

INTRODUCTION

Retaining dancers is one of the most important tasks within the square dance movement. It is the responsibility of all dancers, the caller, cuer and officers to exert all effort to retain their dancers. There are many reasons that dancers leave the activity. Some reasons are beyond anyone's control, such as health, moving, change in work schedule, finances, age or a change in family situation. There are other reasons for dancers "dropping out" that the dancing community can do something about, such as unable to maintain the level of dancing, peer pressure, not feeling welcome, too much responsibility too fast, problems within the club or other things that make the dancer uncomfortable. It is the responsibility of the caller, officers and members to avoid a situation that contributes to the dropout of any dancers.

THE CLUB

There are three phases when a club can lose dancers -- in beginner lessons, in the transition from lessons to the club, and in the club. In lessons, the new dancer may be a slow learner or very insecure. The club members should help them feel secure by helping them with the figures under the direction of the caller and assure them that they are progressing and will achieve their goals. The club

members should meet the new dancers and establish a relationship prior to their first "club" dance. The new dancers are entering a new magic, mythical world, and without tender loving care, they may decide square dancing is not for them. Some club members may isolate themselves from the new dancers or unintentionally snub the new dancers, which may drive them away from the club. There are many of those who would like to become more active in club functions or club management, but are afraid to volunteer or are unsure of the associated responsibilities. It is imperative that the club be responsive to the needs of new and existing dancers.

THE CALLER

The caller has responsibilities of being sure the new dancers are ready for the club, keeping the evening dance program moving along at a pace that the dancers will enjoy. He can also help with keeping cliques at a minimum, and maintaining excitement and enthusiasm in the club activities.

THE CLUB OFFICERS

Although the officers run the business of the club, they also must keep peace and harmony within the club. One of their prime duties is to make everyone feel WELCOME at the club. Each member must be made to feel that he or she belongs. A proven method is to invite

every member to participate in some club service, such as serving the food, welcoming the visitors, setting up the building for the dance or cleaning up after, sending cards to the members that missed the dance or are ill, etc. The officers can help the new dancer by dancing with them and introducing them to other members and visitors. The officers must assure the planning, preparation and conduct of an exciting dance night that will be remembered and enjoyed by the dancers.

THE CLUB MEMBERS

Club members also have responsibilities. They can add fun, fellowship and enjoyment to the dance by speaking to other dancers, smiling, being friendly and by being considerate of the feelings of others. Club members should be respectful of the opinions of others. They should attend all club functions, be willing to help in any part of the club operations. Members should set an example and demonstrate to others that they can contribute and are interested in the club activities. Every club member can help maintain harmony by remembering "Do unto others as you would want them to do unto you."

DANCE PROGRAM

Many new dancers and slower learners need extra help. A workshop before the club dance or separating the slower

learners may assist in resolving these problems. It is very important to encourage them and not put them down. Some dancers may find the dance program is not challenging enough. This can be solved by having a higher level or hot hash tip during the dance. The dancers that don't feel they can do it will not feel pressured. The caller can help by preparing and presenting a program and using figures in such a manner that the dancers will feel that they are being challenged.

PEER PRESSURE

The club caller, officers and other dancers may inadvertently put pressure on a new dancer. The caller may want to call a more challenging dance, so he teaches all the latest figures. Some dancers may want to come have fun and relax and not become perpetual students. The officers may ask too much of dancer's time through visitations and meetings or ask them to do too much and not just let a new member have fun. Club members should not look down at the dancer who cannot go visiting, learn all the new figures or do work within the club. There may be valid reasons that a member cannot do all these things.

RESPONSIBILITY

There are some members who want to participate in club activities and some

who will do very little. It is important that the club members understand and respect the degree of involvement that each member is willing to give. But it is equally important that all members of a volunteer social activity to their fair share of the work. New dancers may be very eager and may take on duties that they are not prepared for. In so doing, they may get discouraged or may receive complaints if they have not fulfilled their duties properly. Since this is a hobby that is supposed to be fun and if their job becomes too difficult or becomes a burden, they may drop out and seek another hobby.

SUMMARY

Every individual associated with the club must understand and recognize their responsibilities in the retention of dancers. Retaining dancers is the lifeblood of the Square Dance activity.



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RETAINING DANCERS



This information sheet was developed by the Education Committee of the UNITED SQUARE DANCERS OF AMERICA, INC. and will provide a brief summary of just a few of the topics concerning the retention of new dancers. These same techniques apply to square, round, contra, clogging, and other folk dance clubs.

Leadership Education material can also be printed directly from USDA web site at www.usda.org

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