

IDEAS ON NEW DANCERS - RECRUITMENT, TEACHING AND RETENTION

Without new dancers, your club cannot survive. Historically SD has always survived on a 50% retention rate even back in the 1970s when square dancing was hugely popular. Nowadays the retention rate is probably less than 50% but almost everywhere, new dancer numbers are very small. It's one thing to have new dancer sessions of 10 squares and keep five. Now we often have one square and only get one couple out of it.

For any Mainstream club to successfully recruit and retain new dancers, three things are needed.

The first is a commitment by a majority of its members to actively join in the recruitment drive and then to dance with the new dancers and make them feel wanted.

The second is to have a core group of enthusiastic club members dedicated to ensuring that the recruiting drive plan is made and executed.

The third is to find a way to have the new dancers join the regular club dancing after 10 - 12 weeks of lessons. THIS IS THE SUCCESSFUL WAY TO INCREASE MEMBERSHIP!

This third component requires concessions from the experienced dancers and a change in the teaching plan by the caller. (See below: NEW DANCER SESSIONS)

SOME IDEAS TO TRY (Based on experience and from articles in SD magazines)

PLAN #1

Engage **all** club members in the recruiting drive.

Decide on when your recruiting drive will start and end. (Suggestion that 4 - 6 weeks before your new dancer sessions start would be best.)

1. Set a target age (or ages) to approach. For example: Families, Teens, 20 - 40, 40 - 60. Decide if the club wants families with children and set an age limit on the children.
2. One-to-one, face-to-face - encourage club members (especially **newer** members) to make a list of 5 - 10 people they can talk to (grocery store clerk, dental hygienist, bank teller, garage personnel, shop assistants etc.) to see if there might be interest. **Train club members in what to say when talking to prospects. See below.**

Recruit one by one or one couple / family at a time. Collect info (names, addresses, phone #s)

3. Make a data base for prospective new dancers with name, postal address, email address and 'phone number. As club members make contacts, have them send the information to the keeper of the data base.

Check the included list of possible locations to post advertising and have club members volunteer for where they will put these up. Fill in the list for reminders.

4. For August have club members personally sign a letter - introducing the club, describing the activities (dance and non-dance) and describing the fun, exercise and sociability that the club offers to their members.

5. Make sure that the club posts zillions of posters - these now have to be redesigned and let's hope clubs can turn to the Federation for posters to download and print. Call on the list of volunteers and remind them of the places they said they would post.

6. Four to six weeks before the New Dancer Sessions start, put on a party night - maybe a chili supper or similar, and invite your prospects. (They might have other prospects who may wish to attend) At the party, sell the club (not dancing) Let prospects meet members. (Mix and mingle, meet and greet) Call three weeks ahead to confirm acceptance and two weeks ahead send another invitation. Three days before, call and offer a ride to the party.

Do a demo square after the meal, keeping the choreo simple (Stars, Circles etc) and make sure the music is modern sounding.

7. Get the prospects up to dance.

8. Sign them up for the New Dancer Sessions before they leave and have an info note to give them that gives, date, time and place and a contact number.

9. Those club members who bring in prospects for the 1st night **must** come and dance with them and then for several following new dancer sessions.

PLAN #2 BLAST CLASSES

Shorten the learning time to 15 hours over three weeks.

Do three consecutive Saturdays, 9:30 - 12:00 1:00 - 3:30. Feed them lunch, have refreshments available. (Hours are suggestions only - 2 1/2 hrs might be too much for one session.)

The learning at the Blast Class is aided by having experienced dancers participate.

Experience has shown that some newcomers to the activity like to learn this way and will put in the time. After 3 Saturdays, they join the club's regular night for Mainstream dancing. They should have learned 40 or more calls and have confidence and with a

1/2 hour teach before regular dancing, they will learn most of the mainstream Programme by the end of the season and, more importantly, feel that they belong. Experienced dancers don't have to 'endure' another Teaching Tip each regular club night.

NEW DANCER SESSIONS (not classes or lessons - research suggests that these terms are off-putting to the Boomers, Gen X and Gen Y)

Offer 10 - 12 weeks of instruction up to the club's Christmas Break or Christmas Party - to which the new dancers are invited.

- In these 10 weeks use the West Coast Call List or the Callerlab short list or your caller may want to make up a list of calls that he/she uses most often. The important thing is to include calls from the full Mainstream list to give the caller enough choreographic possibilities to entertain the club when the new dancers join them at the Christmas Party and of course, when they join the club on their regular dance night in the new year.
- It might be well to advise New Dancers of this possible change of day early in their sessions so that they can keep the new dance day open in the New Year.
- On or about the 6 - 7th New Dancer session check to remind them and see how many will be able to change their dance evening. It also gives the caller time to be able to judge if these new dancers will be far enough along for this to be possible.

In the New Year, ask the new dancers to come 1/2 hour early on club nights and teach them a new move from the Mainstream Programme. They will get practice doing this during the evening as well as floor time to dance what they learned before Christmas. Experienced dancers don't have to 'endure' another Teaching Tip.

- This gets new dancers into the club scene after 10 - 12 weeks and the rest of the season to learn and dance probably most if not all, the MS calls.
- It might take a lot of one-on-one back room persuasion to get the club on board - but the hope is that with more dancers on the floor, there is more of a party atmosphere and the older members will dance happily with the newcomers.
- **The priority is to have the new dancers join the club full time after their 10 - 12 week learning period before the Christmas break. Invite them to the Christmas Party, if you have one, and dance at their level for the whole dance.**

As experienced dancers, you have had 10 -12 weeks dancing full Mainstream up to Christmas. Now is the time to nurture the club's new dancers and help the membership grow. With your help and patience the new dancers will be exposed to most, or all, of the Mainstream list of calls by the end of the dance season. Now let them dance a further full year at Mainstream before mentioning Plus. Strong Mainstream dancers make for strong Plus dancers but weak dancers stay weak through Plus and A.

There will always be some new dancers who are slower to catch on but remember how Slow George became one of your staunchest members?

WHAT TO SAY TO PROSPECTS

When talking to casual acquaintances be sure to have a handout to give them and a paper and pen to note their name and phone #/email so that you can do follow up.
(Follow up is vital!)

Wear something noticeable - a button, a shirt with the new logo prominent - this gives a prospect a chance to open the conversation.

Be sure to talk to people at least 10 years younger than yourself if you are over 40!

Never mention lessons, classes, programmes. Just be positive about having fun, making new friends and moving to all kinds of fun music - no fancy dress involved! Choose from the questions below and make note of the replies.

"If you came to a Square Dance, what would you want to experience?"

"What would it take to get you to come Square Dancing?"

"What would it take to get you interested in Square Dancing?"

"If you came to a Square Dance what would you expect?"

"How could I persuade you to come out to an evening of Square Dancing?"

"Would you like to try a fun, new way to exercise?"

"Have you ever thought of going out for an evening of dancing?"

"Would you like to try something new with your partner (husband/wife)?"

"Do you get a chance to get out of the house and socialize, have a lot of fun and do a bit of exercise - all at the same time?"

"Would you like to get your whole family involved in a fun, alcohol-free activity?"

"Want to try a new team sport?"

"Do you like to learn new things?"

"Want to really please your wife?"

"Guys, Square Dancing is just walking to music and following what the caller says. No twinkletoes, no fancy dress, no exhibition - you are part of a team of 8 working together."

"When I say Square Dancing, what is the first thing that comes into your head." *If the answer is all about fiddles, barns and funny clothes, then say:* "Could I totally surprise you? How about coming to see how different things have become."

YOU WILL BE SURPRISED AT:

The music being used - Lady Gaga!, Adele! Uncle Kracker! Anna Kendrick!

Lots of Pop, Rock, Swing, Blues, Dixieland, CW, Broadway - even Classical.

You will be surprised at how many kilometers you will dance in a 2 hour square dance evening - Have a guess! (5- 7)

You will be surprised at how much fun it is to do those recommended 10,000 daily steps.

You will be surprised at how much you will laugh, hug and chat and the new friends you will make.

You will be surprised at how little you miss your cell phone during the evening.

You will be surprised at how few puffy crinolines you will see.

You will be surprised at how much pure fun you will experience.

You will be surprised at the health benefits. (Have the Federation Health Brochure handy)

You will surprised how much fun you can add to your fitness routine.

You will be surprised to see no barns, no hay bales, to hear no screechy fiddles.

You will be surprised how a Square turns into a circle of friends.