

## Answer Me Honestly...Is The Level Of Our Club Dancing Going Down?

She came to me after a dance one night, and asked, "Answer me honestly...is the level of our club dancing going down?". I had to pause before I answered. The answer was "yes", but did she really want to hear that? She was a member of one of the most successful clubs I know of. Her club had one of the best teachers I know. So, why was the answer yes?

When she asked, I knew she was second guessing the caller/teacher. I reassured her that he was NOT the problem. The caller/teacher has two responsibilities. First, he has to clearly explain the material. Second, he has to retain the students. This caller/teacher consistently does both, so he is doing HIS job. The problem is also not a recruitment issue. This club has one of the most aggressive recruiting programs I've ever seen, and they consistently recruit 4+ squares of dancers each year. Yet, somehow, the level of the club dancing continues to go down. Why?

Well, there are two main answers to her question, and this is what I told her...

First, the club (in particular) and the activity (in general) is getting older. It's stating the obvious, but as the club gets older, they slow down, they don't hear as well, and they don't focus at the same level they did when they started dancing 20 years ago. It's a fact of life. As dancers get older, their skills diminish. You can't do anything about that as a club. People get older. Heck, I'm only 44, but I can't do what I did 10 years ago. (Course, that could have something to do with the fact that I'm "a pound or two" overweight.)

The second answer is why I'm writing this article...

Some people will NEVER be square dancers. There! I've said it. Once upon a time, we used to hold new dancers to a certain standard before we made them club members. Once upon a time, we didn't feel like we HAD to graduate every class member just to survive.

Clubs are running scared because of our declining numbers of dancers and they've gotten to the point that they will take any warm body because they see it as revenue to keep the club going. Yes, in the short term, that does seem to fix the problem, but let's look at the long term, because it truly is a downward spiral.

As clubs continue to accept sub-par dancers to supplement revenue the level of dancing continues to go down. Long term club members notice the drop in level and wonder why it's happening. They don't enjoy their dancing as much as before and eventually, it's the GOOD dancer that drops out while the new dancer stumbles around wondering why a "Right and Left Grand" doesn't begin with a left hand.

This process repeats itself year after year until all that are left are the most dedicated members that simply refuse to let the club die and the poorest dancers. Everything else in between is gone.

This isn't a problem exclusively in square dancing. Look at schools and how many of the exceptional students get looked over while programs are dedicated to problem students or students with special needs. When kids can't pass the tests, they grade them on a "bell curve" or make the test easier. Because of this many of our schools are turning out dummies instead of doctors.

I will never be a pilot. My eyesight will not allow it. I will never be a surgeon. I get queasy seeing blood. I will never be a diplomat. Just reading this and rest of my rants and ramblings should be proof enough of that. Some people will NEVER be square dancers. That doesn't make them bad people. It just makes them NOT square dancers.

What does this mean to your club? If you're not satisfied with your level of square dancing, look around and ask why. I believe that your club will lose more dancers in the long run by being afraid to tell someone that they need to take class again before they can become club members, than not. I believe that the activity, as a whole, needs to hold itself to a higher standard before it can hope to grow.