

How (Not) to Kill Square Dancing, One Dancer at a Time

Most of us are VERY concerned about the decline of the square dance activity (after all, we TALK about it a great deal...) The following thoughts were from the keynote address at the National Square Dance Convention in St. Paul, MN, which was titled "Attitude is Everything", by Jerry Junck.

So, suppose there was someone who wanted to decrease the success of square dancing. It is SO easy to do: we only need to turn off one dancer at a time—**even one dancer lost means 7 others not dancing and one less square!** Many clubs are down to 1-2 squares a dance, anyway. One less dancer could do it.

What are things this person could do to make sure that people are not attracted to square dancing, and if they do come, don't stay past the first half of the year, or their first club dance? The following suggestions can be used at any club where even one member who isn't having fun anymore wants to finally close its doors. Actually, we can each look at our own club and see that at least one is already in place; some clubs practice them all religiously—and wonder why they still have the same 20 members year after year. Here's Mr. Junck's list of things to do (or avoid) if we want to discourage dancers:

1. Insist on square dance attire—full skirts, petticoats, men's long sleeved shirts, etc. (We do not refer to shoes that protect floors.)

We should insist that women wear full skirts and fashions that haven't changed since the 50's—RETRO is in! We ALL love ruffles, flourishes, frilly stuff and short skirts, and long-sleeved shirts are SO comfortable for some men in the heat of exertion, right? Also, make snide remarks about anyone who doesn't dress in SD attire in their hearing, put "*Square Dance Attire Required*" on your flyers, and frown at women wearing prairie skirts and pants.

2. Don't have a class, don't encourage new dancers (unless they are just as good as you are), and don't go to clubs that do these things.

"I've paid my dues in square dancing, and I'm NOT going to drag newby's through it anymore." (Overheard by Mr. Junck from a caller of 25 years.) This one starts at the top: dancers reflect the attitudes of their caller(s). If the caller doesn't like to teach, the members will be less welcoming to new dancers, too.

"They're real nice to them the first night or two and then no one will dance with them. Pretty soon the new people are gone and some of the old people are gone because they've gotten tired of bringing in the new people." Bill Gilmore, 1961. (See below for address of the full interview.)

Hint: Don't even bother with a class—let someone else teach them for us! After all, a class of 4-5 dancers is a LOT of trouble. That's ONLY half a square. And NEVER be an angel! (Now, why do they call them THAT?)

3. Dance only the Plus or above program.

Entry level—why bother with that? Everyone loves to falter through 6-12 months of "dancing" until they "get it". After all, people just thrive on being made to appear dumb—in public, yet. And they came because they thought square dancing would be FUN? Boy, can we play with their minds, there!

4. Discourage singles. "Square dancing is friendship set to music"—but only for couples.

This generation has more singles than any other generation in memory. (Imagine this: some class teachers actually encourage a single woman or man to learn the one part and offer to let them come back next year to learn the other part FREE. Next thing you know they'll be reaching out to members who have lost their partners to get THEM back to the dances or the classes!) Leave the singles who do show up sitting on the sidelines watching how much fun you have dancing and how good you are at it, even if you ARE ready to sit one out and your partner isn't. After all, you have YOUR partner—let THEM watch!

5. Discourage the youngest generation—no one under 25 allowed.

While many dancers are parents, their kids are not of an age to learn square dancing, which is great for our purposes. ("Kids" can dance reasonably by the time they are 7-8, won't be interested when they are into their teens, and may still come back in their early 20's--until they have kids of their own and priorities change.)

DANGER: Our GRANDKIDS are the right age! Don't let anyone bring them to lessons, and make faces when the grandkids get in your square! Never INVITE them into your square—let them sit out. Soon they'll be running around making noise like a kid, and then we can get on the adults case, too. Then they won't ever bring them back, and the kids won't WANT to come back before they're 85, and so we shoot TWO at once!

Get the right "wrong" attitude, folks, and we can kill this activity permanently! It is SO easy to turn a person off—all it takes is one person to say to a total stranger (as was actually overheard recently): "You shouldn't wear such heavy perfume—you need to go in the bathroom and wash it off." Guess which one of them will never return to that club? Hey—GREAT WORK! That's ONE LESS DANCER to worry about in our campaign to close ALL the clubs, one dancer at a time! Be sure to do your part now—ATTITUDE IS EVERYTHING.

At the time Jerry gave the keynote address, he had been a caller for over 20 years; called in 43 states and internationally; on the CALLERLAB Board of Governors for 9 years; and served as Chairman twice. He made some extremely important points, part of which are above.

We learned that the whole country is experiencing the same drop in attendance. NJ/NY/PA is not alone in its troubles. Some clubs are doing well, though, in spite of the lack of interest by many of "today's" generation. There are many theories on why square dancing popularity falls and rises, and each group (dancers and officers, callers and cuers, club members and non-club members) has a pet theory. Some "fixes" are difficult to implement, and some are easy.

One thing we want to keep in mind, however, is that the generation we are trying to attract, the 30/40/50 somethings, were born and raised under conditions that make them unique—and different from us, the "nearly retired", the newly retired, and the retiree wanna-bes. One thing we MIGHT have in common is that we think (or thought) square dancing fun, relaxing, enjoyable.

"And the problems that we have in square dancing is people acting just like people."

Bill Gilmore, caller

From a 1961 (!) interview published at DoSaDo.Com: www.dosado.com/articles/gil1.htm