

Anticipating & Coping With Square Dance Disaster

By Wayne Applegate

It is 10 minutes to 8 and the caller is not here! – What do we do?

Interestingly enough, this very thing happened to me three times in my career.

The first time, I had just graduated as a dancer. During our lessons, a group of students tape recorded each lesson and danced to the tape the day before the next class. Of course, we broke down frequently, and had to run the tape back and start over. Well, I have a pretty good memory and realized that I could remember the sequences and walk us through to the point where we broke down and could restart the tape again. By the time we finished classes I had enough memorized material for a couple of good tips. Not long after graduation, at our club, the caller was late and the president was desperate for someone to do something, so I volunteered. (The round dance cuers had their PA set up so we had sound). Everyone saw me get up and expected a couple of basic calls, but instead got a full Plus tip and Singer. I started Caller's Scholl with the CCNJ the next day.

The second time, I got a call from Kittatinny Rangers, and their caller had gotten a flat in south Jersey on the Turnpike. I jumped into my car and, even though it took me an hour to get there, called for about an hour until the caller arrived, after which we shared the program for the remainder of the night.

More recently, and more embarrassingly, I was on a cruise and got home to find a reminder message from Belles & Beaux and then a call that they were waiting for me at the hall. I am very grateful to Fran Wadel for filling in and very apologetic to Belles & Beaux for the mix-up.

All Callers are human, and so are all dancers, and when we interact, things can go wrong. On a one to one level, this is usually small, but when it involves all the people, places and things involved in a square dance, the results can quickly balloon out of control. Today we want to talk about anticipating these potential disasters and trying to plan ahead for them.

The first, and possibly, largest problem is when the Caller does not arrive due to traffic, unknown scheduling conflict, traffic or personal emergency. In these days of cell phones, this should not happen, but, as above, it can. There are several ways clubs can cope with this problem.

First, call another caller. Sometimes callers are not working that night and can fill in. Speaking for myself, because I am still working full-time, I do not have as many week night dates as other callers. I teach on Tuesday, but probably 3 out of 4 weeks, I have open week nights and would be glad to help in any emergency.

Second, grow your own caller. There was a great response to this year's CCNJ Beginning Callers Class. Seek out these new callers and give them a chance. If one of your club's members has an interest in calling, encourage them (maybe even set up a scholarship for their Caller's Class fees, or to help purchase music.) This is the only way that new callers will come into the activity.

Third, buy a club PA system and some records. You can find suitable PA systems on eBay. I have purchased two Califone 1455K systems as backups. They cost me less than \$50. You can get records through several websites. I use www.dosado.com/music. Almost all singing call records have a called side, as do some patter records.

One last thing you might try is asking a caller to allow your club to record a couple of tips, or even a whole dance. But – be very careful not to violate copyright laws. If a caller allows you to record, make sure he uses records that your club has purchased. If you buy the record, you have the right to use it, but copying that music without owning the original is a copyright violation. I would be willing to work with any club that might want to do this.

The second largest problem facing us is: No access to the hall on dance night. If there is ever any question, call the day before and confirm the hall. In addition, have the phone number for the hall contact with you or on your cell phone. A good piece of advice for any club, especially those dancing in school halls, is “know your custodians!” Learn their names, thank them for the work they do in setting up and cleaning up for your dances and you might even “bribe” them. Reserve a plate or two of your choicest “goodies” for the custodians. Good relations make everyone happy.

Well, let’s say we have our caller and we are in the hall. We can now turn our attention to the thing that can go wrong during the dance.

If you get in the hall and there is no heat or air conditioning, there is probably little you can do beyond contacting the custodians or your hall contact. You may be able to open windows and/or doors. If you think this may be a problem, ask members to bring fans. Square dancers seem pretty tough, most of us cope with a room too warm, but if it is February and there is no heat, you may have to consider going home--or dance in coats!

This would also apply to power failure. Under no circumstances should you try to correct a power problem yourself. Call your hall contact or find the custodians. Look outside and see if it is area wide or just your building. Establish a maximum time to wait before calling it a night.

If a club officer should be late, fellow officers should be prepared to step in and take up the slack. The most critical officer would be the club’s treasurer. Keep spare sign in sheets and 50-50 tickets with the items you may be able to store on site. Officers should carry some cash to use as change – and don’t be embarrassed to ask for people with exact change to step to the front of the line!

One more very serious event could mar our dances – injury on the floor. Every club should have a GOOD first aid kit. Buy one of the commercial or industrial kits in a metal case and keep it current. Also have a good flashlight, with fresh batteries available. I probably don’t need to say this but, if someone is injured, do not move them unless they are in immediate danger. Stop bleeding with direct pressure and call for aid. If using a cell phone call 1-1-2. This number will always lock on to the nearest cell tower – regardless of who your carrier is. Even a Tracfone that is out of time can make the 1-1-2 call. Better still, have the local police phone number (not 911) programmed into your cell phone. By the way, it is not a bad idea to let the police know your club’s dance schedule.

Here is a suggested checklist for Square Dance Preparedness:

First Aid Kit in Good Condition—check annually
Flashlight

Caller Name / Cell Phone Number	
Hall Contact Name / Number	
Custodian Name	
Local Police Number	
Club President	
Club Vice President	
Club Treasurer	
Club Secretary	
Club Class Coordinator	
Other	