

Speech delivered at the 55th National Square Dance Convention in San Antonio, TX
By Tim Marriner

First of all, I would like to thank the 55th National Square Dance Convention Board for inviting me to have the opportunity to speak with you this morning. Also, I would like to thank each and every one of you for being here this morning taking time out of your busy dance schedule.

About thirty –five years ago I started out in this activity on a dare. I too was resistant; you could see the two trail marks behind me as they dragged me into the room. But to my surprise I began enjoying myself. I enjoyed the camaraderie of all the folks involved. The people that were training me to dance thought they could start feeding me singing call records. At one point a caller said, “You can’t come back to our group until you can call patter.” So, I started training with a caller that was wonderful in the area. He took the time to educate me with all the leadership available to get me on the road to become a caller. Before I knew it I was recording records for square dances and traveling around the world entertaining dancers.

Back in the early days there were lots of families involved and many family friendly square dance clubs. Some parent clubs had satellite clubs that offered clogging, line dancing, youth or teen groups that met at different times. It was a big social gathering. They would have weekends, camping outings and different events where everybody gathered together as a group enjoying lots of fellowship. It was a blast! That’s what kept me involved with the activity. I was a part of all the fun. The social bond of fellowship is one of our activities biggest assets. Getting together at these National Conventions is a reunion of sorts. We come back and reunite with people from different areas again and again. That is such a great bond to have.

If you look at the predominant leaders of today you might be fascinated to find out that the majority, like myself, were teenagers when they started calling. We would not have those leaders today if somebody didn’t take the time to help them along the way, to encourage them as youth to get involved and stay involved as young adults. We stayed the course and have continued to enjoy our calling. But where are the leaders that are going to be here thirty five years from now? That poses a problem that we need to start analyzing.

Vernon Jones and I were talking earlier and he stated that at thirteen he was the youngest caller in his Texas callers association; and he still is some thirty years later. The same scenario has happened to me. That is an issue our activity needs to address. Today’s leaders were molded thirty years ago. We need to start grooming new leaders today to take part, to assume responsibility in the future so that other generations can enjoy all of this! We are at a stage now where we are not working, grooming our leaders for tomorrow. Again, we really need to start work on this today.

What a difference thirty years can make. Think back thirty years ago. Most everybody knew their neighbors. We were front porch folks! Children were in the front yard playing. Air Conditioning was not as prevalent back then, which kept people outside more. AC has drawn us inside. Another thing that has evolved is television. I may be dating myself but I remember the

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round black and white tube that was lucky to pick up three stations. Look what we have today, unlimited channels in multiple languages geared to whatever your interest; gardening, cooking, Jerry Springer... also HDTV, TiVo, & DVD recorders. Those are the sort of things that allow one to become cocooned; never leaving the house. Computers have evolved too. Once we had computers the size of rooms. Now we have computers the size of cell phones that take pictures and movies that can be emailed to our friends immediately over the internet.

It's fascinating to see the changes that thirty years can make. We had automobiles back then that didn't have seat belts. Now we have airbags and every safety device you can think of. I was lucky to have an AM radio in my first car, a Willis Jeep by the way. We are fortunate today to have virtually a jukebox on wheels. We have satellite radio now. I have satellite radio, and recommend it over cable radio! Cable radio didn't work very well unless you like driving in circles. Today's price of a car was the price of a home back then. Now most have to have dual incomes to afford a family home due to the increase in the price of goods. We also use to carry around library cards. Now the internet can come right into our homes.

Thirty years ago we had family and teen clubs. Today we don't have much of that in our activity. It's a sad state. We have gotten away from family clubs. We have groups today that don't want youth or teens in their clubs. "No, we aren't going to teach anyone that can't do a Star Thru with us." We need to start relaxing some of these rules and regulations and start adding incentives for young adults, teens, youth and families to get back into our activity; whether it's family rates or half price plans, something that can help with the economics of getting and keeping them involved.

Donna and I like to do a lot of antiquing. As we travel across the country or to different regions of the world we often find ourselves in rummage shops, antique dealers or flea markets. One day we were in a part of Alabama that was noted to have lots of antiques. In this one shop we stopped at I found some old records, 78's, and 45's. I discovered an old square dance record, Rhythm Sticks on Roadrunner Records by Randy Dougherty. It only cost \$1.00, so I bought it and am looking forward to ribbing him over the fact I found his record in an antique store! We also found an old Bob Osgood's Sets in Order Magazine dated back February 1967. I bought it for \$1.00 and read it from cover to cover. If you were to take today's American Square Dance magazine; remove the cover and place it over this old magazine from 1967, the information would be as pertinent today as it was back then. The content reads like a current magazine! Inside there was material that discussed many problems back then. They had problems with recruiting, image, teaching, drop outs, retention, promotion, organizations, economics, clothing, club dynamics, poor leadership, and bad callers! Fascinating that the problems we had thirty years ago we still have today. I have been trying to figure out why that is? Can anyone solve these problems?

What I think I have understood is that thirty years ago the perception was the activity was doing just fine, doing well. The perception was the activity was healthy and viable because lots

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of people were joining in. Unfortunately, perception seems to almost always out weigh the facts. It looked as if the activity was growing, everything just hunky dory going in the right direction. We still had all these problems but nobody was really worried about them because the next class joined the club and we had another five to seven squares added to our ranks. I remember the days when callers refused to teach a class with less than five squares. I think today the trend is if you have five people the class is on! This is done out of necessity of course. We need new dancers. We realize we need the folks. Back then we had the appearance there were few problems because we had the dancers', lots of people involved. Unfortunately most didn't measure or keep track of retention rates. Things were not as good as it appeared.

I remember in the area where I started in Virginia Beach, VA there were four clubs that were twenty square clubs; very healthy! They had classes every year and had big groups. Groups eventually split up and formed other clubs to the point where there were twenty clubs all four square groups. Today there are three clubs mostly all three square groups. There must be problems. If you were to measure, there is no doubt a decline in our numbers. To say there are no problems is denial, ignoring the facts, much like the ostrich sticking its head in the sand. I'm here to tell you we need to take our heads out of the sand because there are problems within our current activity.

No, these are not "Dooms Day" type crises. Thirty years ago leaders figured ways to get around these problems. The thing is; problems really don't go away, they are ever present. Today, most groups have let down their guard and stopped keeping track of figures, and are more panicked to find out there are still problems. We have the capacity to resolve most of these issues. We just have to recognize them before they occur.

Club dynamics are ever changing. Leaders that recognize the changes can redirect their efforts in ways to achieve positive results. Fortunately we have some leaders in our activity today that use to be managers of very important companies. They see trends and know how to work to redirect the organizations in a way to achieve positive results.

One problem the activity faces today is an overall decrease in dancers affecting club longevity. The average club dancer today might dance three to five years. I 'm sure I am preaching to the choir here because you are not the average club dancer. You are festival dancers that travel everywhere and have attended many National Conventions. You have beaten the odds. We need to encourage club dancers to attend regional festivals and national dances to experience the reunions and fellowship attached to these events. We need these dancers to gain access to the leadership seminars provided at these events. Once again, we must start training our future leaders.

Why are more and more clubs folding? I have a theory; clubs often have the tendency to ignore their own needs. They often work on a status quo basis, and are more apt to get negative results. Often time's groups do things habitually. Every September they conduct a class, get a

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hall, pay the caller, and outside their normal club dances they might host a club anniversary dance. The next officers come in and must be able to perform the same service, to be able to obtain a hall, to be able have the know how to hire callers, get folks in for their special events. Then the next officers come in and the transition almost becomes a game of passing the party hat to the next set of officers continually. Leaders ignoring the clubs needs or not measuring success are going to be blinded like the ostrich with its head in the sand. You need a way to measure results to keep track of how things are going. If you continue down the same path without ever changing the equation, if you don't see the declines, you are destined to fold; just a fact. If every year you have a decline in numbers and your answer is, "Let's increase our dues", eventually it will be too costly to continue. Finances are difficult. Facilities are needed but rent can be high and usually increase. It might be interesting to determine the ratio of rent to our door fees. At one time dance fees were \$1.00 per person. I know the rate of inflation has grown over the years but today the average door fee is now \$3.00 to \$4.00 per person. But, the hall rents that were \$20 years ago are now \$200. There is no way, if you do the math, a group can survive unless they have an increase in members. If you could ten fold the numbers of dancers the perception would be the problem has gone away.

Many years ago I was with a group of friends at a family's home cooking a wonderful meal. The parents, grand parents and great grandparents and kids were all in the house enjoying the reunion. One sibling went into the kitchen and asked their mother "Why do you cut off the ends of the ham before placing it in the pan? She said, "Because the ham taste better when the juice can simmer through the meat keeping it moist and tender; more flavorful. Besides, my mom did it that way." This same person then asked the grandmother why she cut the ends off the ham before placing it in the pan. Her reply was very similar to provide tenderness and flavor but also added, "My mother did the same thing." Inquisitively, the child asked the great grandmother the same question and to everyone's amazement the answer was, "I cut the ham to fit the only pan I had that fit in the oven." Wow! Look at all that wasted meat over the years. Doing something for all the wrong reasons! So it's ok to ask questions to determine why we do the things we do.

Are our actions effective, creating positive results? Often times we are our own worst enemies. Negative attitudes can interfere with a club or organizations progress. Exclusiveness, cliques, condemnation, unwillingness to help, resistance to change and apathy will all destroy groups, clubs, and organizations. We have had these problems for years but as we have reduced in members the blemishes seem to be more visible, and really do have a negative effect upon our groups. Even amongst our leaders, callers, and cuers; problems with ego, pride, arrogance, can cloud good judgment. Have you ever tried to have a discussion with someone and you would swear they were covering their ears while talking? They only want you to hear what they have to say. They do not care to hear what you have to say in return. They just want to provide you with their thoughts. I'm here to remind you we have two ears and one mouth to listen twice as much as we speak! We need to open our ears and listen to all viewpoints before we make decisions. But unfortunately with some, ego, pride, and arrogance, clouds their judgment closing their

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senses. No way are they going to change the way they have done business over the years. If something is not working and you have been following this same path all along, it's time to look for other paths. If your club is growing, don't change a thing. Congratulations! Share your ways with others. But if you find yourself on a decline, something in the equation needs to be changed. If you don't, then your group is destined to fold.

Often time's dancers and leaders get a short timers attitude. We are seeing this more often now as our activity is graying. We have folks in the activity who are only concerned about their own shadow. Only concerned about how much enjoyment they can achieve within maybe four or five more years. Anything that happens after that doesn't matter to them. But I want each and every one of you to realize; it matters. If you really enjoy the fellowship and fun of what we can provide then you would want this to continue thirty years from now. We need to start thinking what is going to become of our activity thirty to fifty years from now. What does the future hold? I would like to see a 105th National Square Dance Convention. Not that I would like to see it but I would like to know that a 105th Convention could take place. We must harness the energy and enthusiasm of what we have today and educate our new leaders to start worrying about fifty years from now not just five years.

I was talking to someone earlier this week, a predominant leader in the activity, and asked them how things were going. They responded they had decided to retire. "I'm giving up, quitting. I've worked through the heydays of the 80's. Now I'm going to look back and remember the good old days." I really didn't know what to say but told them I was sorry because the activity sure could use their leadership to help with the future. "Too late", he said. "I've already sold my records and equipment." I felt this was short sided and defeatist. If you enjoy today's activity we need to plant seeds for the future.

There is a lot of apathy out there. Many dancers are very satisfied with the way things are right now; comfortable with their little group of friends and don't want anything or anyone to interfere with their small circle. They don't want new dancers because most likely they will interfere with their level of proficiency. After all; this is why they learned all the calls, invested money work and time. They don't want to recruit. If new dancers do enter the club they don't want to dance with them. They only want to dance with dancers with the same level of proficiency. We need to get away from this negative attitude. We have the perception everyone wants to help perpetuate the activity but the fact is nobody really wants to be the one to do it. Many would prefer someone else to do it. They would rather rely on the new people to do all the work. Who is managing the store?

We have callers retiring after calling for clubs over thirty to fifty years with no regard to who is taking the group over when they leave. You would have thought that over thirty years they might have trained somebody, groomed them to take the position. There are groups we can learn from that are successful role models for our activity. In Japan many clubs have three club callers. They don't seem to have a conflict. They are known as caller number one, two, and

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three. Caller number one is the usual club caller, the one that calls most of the dances. Caller number two helps whenever number one is out and helps with classes. Caller number three is the caller in training, an apprentice. Sometimes they get together collectively for the fellowship of the entire group. We all can learn from this example. Here in the U.S. not all clubs have a club caller, but hopefully someone is teaching new dancers because the activity sure does need them.

There are areas where there are no square dance clubs. Known associations have stimulated growth in different regions subsidizing nearby callers to travel to the baron dance spot to start a group. That's an interesting "Winning Way!" If you know of an area or city that does not have an existing club wouldn't it be great to have some sort of starter kit to provide someone with a DVD, tape or live caller to train dancers? Can you imagine what would happen if everyone started planting the seeds necessary to jump start or grow square dance clubs?

We all seem to lack vision and sometimes even a sense of direction. Callers and cuers need to work together and be a part of the equation for success. We need to start attacking problems and not each other. We have to stop undercutting, backstabbing, and fault finding to collectively work for the betterment of the activity.

Have you ever watched a flock of birds or a school of fish? They seem to work as a team, a unit looking larger than they are individually. They go in one direction then all of a sudden dart in another. How they communicate this change of direction I'm not sure, but they do all seem to work in unison. Occasionally one falls out of the pattern unable to keep up with the rest. Usually that's the one a predator attacks. Collectively they give the appearance of being larger than the predator, but one stray part becomes a meal. As a group they protect each other through team work. We have this same thing going on now in our activity. We have an organization of organizations called the ARTS. A lot of work can get done as a larger collective group than one can do individually. So, if you are not sure of what the ARTS can do for you or what you can do for the ARTS please checkup on that to find out what it is and what they are working on. It is a very viable organization for our future. Yes, each organization CALLERLAB, Roundalab, Contralab, United Singles Square Dancers of America, National Campers, International Association of Gay and Lesbian dancers, USA West, and NEC are working individually for the betterment of the activity. However, we still need a communication link between the organizations in order to collectively move our activity in a better direction. The unification of our groups through the ARTS gives the perception we are larger than our individual parts. A sole club, individual caller, or dancer can not make as large an impact upon the overall activity the way ARTS can.

Another problem the activity faces is our inability to disseminate information to the club level. Some of the most knowledgeable leaders of today have compiled many educational documents available for others to learn from. Most of this information is available on web sites, blogs, organizational newsletters, and magazines but so few seek it. Very few know it even exists. If your leaders are members of any organizations, ask them to provide you with

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educational material. Let your dancers read the newsletters or have web site information available for them to seek. Editors of magazines and newsletters will often provide free copies or first year subscriptions for new dancers. Clubs need to get new dancers invested in the activity.

It was interesting at the last Roundalab Convention I attended a dancer said leadership is when you turn around and see everyone following you. Somehow or another if you ever pick up a microphone you become a leader. Leaders can fall into ruts and old habits are hard to break. However, we need to educate rather than manipulate! We also need to provide training for other leaders. If you don't have continual education training in your area, hire someone that can do it for you. There are lots of individuals in our activity that can provide training and motivation for your groups. If you don't have leadership seminars in your state or region to demonstrate how you can achieve positive results, start one! Our lack of business is partially due to our lack of business practices. We aren't training our volunteers. Someone needs to start managing the store. Somebody must provide leadership. We need to start implementing better business practices and tactics to manage clubs and compete with today's market place.

How many clubs for example have a working budget; show by hands please? Eight hands out of a whole room full of people have a working budget. We all need to start thinking in terms of a budget. How are your groups going to financially survive? Set aside five percent of your net towards advertising and never reduce it. If you have a large treasury, still five percent needs to be put back to support the activity through advertising. You should extend a financial plan to project five years into the future. Now you have a tool to measure and predict how well the group is functioning financially. Let every member, caller, and cuer, get involved to evaluate the clubs needs. You need to set an action plan. Get a set of goals for your organization. You also need a means of measuring the success rate. You have to motivate the members. They need to fully understand the objectives and be supportive of their clubs efforts, duties, and responsibilities. As goals are being met you also need to recognize that success. Praise the workers. Let them know when they have done great work, and give recognition where it is due. Have a contest or set awards for achievement. Take AIM! This means if you have a plan you need to be flexible enough to, **Adjust** it, **Improvise** it, and **Modify** it along the way. Sometimes a plan is set and a something happens that knocks it off course. Don't worry, battle that problem and get back on track with the initial plan. Occasionally plans get overcome by other events. No problem, chart a new course. We have to treat clubs more business like without loosing track of the fact we are in a people pleasing business.

When you evaluate a clubs needs remember you need to have a way to measure the success rate. Ask yourselves, "Are we loosing members or gaining members"? What does the group need? If you ask that question amongst the club it would be interesting to see what the answers might be. If you are loosing members; why? Do you care if you are loosing members? Survey the lost members to find out what you can do to make a positive difference. Don't assume you already know the answers. Send a questioner or a post card saying, "We miss you and need you

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to fill our square. Call this number or stop by our next dance to say hello and let us know how you are doing.” This is an example of gathering lost members by inviting them back into the flock to enjoy the fellowship, the social glue necessary to stick together. It is also an example of how to maintain members. In CALLERLAB we have an R.P.M. committee whose charge is to help with recruiting, promoting and maintaining the activity through various marketing efforts. Well, it is this “maintain” part that many clubs are lacking. We are not maintaining our memberships very well. Often times, it's just a matter of keeping track of our people.

You need to be able to measure success rates. There are a few equations that can help and should be closely tracked. One equation measures the retention rate. The number of renewed members divided by last years members multiplied by one hundred equals the retention ratio for the year. Another equation can measure the dropout rate of new dancers. The number of dancers that started classes divided by the number of those dancers that graduated and still attending club dances multiplied by one hundred equals the dropout ratio for the year. A third equation is useful to measure a clubs growth rate. The total number of current dancers divided by the total number of last years dancers multiplied by one hundred equals the growth ratio for the year. The answers obtained by these three equations should be tallied annually and could be graphed over several years for future reference. Groups that track these rates have statistical evidence to measure success. The results are amazing and often astounding!

If what you are doing is not achieving positive results then you need to seek change. Some will lead you to believe money will solve all problems. Can't tell you how many times I have seen clubs fold with thousands of dollars in their bank account. Throw money on a fire; it really won't go out. Standing back acknowledging there is a fire doesn't put it out either. Someone needs to figure out the fuel source, determine how to remove it, in order to put out the fire. If you are waiting on an organization to solve your problems for you, it will never happen. As Chairman of CALLERLAB people have told me "It's entirely your fault." All an organization can do is provide the best educational information and make it available for an individual to learn and educate others. Until the time comes when CALLERLAB conducts a new dancer class they will never as an organization put a new dancer on the floor. CALLERLAB can provide all the tools necessary to train others on how to do the job. Organizations are a great resource of educational information. However, it is up to each and every one of us individually to step up to the plate to make a difference in our own areas. A grass roots effort to be more proactive as leaders is necessary to achieve positive results.

Recruiting is a year round process, not just something you do as you start classes in September. Establish a good rapport with your local media. If you are not in contact with radio, newspaper, and television folks year round, you are missing the boat. The internet is a new way to get the word out. Does your club have a web site? Have you posted anything on You Tube or Facebook? You need to start developing new marketing strategies with the new tools that exist. Many think technology is competing against us. Let's not give in to the notion technology of today is harnessing us; let's harness today's technology to help us. The internet, websites, blogs,

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chat rooms, Facebook, You Tube, DVD's and power point presentations can all assist our activity. Callerlab.org, ART-Dance.org, Dosado.com, and USDA.org all offer useful tools with a wealth of information to educate our current and future leaders. Draw from these wells success stories, teaching tips, winning ways, and other important educational material. If you are having trouble recruiting don't waist your time trying to reinvent the wheel; get on a web site to seek ways that have been tried and proven successful in other areas. If it doesn't work, try another one next time.

We have a unique way of recruiting in our Sun City Squares group near Hilton Head, SC. Over the last seven years or so we have grown from eight people to eighty couples. Some of what we do is very basic marketing. Some members have held house parties and invited non dancing neighbors to be a part of the social evening after a dance. They are not recruiting; they are just socializing around food and drinks. Some dancers laugh about what happened at the dance while others discuss golf or other common interest. Eventually they get to know their neighbors better. Once an open house try out dance party comes around they invite these same friends to join in the fun. "Hey, you already know most of the players. Why don't you try square dancing with us"? This is no longer a cold sale to a complete stranger. The house parties warm up the neighbors to the idea ahead of time. They begin to think square dancers are just like themselves, destroying the stereotypical image of those involved. This has been successful for us and I am sure it could work for others.

There are so many unique ways to recruit. If you don't get good results from one try another. Here's one; every time you hand someone a dollar throughout the day provide them with a business card pertaining your dance information. Imagine how many cards you could give out in one year? Eventually some of those cards are going to find there way to someone that wants that information. This has proven to be a successful way of recruiting for some groups. Others offer salmon bakes or chili cook offs to promote the activity in their area. Some have been allowed to stuff flyers while bagging groceries. On average you only get about a one percent return on flyers or newspaper ads, but it does no good if you only place this material at club dances. "If you bill it, they will come!" does not work. You have to entice prospective dancers taking them by the hand into the first square. Direct contact by word of mouth is still the best way to recruit. Cuers can't wait for callers to do the work. Callers can't wait for dancers to do the work. Dancers can't wait for some organization to do the work. Each and every one of us has to take on the responsibility to do the work recruiting at the grass roots level.

Teaching is another issue. Lots of clubs really don't want new people. They are satisfied with how things are now and don't want new dancers to interfere with their level of proficiency. You expect new dancers to enter the club with a three year or greater level of proficiency, as proficient as you, after twenty five weeks. It's just not going to happen. You need to take the time to go out and make them feel they are a part of a family. Wade Driver once said, "Not like in-laws." Get new dancers involved and make them feel welcome. You need to be willing to reduce your club level of proficiency for a time to help the new dancers gain confidence.

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If your clubs need is new people, then recruit and get them into your club as soon as possible. Start dancing with them immediately. If your club has plenty of members but needs to increase overall proficiency then reduce the number of classes a year you conduct. Hold workshops before a dance. Set goals to have the group master certain steps or calls within some time frame. Provide instructional materials so dancers can practice on there own.

Multicycle methods of teaching, Fast Tracks and Blast Classes are alternative ways to teach rather than the traditional thirty once a week sessions most everyone is use too. For some, these alternatives are very effective. Multicycle is a teaching format that allows for more than one entry point during a given year. Staggered entry points allow new dancers to join the activity at various times in a season. Fast Track teaching is usually over a three weekend time period. Blast is usually teaching as much as possible in a given day. All of these methods need to have a place for the dancers to dance afterwards. There needs to be a way to feather the new dancers into the home club, otherwise without a support system these folks stand a greater chance of dropping out.

Angels are another dynamic to new dancers groups. My approach is somewhat different. You only need three angel couples to fill the last square. If all the squares are completely filled there is no need for angels. This way no one person or couple has the burden of having to angel a new dancer through an entire set of lessons. Club members often get recruitment burn out due to having the obligation to angle yet another year of lessons. A club angel roster is set up and rotated throughout the club members. If someone can not attend a session they are to find a replacement. There might be a situation where no angles are necessary due to full sets. I want to be sure the new dancers know how to dance on their own and are not just being pushed or pulled into position. I have seen callers depend on angles to get new dancers through the material rather than provide proper teaching. Teaching tips are available at CALLERLAB.org

Our toughest job is still maintaining dancers. I think most clubs can recruit dancers adequately. I think some can promote. But, most clubs are failing when it comes to maintaining members. Groups often push new dancers into an officer's position too soon. Most new dancers do not have any prior experience with running anything. We also rush new dancers through the programs to fast. Often times we get new dancers into the activity only to make them attend a workshop or another class to reach another program. This is almost like a poor sales approach of "bait and switch." We must find a better way to feather the new dancers into the club sooner. Some dancers think the more calls they dance the better dancers they become. This is not true. Callers often times prefer to call more calls from standard formations than being creative with just a few. The art of calling is being able to entertain the dancers with fewer calls. Figuring ways to be creative with fewer calls is a lot more work. Callers need to be able to use less puzzle pieces to entertain. Sure, I enjoy a large puzzle but not everyone does. Round dancers have danced Frenchy Brown and Houston several hundred times still enjoying the same routines. Another example of this is a line dance called the Electric Slide. No matter how many times you play it the floor is full of people enjoying the dance. The music provides a rhythm that dancers

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enjoy moving to, providing fun. Music should enhance the dance. A wide variety of music usually keeps the dance fresh and interesting. Current music can entice a younger audience. It is time we put the dance back into our activity. Good music, interesting dance routines, and good old fashioned fun will help maintain dancers.

The late Bob Osgood attended a Board of Governors informal meeting at a CALLERLAB convention and stated how he felt we had lost sight of the fellowship of our activity. Questioned about this comment he continued to explain how dancers use to do things together outside of the dance on a social level. Bowling nights, pizza parties, ice cream socials, pot luck dinners, pool parties, picnics, theater outings, and camping trips were all a part of clubs yearly activities. I understood what he meant. If our activity could focus more on the social side and less on the puzzle solving we would have a far better retention rate and could better maintain our club numbers. Many groups think it's more important to progress dancers through levels of dance rather than entertain them socially. The programs and phases are important. I enjoy dancing all of them but we often loose site of our social side of the activity. The key is to have a balance of both. Fellowship is the major ingredient to the glue that bonds members.

Can we reverse this outgoing tide? Yes, each of us individually has the capability of doing just that. Every member needs to get on board to pull collectively. Don't be a hitch hiker going along for the ride. We can get out of apathetic ruts; motivate members to secure a stronger activity for the future. Though the perception of problems appears to reduce with an increase of members, we still need to address dropout and retention rates while evaluating the needs of the club. Stay involved. Join area associations. Get on board with State, National, and International organizations. Help out and we can make progress. We can make a positive difference. Start thinking long term about the future of Square Dancing. I would like to see someone thirty years from now be on a stage like this discussing all the opportunities and good times they had with hopes for more tomorrows. Thank you for your time. Now, let's all get back to dancing!