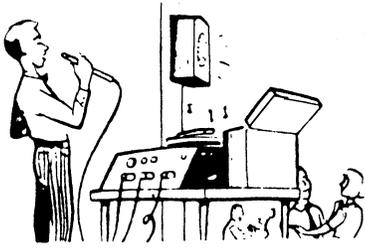


WHAT MAKES A CALLER OR ROUND DANCE TEACHER?



“What makes a caller?” and “What makes a round dance teacher?”

Four members responded with some meaty answers, **Sam Mitchell says:**

“One certainly cannot use the old saying ‘callers are born, not made’. We all know this not to be true! In fact, we know it to be quite the opposite!

“First off, I feel the number one requirement to being a caller is a deep devotion to the entire square dance movement.

He or she must have learned to dance and in most cases learned to do so quite well.

“Secondly, one must have found that what their caller was doing, was worthwhile, interesting, challenging and personally rewarding (rewarding in the sense that the caller was making people have fun).

“Thirdly, one must certainly feel that he or she has a certain amount of talent and ability; at least enough of each to make the effort to learn to call.

“Fourth, one must have the available time to devote to learning to call as it is a time consuming field to enter.

“Fifth, one must be just a little bit on the vain side, as it stands to reason, you couldn’t continue with calling if you didn’t think you were doing it fairly well.

“All five of my suggested requirements must enter into the picture if one wants to be a caller, over and above these five suggestions you will find no mention of the following:

1. Should be somewhat outgoing
2. Should be willing to take critical remarks well
3. Should never hesitate to seek advice
4. Should place ethics above personal feelings
5. Should always set the near perfect example.

Bob Augustin shares some thought-provoking observations:

“The very fact one is a square dance caller does not make one a leader. True leadership qualities in an individual are not common. In my opinion, leaders are born and not made. The all around caller therefore, must be a natural-born leader.

In addition to being a talented individual when it comes to having good voice, clarity, rhythm, and timing. It becomes apparent that most callers are not endowed with these attributes because everybody can’t be a pro and leader too! Therefore, it becomes apparent that all-around square dance callers are in short number. It is to be hoped that the talented caller-leader will find himself or herself in a place in the activity where their talents can do the square dance movement the most good.

Unfortunately, this circumstance does not prevail in a number of instances and the square dance movement

suffers because of it. There are too many instances where people of limited ability have a virtual stranglehold on various important activities in the movement and this circumstance lends itself to the attainment of mediocre results.

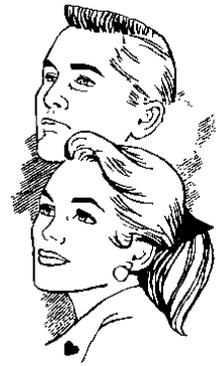
“There is a belief among many that in order for a caller to be a real caller, he or she must teach too! I take issues with that philosophy. There are many callers teaching who have no business teaching anything. Great callers are not necessarily good teachers and vice-versa. In fact, if the truth be known, you’d probably find that most good teachers are average-to-below average square dance callers. A vast majority of your better coaches in football were men who were just average in their playing days. In my opinion, this is where leadership has its greatest role in the square dancing activity teaching. This is where we either make or break our square dancers; in too many instances we break them because of inadequate teaching and a lack of leadership vested in the person doing the teaching.

The teacher who tries to become all things to those he is teaching is doing a disservice to everyone concerned in my opinion. This is one end of the square dance movement for which we are going to have to set up guidelines. I don’t pretend to know the answer, but I do know we’ve got to eliminate from the teaching end those who are simply not qualified. There are too many classes that graduate with too many dancers who do not know what they are doing. There is a couple or two in every class who should be discouraged from taking lessons, but this takes leadership and it is lacking in so many cases. The growing complexity of square dancing today makes it mandatory that we graduate people who have a complete grasp of their basic moves and basics.

“It now becomes apparent that a square dance caller can be an excellent teacher, but be a very poor caller by the standards with which we measure the attributes of real professional square dance calling. It is now more obvious that ‘what makes a caller’ has to be broken down in several categories because there are all kinds and types of callers.

“If it is possible to condense it, a caller who is worth his salt in any facet of the square dance movement must possess the following characteristics and innate talents.

- 1) He or she must have a basic affinity for people. You have to like people to really work effectively with them.
- 2) You must understand your own limitations and those of the people you call to and teach



- 3) You must have the courage of your convictions and not be afraid to stand up for what you believe to be right in square dancing.
- 4) You must have some clarity to your voice and have some basic feel for music.
- 5) You must be flexible and open-minded when it comes to accepting inevitable changes in square dancing and choreography.
- 6) You must be dedicated to the point that your job is to make people have a good time through the medium of square dancing.

“In my judgment, the last item is the most important and it is the one that will eventually separate the men from the boys. Lately, the life of the real square dance calling pro has been a tough one. He is not only expected to be a great caller, but an entertainer, comic, actor and great singer, and all for a fee of \$100.00 to \$150.00. In many cases being a good caller is not enough. On top of all of the above, you have to be a Clark Gable. Today, most of what is expected from a real fine caller is all out of proportion. This gets back to No.6. A square dance floor hasn't any right to expect a caller to be more than a good square dance caller and to be able to entertain them by calling a good dance. That's really the name of the game.”

“What makes a round dance teacher? is answered by Frank & Phyl Lehnert:

“Of course the obvious things are necessary: a reasonable amount of musical ability, ability to execute proper basic steps, a good clear voice with a workable amount of public speaking ability, and the ability to cue and teach well.

“All of the above are very important, but I have the feeling that at least 500/0 of the success of a R/D teacher depends on his ability to “get along with people” - to relate to them on a one to one basis, even if the relationship, in reality, is more likely to be 1 to 50. It is important to sincerely like the people you are working with and to impress them that you are doing the very best you can for them. A good teacher does not bluff his way through a problem and readily admits, “I don't know” when it pertains. He/she must do what is best for the majority, rather than heed the noisy minority, keeping the fun in dancing and keeping it the good recreation that it is.”

Edna & Gene Amfield list what it takes to be a round dance leader:

“First, a love for people combined with a love of dancing.

“Humility and hard work.

“Ability to guide people in a tactful manner - a must in leadership and teaching in any field.

“A good foundation and education in dancing with the desire to learn more. A thorough knowledge of body mechanics musical phrasing. The ability to conduct a successful beginner class. Teaching routines without being able to teach basics is like building a house without a foundation.

“Patience, humor and a touch of charisma. One must be long on patience combined with a quiet sense of humor.

Know when to interject levity to produce relaxed learning. Use personal charisma to make each individual feel instructions are directly to them as though there was no one else in the room.

“Judgment - be heavy on it in selection of material, programming and how much and how long to spend on teaching portions of a dance.

“Mike presence”, pleasant voice projection, accurate presentation of material using showmanship with dignity.

“Proper cueing, both with wireless mike from floor and with stationery mike.

“Using directional cues with proper basic terminology.

“Dress neatly. Keep good teamwork and rapport between teacher and partner.

“Avoid gossip. Find something good to say about other individuals or keep silent.

“Above all the ethical. In this profession, the monetary gain is not the bull's eye in the target. The friends one makes in the circle of dancing is the real pay-off.

“Finally but foremost, we lack education and training for round dance leaders. We need training schools and seminars.

In no other teaching field, can one presume to teach others without proper training. This is a profession and should be treated as one.”

And one final comment from Amfields to all callers and leaders, “If you know it all, you are over the hill”.



REPRINT FROM
AMERICAN SQUARE DANCE
MAGAZINE Sandusky, Ohio

