't, ask if they do. Also, the cuer needs room for a record case and/or laptop. Keep this in mind if you are setting up first or when the club asks you what size table you need. Some cuers also work from a wireless mike and they need room for that.
3. Volume and Tone Controls: To be honest, most cuers are just plain boring in their presentation. However, some are performers and use the remote volume controls just as much (and usually better) than the callers. Don't be put off if you have to plug your little cord back in. The same thing applies to the tone controls when there is a single tone control for both mikes. Dick Mazziotti uses different settings than Kathy Koft and might have to check his settings when Kathy is done and vice versa. Should the cuer reset the controls when they are done? Yes, but believe it or not, they sometimes forget. The last thing I want to mention about controls is that both caller and cuer should set the music volume to off when they are finished. In this day and age when most are using laptops as their music source, not all the music is recorded at the same volume and there is nothing like hitting "play" and having the sound break glass at the back of the room.

ETIQUETTE

This could take awhile. When there are pre-rounds at a dance, the caller should arrive before the pre-rounds or be willing to use the cuer's equipment or start a few minutes late. Reasons:

1. Most callers like to use their own equipment.
2. It is rude to be setting up while the cuer is working
3. It is also impolite to have the cuer quit 5 minutes early so the caller can set up.

4. It is disruptive when the caller comes "busting" in right in the middle of soft piece of waltz music. It's better if they would just slink in around the edges.
5. Another point is signing of century books etc. Move away from the stage area to do this. The cuer needs to prepare and then go to work. Also, try not to be on stage when the cuer is working. It is their spotlight at that time.
6. As a final note on Etiquette, since I find it rude when the caller arrives at the last minute, I also find it equally as rude when the cuer leaves early (as soon as his/her/its last set of rounds is finished).

PROGRAMMING

When two or more callers are working together, they usually discuss (or at least pretend to discuss) how the evening should progress. Cuers deserve the same consideration.

1. Length of breaks - Long? Short? None? If the cuer is the club cuer and you are a guest caller, let the cuer set the timing of the breaks. After all, they should be familiar with the clubs tastes. If both are guests - talk it over! The club may have instructed the cuer on how much rest to allow. I was at one club where the officers said that I was to start as soon as the tip was over. This upset the caller but I was being paid by the club.
2. End of the dance - As the last hour approaches, tell the cuer how many tips you are planning to squeeze in (or stretch out). Some cuers do actually program their evenings and like to finish with certain numbers. It is very frustrating to be planning on two more sets of rounds and have the caller say to you (as you are getting ready to do the first set)"See if you can stretch this out a bit so I can finish with one long tip".
3. Music - Mike Jacobs talked about this in a workshop for CCNJ. Musical styles affect the mood of the dancers. It can enhance or change their psyche. Minor keys (a lot of pop music) can be depressing. Callers don't want to have to follow the cuers "best" music all the time. If the cuer is finishing each set with a foot-stompin' house-rockin' piece of music, this puts a burden on the caller for music selection. Ask the cuer to do a little more mellow second selection now and then. Callers should listen to the rounds a little to hear what is being played. As an example: The round Houston is a good piece of music with a lot of steel guitar. The caller should not follow this with a patter record full of steel guitar. This tends to mellow out the crowd when all the music starts to sound the same. All of the above also applies to the cuer listening to the caller's music. This particular subject of music selection is not one of my fortes, and deserves a more in depth look at a later time.

As a final note, in the absence of a partner doing this job, the caller should help the cuer balance their sound, and the cuer should help caller do the same.

Respectfully submitted
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