



The Call Sheet

June 2006

Prez Sez

Necessary Evil

by Nick Martellacci

Want to know a secret? I hate calling GCA guest spots. While I'm on stage I try to make the audience think I'm having a blast. But deep down, I hate them.

You see I am, as Bette Davis said when referring to herself an "acquired taste." In my computer consulting days, when I taught a half-day class I got so-so reviews from the students. After people took my three-day Introduction to Database, they didn't want to take classes with anyone else.

Did I work less hard on the half-day classes than I did on the 3 day classes? Not at all. In a half-day class, I was concentrating on getting the required material covered by the three-hour deadline. In a longer class, I had time to interact with the students - joke with them, discuss their needs for using the material, customize the material to those needs, etc. The students got to see and react to the real me, not just the professional man on a mission. Unfortunately for me, my company was hired to teach half-day classes as well as full-, two- and three-day classes. I had to take whatever jobs came along to keep my job.

The same goes for getting hired as a caller. Everyone who hires me gets my best effort. But after 15 years in the business, I know that the longer the event, the better my reviews. Calling a 10 minute slot at a fly-in or convention is like walking a tight-rope. Very dangerous. If eight people show up, I have 10 minutes to setup, call, and get off the stage. Having this time limit over my head limits my interplay with the audience. The upside is that I've hit the ball out of the park enough times to keep getting hired by new clubs. I guess I've managed to keep the audience from seeing me sweat.

As you start preparing your guest tips for fly-ins and convention do whatever it takes to get yourself in the proper frame of mind. But please remember - whatever happens, always conduct yourself as a professional.

Be in the hall ahead of time so that you're ready to perform at the appointed time.

If you use a PC, be sure to scope out the hall long in advance to see what wires and connectors you'll need for your tip.

Last but not least - During your ten-minute tip, you get to plug in, square them up, call, and get off the stage. A ten minute time slot does not mean 8 minutes to setup, 10 minutes to call, and 5 minutes to chat with your friends while you're standing on

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✓ Annual Meeting

This year's annual meeting will be:

Friday, June 30, 2006, from 5:30 - 6:30 pm in Salon E at the Marriott.

Note that this is before the convention starts.

Intro to Calling

Bill Eyler will be hosting two Intro to Calling Workshops at the Convention:

- **Saturday, July 1 - 10-11 am**
- **Sunday, July 2 - 9-10 am**

Be there if you can to encourage new callers.



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stage packing up. Every year I see our members abuse the time limit - in spite of my begging and pleading that they not.

But what if I screw up my last figure? Too bad! Get off the stage.

What if I had to wait 5 minutes for a square to form? Too bad! Get off the stage.

What if the caller for the next hour hasn't shown up yet? Well, unless a member of the convention staff asks you to cover the next tip, get off the stage!

Now you see why I dislike these calling slots. I really want to do a good job. I want the dancers to like me. But there are so many things that can go wrong. But as I say every year - these guest spots are a gift of the planning committee - a privilege. If we continually abuse the privilege, it can be taken away.

I apologize to the new members who haven't been around long enough to transgress. I don't want your first impression of your president to be as a cruel disciplinarian. I deeply care about the image of the GCA within the larger IAGSDC community. Most GCA members live out their calling careers within the IAGSDC clubs. Doing things that antagonize the IAGSDC clubs is not good for your career and reflects badly on all of us.

For those of you who have survived this same harangue for several years, what can I say? Since my term ends in 2007, after next March you'll never hear it again!

2006 GCA Caller School

by Kris Jensen

The GCA School had a high enough enrollment to hire Todd Fellegly as the third caller coach. Todd will join Annue Uebelacker and Mike DeSisto. In addition, there are three TAs: Darren Gallina with the Beginners, Kris Jensen with Intermediates, and Barry Clasper with Advanced.

The GCA has once again received co-sponsorship by All Join Hands Foundation for our 2006 Caller School.

Swan Song

by Kris Jensen

I've really enjoyed editing the *Call Sheet* these past (I don't want to count how many) years. But having gotten only two out this past year (including this last minute, swan song edition), and missed the crucial March (GCA slot signup) issue, I think it's time to find someone else to take it on.

The *Call Sheet* has published a lot of great articles over the years, thanks to the contributions of many members. The newsletter can't be solely the work of one person; we all have to provide ideas, articles, news, and enthusiasm.

I have to admit that I've lost some enthusiasm for a regular "print" publication. Many of the articles have already been

"published" in email or on the web. With virtually everyone having internet access, it seems the web might be a better way of getting news and information out.

On the other hand, a newsletter is still useful for longer, more in-depth articles, like Nick's on creating a teaching order in this issue. And it's a good place to highlight and archive some meaty emails, like Stewart's on learning and memory.

So I hope the new editor will be able to draw on YOUR expertise, knowledge, and opinions to continue publishing a useful and entertaining *Call Sheet*.

Thanks again for all your help over the years!

Happy calling!



The Call Sheet

Official Publication of the
Gay Callers Association

Editor: Kris Jensen

The Gay Callers Association is open to those who call and teach for gay square dance clubs. No assumptions should be made about the sexual orientation of any contributor to this publication.

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Signed articles are the opinion of the authors and in no way reflect any official position of the GCA.

Further information about the Gay Callers Association can be found at our web site:

www.gaycallers.org



CALLERLAB: Milestone Award to Betsy Gotta and More

by Rich Reel

[Rich Reel wrote a good summary of the doings at CALLERLAB for the sd-callers mailing list, and has given me permission to publish it here. I've also added a few notes and expansions from others.]

[Some self-deprecating remarks omitted here: Rich admits that he focuses on things that interest him (don't we all?) and that he doesn't take notes.]

This is MY take - remember that...

We met in Charlotte, NC at one of the nicer Marriot hotels I've been to. Attendance was (please correct me) somewhere around 250 or so callers + partners. The energy was good and I am glad I went.

Basic is back! Since we had less than 1/3 of members in attendance the only real issue to be decided at the Wednesday meeting was whether to add Basic to the list of programs. There was a lot of thoughtful discussion, a couple amendments, some emotion, but in the end after a fairly close vote, Basic is back, defined as the first 53 calls of the Mainstream list - effective this September I believe. The one difference is that the Mainstream committee will figure out how Basic will be shaped going forward with the simple directive that change shall be slow and deliberate.

One of the big emotional issues that came up in the voting was how bringing Basic back might discourage the experimentation that was at the heart of this year's theme: "Thinking Outside The Square". Let me reassure you that the Mainstream committee specifically wants you to experiment and feed your results back to them BECAUSE they want to make a lot of changes to the teaching ORDER and may eventually come up with a new entry level, possibly apart from Basic, after careful study of how calls are being taught. An ad-hoc committee was set up specifically for researching not only alternative teaching orders, but the rationale for ordering the calls for a given purpose. Many agreed we might end up with different orders for different purposes like blast classes, dancing without destination, community dance, etc. Dottie Welch, Lanny Weakland

and Bruce Simperts (who heads this ad-hoc committee) want your ideas!!

ALSO - The idea of listing the Mainstream calls alphabetically and separately listing

one or more teaching orders is gaining momentum.

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2006 Milestone: Betsy Gotta

by Andy Shore

Betsy Gotta was awarded the CALLERLAB Milestone Award. The Milestone Award is the highest honor CALLERLAB can bestow. It is presented to individuals who have met a five point criteria in the field of square dancing and have been selected by representatives of the membership to be honored in this way.

These five points are:

1. The recipient must have worked in UNCHARTERED FIELDS.
2. The individual's contributions to the activity must have STOOD THE TEST OF TIME.

3. These contributions must have been UNSELFISH.
4. In the course of making these contributions, the recipient must have displayed true LEADERSHIP and PROFESSIONALISM.
5. Finally, the recipient's work must have had a BROAD INFLUENCE on the activity.

In his presentation speech, John Kaltenthaler mentioned the IAGSDC and that Betsy had previously been the recipient of the Golden Boot Award for working to build bridges between the gay and straight square dance communities.



GCA callers at CALLERLAB: Michael Maltenfort, Andy Chong, Chi Chi Hoffner, Rich Reel, Kris Jensen, Betsy Gotta, John Ryan, Andy Shore, Warren Jaquith, and Barry Clasper. We managed to snag Betsy after she won the Milestone Award. Photo courtesy of Roy Gotta.



Adds and Drops

This is that one year out of 3 where all the programs contemplate adding and dropping calls. As far as I could tell, the majority of votes seem to be for little or no change to any list.

There was talk about returning Triple Scoot to Plus, moving Spin Chain Thru back to Mainstream (although not directly given CALLERLAB's program policy) or possibly getting rid of one of the other Spin Chain calls from Plus. This will be out for a vote in coming months.

I don't think there was any other substantial changes to any program except for wording here or there.

BTW - (in case you care) Tag The Line timing results are in:

Tag Full - 6 beats Tag 3/4 - 5 beats 1/2 Tag - 4 beats 1/4 Tag - 3 beats Tag Zero - 2 beats

One interesting Advanced definition issue came up. Did you even know this?...

R-H Quarter Tag: Chain Reaction R-H Quarter Tag: Left Chain Reaction L-H Quarter Tag: Chain Reaction L-H Quarter Tag: Left Chain Reaction

They are all different, although subtly. Chain Reaction ALWAYS starts with a right shoulder pass. This was affirmed by vote. If you want a left shoulder pass from a L-H Quarter Tag, you must say Left Chain Reaction. This was affirmed by vote. There was even consideration to restrict Chain Reaction to a R-H quarter Tag at A1 and it failed meaning there will be no restrictions. My advice is not to drill the dancers on this, simply remember to say LEFT when you call Chain Reaction from a L-H setup to get the left shoulder pass most callers and dancers want.

Moving on...

There was a session where newer callers (5 years of less) could call. I don't think I could have called in front of so many experienced (and I mean up to 63 years!) callers when I was new, but several did and I thought the

session went well. *[Kris notes: This was one of the evening dances, where CALLERLAB tries to showcase different ideas. Michael Maltenfort called an A2 tip, and I think John Ryan from Ventura also called.]*

There was also an "Outside The Square" dance that was more or less square dancing but with some new and interesting ideas. *[Kris notes: This dance had a competition: Mike Jacobs called material that he'd written for the Northwest Teen competition, and each square had a timer keeping track of how much time was spent dancing (as opposed to broken down). I was in a square with other GCA members Andy Shore and Barry and Pam Clasper, as well as Michelle Jacobs, Kristy Jacobs, Jill Borris, and Mike Seastrom (talk about a rigged square!). To no one's surprise, we won, but the big surprise was what a high all the dancers had after participating.]* I'm looking forward to listening to the tape of that session. It is available from CTI (Convention Tapes International).



Betsy Gotta won the Milestone Award, one of CALLERLAB's most prestigious awards. I think it took a good 10 to 15 minutes just to read a list of her accomplishments.

[Doren McBroom adds: Let's not leave out Cal Campbell who also won a Milestone award this year. Cal will never be known for his complex choreographic prowess. But he has a boatload of simple, easy to teach, interesting dances, that, over the last 50 years, he has been sharing with more dancers than most of us will ever see. He has organized a beginners dance seminar that has been running the Saturday and Sunday before CALLERLAB for the last four years, and he is responsible for having these beginners seminars video recorded and made available through CALLERLAB. I attended the Beginners Dance Seminar this year for the first time. I recommend it highly to anyone who does One Night Stands. I have, during ONS, found myself wishing I had Cal's knowledge and experience.]

[Kris adds: I've also attended Cal's Beginners Dance Seminars for the past several years, and always learn something new. And, to tie it all together, Betsy is a regular contributor to Cal's seminar.]



Elmer Sheffield was back and is running for the Board Of Governors (BOG). He held a session on how much SD record sales are down - from 20,000 in the good ol' days to as few as 200 copies now for a top seller.

(MY COMMENT) PLEASE make an effort to buy the music you use as it really does make a difference to the few producers we have. Try to make it a priority to buy a legal copy to back up the few illegal copies you are using.



Jon Jones, Deborah Carroll-Jones, Randy Dougherty and Jerry Story presented their choreographic management tool called CRaMS (Controlled Resolution and Manipulation System). I would describe it as another tool callers can use to keep their choreography flowing and be able to resolve if all the pilot squares go down. It's something between modular calling and mental image. I'd say it's for the caller with 15 or more years of experience, but isn't much beyond what you may already be using in your calling if you can break up the classic chicken plucker routine and swap in modules and alternative getouts. *[Kris notes: I think it's also an effort to put memory back into calling; to emphasize the importance of memorized modules in keeping choreography interesting.]*

Wrapping up...

Gosh, there were a lot of good sessions this year including voice lessons, digital editing techniques (beginner and advanced), sounding halls, calling for handicapped, alternative music, community dance, contra/traditional dancing, competition dancing, gimmicks, history/heritage, multi-cycle, showmanship, other dance venues, caller's education, teaching methods and calling for youth and in schools.

I met a lot of people and learned a TON of new stuff, found some new music and have some new contacts that will help me grow in the coming years. If you can't tell, I'd urge you to make an effort to attend these conventions for your own selfish benefit if nothing else.



Planning a Mainstream Teaching Order

by Nick Martellacci

I've had the honor and privilege of teaching the Beginner Class at Times Squares for the past thirteen seasons. Looking back, I'm wishing that I'd saved each year's teaching order in a separate file. I think it would be interesting to see how my philosophy changed over the years. Oh well - I didn't. And as it turns out, what you're looking at now is not the year as planned, but rather the year as it actually unfolded. And no, this list is not etched in stone - I'll probably tweak it some more before the start of next season. The lines show the calls taught each week.

The development of my teaching order was a result of lesson planning techniques I picked up while earning my Music Education degree plus hours and hours of conversation with the coaches and callers I've worked with and danced to over the years. As I've said many times, experienced callers are very generous when sharing their knowledge with newer callers. Part of the reason they do this is purely altruistic (i.e. they really care about the activity.) The other part of the reason is self-preservation - in order to do their job as callers, in order to entertain the dancers, those dancers they face must really know how to execute the calls properly. For this to happen, the local callers and teachers must know what they're doing behind the microphone. I'm thinking back to the dark, scary night I was told by a Plus club that Grand Swing Thru was NOT a Plus call, Thank you very much!

OK - onto the list.

Open House - Along with the easiest circles, stars, and Right & Left Grand, I make sure I teach the building block calls - calls upon which other calls are based. Courtesy Turn is used by itself but also as part of a Ladies Chain and a Right and Left Thru. While I teach the same calls in basically the same order every year at the Open House dances, I try to vary the way I introduce them and use them. Why? The new dancers won't know the difference - it's their first night. True. But the angels who come back year after year to support the new dancers deserve to be entertained too. (Some people claim

that they prefer teaching without the help of angels. I'm not some people!!)

The order in which you teach calls at the Open House (or any beginner dance / fun night) is important. If they know how to Star and how to Courtesy Turn, they'll quickly

pick up Ladies Chain which combines both moves.

Purists will notice that I did not include "Dancer Naming" in the list. (Bad Nick!) This omission was intentional. Yes, I really DO teach dancer naming. But from years of computer training I know not to say a term until the students are going to actually work with the concept. So I begin the night by defining "Partner" - the person dancing beside you. After a few minutes of circles

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Nick's Mainstream Teach Order

CIRCLE
FWD & BACK
ALLEMANDE LEFT / RIGHT
DO SA DO
SWING
R & L GRAND
RH / LH STARS
COURTESY TURN
LADIES CHAIN
PASS THRU
PROMENADE
STAR PROMENADE
GRAND SQUARE
SQUARE THRU
STAR THRU
LEAD RIGHT / LEFT
BEND THE LINE
VEER LEFT/RIGHT
CIRCULATE
WHEEL & DEAL (2-FACED LINES)
SEPARATE @ 1 / 2
SPLIT THE O/S
CALIFORNIA TWIRL
WEAVE THE RING
RUN
TOUCH 1/4
SINGLE FILE CIRCULATE
DOUBLE PASS THRU
1ST COUP LEFT / NEXT RIGHT
HINGE
TRADE (MINI WAVE)
CAST 3/4 (MINI WAVE)
WHEEL & DEAL
(BACK TO BACK LINES)
WALK @ CORNER
SEE SAW
ZOOM
U-TURN BACK
SWING THRU
TAG THE LINE
FOLD

R&L THRU
DIVE THRU
PASS THE OCEAN
(REVERSE) FLUTTER WHEEL
CIRCLE TO A LINE
EXTEND
FERRIS WHEEL
CHAIN DOWN THE LINE
TRADE (SIDE BY SIDE)
CLOVERLEAF
SPIN THE TOP
SWEEP 1/4
HALF SASHAY
SLIDE THRU
SCOOT BACK
TRADE BY
ALLEMANDE THAR
SHOOT THE STAR
DIXIE STYLE
WHEEL AROUND
CROSS FOLD
WALK & DODGE
EIGHT CHAIN THRU
BACK TRACK
BOX THE GNAT
WW GRAND
SPLIT CIRCULATE
RECYCLE
DO PASO
SLIP THE CLUTCH
TURN THRU
CAST OFF 3/4 (LINES)
ROLL AWAY (LINES)
CROSS RUN
PASS TO THE CENTER
HALF TAG
ALAMO STYLE
GIRLS IN / BOYS SASHAY
ROLL AWAY (BREAK)
CENTERS IN



and stars and I've actually got the dancers into squares I introduce the Corner - the person who shares the corner of the square with you. A few tips later, I have the dancers wave to the person directly across the square - their Opposite. I then have them Do Sa Do and Pass Thru with their Opposite. (Opposites are important in the teaching of Ladies Chains and Grand Square.) Unless I'm teaching a visiting couple dance that includes working with the Right Hand Lady, I don't even bother throwing out that term. Useless information! (Blasphemy, I know!)

After the Open Houses, I want to get the students into as many real-life formations as quickly as possible - lines, two-faced lines, columns, regular and completed double pass thru formations. Next we move to arm turns - hinges, trades, and 3/4 casts. Why? They're not easy. The students will need time to get comfortable with them. Also, these arm turns are building blocks for other calls - e.g. Swing Thru and Spin the Top.

Speaking of not easy - how about Circulate? That's the toughest call for beginning dancers to master. So I give them as much time as I can by including it in Week Two.

CALLERLAB lists Spin the Top and Recycle as the last two calls. New dancers need much more time with these calls. But Roll Away is fun and easy - so that goes on the last night of my lesson plan. Spin the Top and Recycle come four or more weeks before the end of class, giving the students lots of time to practice.

Another thing I can do teaching for a gay club that straight callers might not be able to do - I begin adding Mainstream calls before I've completed the "Basic 50." Many straight clubs belong to local square dance associations. These associations hold student dances which require the instructors to keep all the classes in the area at pretty much the same pace in order for their students to attend these dances. Having the freedom from this restriction makes my life easier and allows me to be much more creative. I have the luxury of teaching harder stuff when the dancers can handle it. I can also back off and give them a night of break figures when their minds need a rest.

A couple of other tips - just because I haven't taught a call doesn't mean I can't use it. "Turn around" is a simple English instruction that people will be able to follow on the first night - if several weeks later I tell them it has a special name in square dancing (U Turn Back), it's no big deal. I also teach the traditional Missouri Hoedown at the Open House. This figure uses a Do Paso. So rather than - ugh! - teach them another call - I build on the arm turns they've been using all night and just cue it. Months down the road, I give that arm turn combination a name and it's a no-brainer! Pass Thru + Courtesy Turn and Square Thru 1 + Courtesy Turn both give me the same effect as Right and Left Thru but without teaching another call. Using these easy equivalents allows me to pack more material in during the critical first weeks. Once again, when I give this action a name, it's no big deal for the dancers.

Early in the year, I avoid teaching calls whose names sound alike on the same night. Wheel Around and Wheel and Deal would overload their brain circuits. However, later in the year I'd have no problem teaching Cross Run and Cross Fold on the same night (provided they'd already mastered Run and Fold.)

Wheel and Deal / Trade. - Each of these calls can be called from two different starting positions - side by side dancers or mini-waves for Trade; or one-or 2-faced lines for Wheel and Deal. In theory, the action for both positions of each call is the same. However, to the dancers - particularly to new dancers, they feel very different. Therefore I teach each position separately for each call. With Trade, I start with the mini-wave position - there's a handhold involved. This hand hold acts like the training wheels on a child's bicycle. Several weeks later (and after they've mastered California Twirl) I teach the no-hands Trade starting from side-by-side dancers - emphasizing how it's really the same action as a mini-wave Trade (i.e. walk forward, in a semi-circle, trade-ing foot prints, and changing facing direction.) I teach Wheel and Deal first from 2-faced lines because after Week 2 I've got the students Veering and Circulating in 2-faced lines. Wheel and Deal from this formation gives me lots of standard get out points.

Why all this fuss and micro-programming? Thank you for asking! While square dancing involves mental stimulation, it's still a physical activity - the dancers have to move

their bodies from one call/formation to another. Being able to mentally understand how one definition applies to two (or more) starting positions, does NOT mean that the dancer will be able to execute the call successfully from either position. This micro-programming, while creating more work for us, makes the dancers' work easier and more enjoyable.

Let me end with three techniques that have served me well over the years.

1 - Once all the students have arrived and are in squares dancing, those squares are fixed for the rest of the evening. Yes, I know. Doing this makes sight calling the lessons a whole lot easier. I don't have to try to figure out new key couples every tip. But this practice also makes things easier for the dancers. How? Thank you for asking! If I have the same Partner and Corner all evening, I know immediately whether I've gotten to the right person for the Allemande Left or Right and Left Grand. When the caller says "You're Home!" I know that, too! Having 4 less things to think about (Who's my Partner? Who's my Corner? Where's home? Am I a Head or a Side?) frees up the students to focus on learning the calls for the evening. Also, knowing that the person I'm facing really is my Corner, the Allemande Left is met with a jolt of enthusiasm - thereby increasing the overall energy level in the room - generating more fun. And isn't fun what it's all about?

2 - Following the same train of thought as in Technique 1, I don't change partners on singing calls until mid-November. Then I teach changing partners like I would teach any other call:

- Heads Square Thru 4 - Swing the person you're facing - Boys promenade this girl all the way around the square back to your home;
- I call this twice.
- Next, I call a brief circle figure to get them used to the idea of looking for their new partner at the end of a Right and Left Grand or Weave the Ring.
- Finally, I repeat the same figure twice starting with the sides making sure to

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have a big whoop and holler when they finally get back to their original partner.

- After one or two walk thrus, I put on at least two singing call records to solidify what they've learned.

3 - Teaching Grand Square. When I learned how to square dance, the instructor had the Sides sit out while he taught the Heads' part and vice versa. The method I'm going to demonstrate has all the dancers working all the time. I take no credit for this technique. I learned it from a CALLERLAB Convention tape and it's just too good not to share. Here's my script (with comments in italics):

Side couples, turn to face your partners. We're now going to learn something called Grand Square. To do a Grand Square you first have to learn two things: how to walk and how to turn. (pause for audience giggles)

Rule for Walking - if you're nose to nose like the Sides are now, walk backwards; if you're far apart like the Heads are now, you walk forward.

We're just going to walk back and forward - step - 2 - 3 - touch; step - 2 - 3 - touch. Ready? 5 - 6 ready - go! (5 - 10 seconds of walking practice ending up back where everyone started)

Congratulations! You now know how to walk. (pause for audience chuckles - and groans from the angels)

Rule for Turning - if you're facing your Partner like the Sides are now, turn to face your Opposite; if you're facing your Opposite like the Heads are now, turn to face your Partner.

Ready? Turn. Turn. Turn....

Here's a hint - after a turn, you should always be looking at the front of someone's body. (Nick now fights the urge to make a joke about where exactly on the front of someone's body they should be looking... or not looking!) If you're looking at the back of someone's body, THEY turned the wrong way; if you're looking at thin air, YOU turned the wrong way!

(Practice some more turning and make sure they finish facing the opposite way from when they practiced walking.)

Let's practice walking facing this direction. Ready? 5 - 6 - ready - go!

Now let's combine the walking and turning. So rather than step - 2 - 3 - touch, you're going to go step - 2 - 3 - TURN.

Walk them slowly (and without music) through the first half of Grand Square. Make a big fuss about "Stop there - NO turn" Then walk them through the second half - thunderous applause at having done their first Grand Square. (My favorite record for teaching Grand Square is "Real Madrid" on TNT - It has a solid 4-square beat PLUS

it starts and ends with thunderous applause by the recorded crowd!!) Walk through it a few more times - less stop and go and closer to speed. Then let them do it to music. Eventually explain the start up command "Sides Face Grand Square."

Going back to something I said earlier in this article - teaching dancers is the way we keep square dancing alive. As I've heard in more than one caller school - every time we step up to the microphone to sell our choreography, we're taking on the role of teacher. I hope that among all material I presented here I've been able to share some ideas that will prove useful to you in your teaching careers. Even better - I hope that this article stirs up some discussion so I can learn some new ideas from you!

Teaching / Learning / Memory

by Stewart Kramer

There are actually 3 different kinds of memory that are important for teaching and learning square dance calls: Short-term memory, long-term memory, and habitual or muscle memory.

One of the secrets of effective teaching is to encourage long-term memory. If you teach a call at the beginning of a tip, and use it continuously, the dancers don't have a chance to forget the call; it stays in short-term memory, but is easily forgotten. If you teach a call, use it a few times, and then use other calls for while, you've given the dancers a chance to start forgetting the call. The effort to remember something that's nearly forgotten is one of the best ways to strengthen long-term memory.

Ideally, the dancers should learn the call definitions (in long-term memory), and eventually able to react effortlessly to the standard applications (with muscle memory). Too much muscle memory can be bad ("bad habits" and "autopilot" mistakes). Normal dancing experience and floor time will allow dancers to develop an appropriate amount of muscle memory. (Professional dancers, of course, need better habits than recreational dancers.)

Twice-a-week classes are also better for memory retention than weekly classes. This is a fairly well-known psychological effect.

People forget a lot more in a whole week than they do in half a week.

In learning, there's a big difference between short-term memory and long-term memory. If you teach a call, and then use it several times during a tip (say, 10-15 minutes), it will stay in short-term memory the whole time. After a 5-minute break, people will tend to forget the call completely. Too much practice in a short time isn't as effective as the same amount of practice spread over a few hours.

One of the tricks for getting the call into long-term memory is to keep extending the time lag. Here's an example of the method:

1. Teach the call during one tip.
2. Review the call at the start of the next tip.
3. Dance them through the call to be sure they've got it.
4. Call other things until the middle of the tip (3-5 minutes)
5. Use the call you taught, and be ready to review or re-teach.
6. Call other things (maybe 5 more minutes).

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7. Use the call again in the last figure of the singing call.
8. Do a tip or two of other things (perhaps another call).
9. Use the call again (15-30 minutes later).
10. Review at the end of the session (1-2 hours later?)
11. Review at the start and end of next session (1 week later)

If you forget something in 2 minutes, you certainly won't remember an hour or a week later.

If you understand what's being taught, you can probably remember for 30 seconds. If you've been able to remember for 5 or 10 minutes, you might remember for an hour. If you've been able to remember for an hour, you might remember for a week. In an ideal situation, a few additional reviews at 1 day and 3-4 days would also help, but that may not be feasible for weekly Square Dance classes (although perhaps you could send definitions by email for next-day reviewing).

The other important part of memory and learning is the effort to remember. Things that stay in short-term memory are easy to remember. As they start slipping away and are being forgotten, they are difficult to remember. If you ask people to recall a memory, or do a call that they've almost forgotten, at the point where it's just slipping out of short-term memory, they will have to work harder to dig up the memory, which tends to strengthen the memory, and move it into long-term memory. This is another part of the technique above. The memory span keeps getting longer, in an attempt to hit the right time for each person's short-term memory.

The moment of effort while trying to remember something that's almost been forgotten is also effective in strengthening a memory. In Square Dancing, people will often blank out on a call, even one that they've known for weeks or years. Once they're reminded of the call (by the what the dancers around them are doing, or by the cues that the caller gives), they will remember it

better in the future. "Keeping the dancers on their toes" and "Simon Says" are the attitudes to maintain; it should be fun, and slightly challenging, but not frustrating.

In teaching, the goal is long-term memory. If you've only got a certain amount of time to spend each week on teaching, you can be much more effective by spreading out the teaching and review, and by letting people start to forget. You won't be wasting time on simple things that they find easy to remember, and you see whether the memories are sinking in, you'll see what teaching methods are working and what doesn't work, and you'll get some of that feedback the same night rather than the next week.

If you taught 3 calls last week (A, B, and C), and want to teach 3 calls this week (X, Y, and Z), you can spread them out like this:

- Tip 1: A XXX B X C X - teach and review X, review last week's calls
- Tip 2: X YYY X YY A X - review X, teach Y, mix in some other calls
- Tip 3: Y BC Y ZZZ Y - review Y, teach Z, let them forget X
- Tip 4: X ZZ A Z BC Z - use X, review Z, let them forget Y
- Tip 5: Y XY AABBC - use Y and X, let them forget Z
- Tip 6: Z ABC ABCXYZ - use Z, mix in all the calls, use all the new calls.

On an even larger scale, people who dance every week will often find that they "get rusty" after they skip a week or two. The effect is fairly minor, but it can be used to good effect with things like "emphasis calls" and such. A seldom-used call can be featured one week, in a variety of extended applications, and then used only occasionally in standard positions for a couple of months. A caller can rotate through several different calls and gimmicks, giving the dancers enough time to forget each one. By featuring something different in one tip of each dance, a caller can keep the gimmicks fresh and challenging, by letting the dancers forget more easily. They'll go home with the impression that they did something fun and different, but they don't need to remember the details,

Retention times are also different for different people, and can also vary based on the kind of information -- for example, numbers, pictures, motions, words -- and different senses -- for example, words you hear, words you read, words you say.

That's one reason that using several methods is more effective than a single method. Sometimes a caller describes the move, maybe lets everyone watch a demonstration of the move, and then makes everyone walk the move, then dance the move. Each mode works better for different people.

But whatever the learning style, the goal is long-term memory. The only way to be sure that something has gotten into long-term memory is to give it a chance to move out of short-term memory.

The people with short retention spans will have trouble in the shortest time-lags. With any luck, they'll actually learn the call better (by forcing it into long-term memory) before the people with long retention spans have let the call out of their short-term memories.

Then, in the longer time-lags, the first group will have re-learned the call at least once, and will be more able to help the others.

Each group will help the others, by being in the right place, by doing their part of the call correctly, or whatever.

Many people will forget at the very beginning. Others will forget in the middle. A few won't forget until the end. By gradually making the time spans longer, you get more learning out of the same number of repetitions, or the same learning with fewer repetitions.

By making the gaps longer and longer, you'll hit any particular retention span at least once:

XXX.X..X...X....X.....X.....X.....
X.....X

It's more effective than the same number of repetitions all clustered together:

XXX.XXX.XXX.....XX.....

When the repetitions are clustered, it all stays in short-term memory, and doesn't stick as well in long-term memory. To some

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Memory, continued from p. 8

extent, the repetitions are wasted (or even counter-productive if the students get bored or frustrated). In something like Square Dancing, you could be practicing other moves during the “forget” periods.

Another method, which is more complicated, is to build on memories, or force people to work with their new memories. For example, if you teach Courtesy Turn, and then immediately teach Right and Left Thru, you are forcing people to know Courtesy Turn. If you then let them forget both of those for a while, and then teach Ladies Chain, you are reinforcing the Courtesy Turn again. It counts as one of the forgetting periods. The

Discuss, Please....

by Kris Jensen

Whenever a bunch of callers gets together, there are always things to talk about. There'll be a lot of us together at Wish Upon a Thar and the preceding caller school, so here are some ideas:

Sharpshooter Music:

Andy Shore wrote: “Rick Hampton is trying to put together a new square dance music project with music appealing to a younger crowd. He’s looking for more people to commit/subscribe up front to help fund the project. I’ve signed up. I have no other financial interest in this project.”

From the website (sharpshooterrecords.com):

SharpShooter Records (A Division Of FineTune/Gold Wing) will produce and deliver (via CD/CD Mp3/Mp3 Email) a minimum of 10 youth targeted Square Dance Tunes- Some singing calls-some hoedowns- all well researched -full studio quality instrumentation (No Casio Keyboard/MIDI only stuff) which is designed and researched to appeal to the 15-25 year old demos. (NOTE: We (us old guys/gals) may not know or relate to the tunes-the audience we want-They will!!) We will give co-op members an exclusive introductory period (3-6 months) on these titles, after which they may be generally released via the existing distribution chain

danger, however, is that the whole thing can start to feel overwhelming. Once the student starts feeling shaky, it’s as if the bottom has fallen out, and the student needs to review all of the parts. There can also be an interference effect if two things are similar (like Right and Left Thru vs. Square Thru, which confuses many new students).

There are a lot of variables to consider, but it helps to know how a typical group of people is likely to learn and forget. Even though some will be quicker or slower than others, they’ll mostly have the general pattern of gradually fading memories. They’ll fade at different rates, but you can compensate for that by reinforcing their memories at gradually longer intervals. •

used by FineTune/GoldWing Records. Co-op members (a minimum of 40 members) will pay a \$125.00 annual fee that will entitle them to the music, with exclusive rights and additional benefits that may include more youth tunes or comps of existing tunes. If in the event that the 40 member minimum is not reached, all monies will be refunded.

According to the website, they’ve sold 27 memberships so far.

Seth Levine wrote: “First, I find it difficult to justify paying \$12.50 per song for any music to use for square dancing. This is still basically a hobby for me, and even if it were a full time thing, that just seems like a heck of a lot of money for one tune.

I find it even more difficult to justify pre-paying for music I don’t get to hear first. I mean, I listen to the Hanhurst tapes (CDs) pretty regularly, and the majority of what’s on there is, IMHO, unusable. What if I sign up for this service at \$125 and I hate all or most of the tunes they release?? What if they release stuff that’s really badly produced? I guess I wouldn’t subscribe again, and neither would anybody else I talk to about it, but in that case, I and at least 39 of my colleagues are already out \$125.

I’m curious to know if anybody I know other than Andy is signing up for this, and if so or if not, why.”

Chi Chi Hoffner wrote: “Although this is targeted at 15-25 year olds, gay men might also enjoy current music! Any thoughts?”

So what about it...let’s discuss.

Caller Music Programs:

There’s Vic Ceder’s (CSDS) and Dave Wilson’s (Sqmp3) and Thomas Bernhed’s (Sqview) and Bill Heiman’s (Digital Music Magician). Who’s using what and why?

CALLERLAB’s Program Policy Initiative:

Anyone using alternative lists? Anyone tried out ABC (squaredanceabc.com)?

John Oldfield tried it for the intro dances for ChiTown’s new class. His thoughts:

“New dancers that attended all three had new material each class as well as the first 15 calls on the list.

“They weren’t stuck in a squared set formation for the whole evening.

“I got to play more with the dancers.”

He adds, “This program seems to make the intro classes more like a dance than a class - and it’s a lot of fun!”

Singing Call Figures

I came across this one while catching up on old sd-callers email. Do dancers generally care about the figure, so long as the caller can sing and the music is good?

Dosado (and other styling issues)

Based on the amount of discussion on sd-callers, one would think that how dancers dance dosado is of earth-shaking importance. Here in Albuquerque, we teach the styled (highland fling) dosado right away and call it the gay, fabulous version. What do you do? And what about Circle to a Line?



How To Make It

by Barry Clasper

In the December 2005 edition of *The Call Sheet* Nick wrote a great article on "Paying Dues". I would like to add some follow-on thoughts. If I can be so bold as to reduce Nick's message to a sentence, it was "Before you can 'Make It' as a caller you have to pay your dues - do the work necessary to develop the skills and judgment required to succeed." So true -- but for me it raised an obvious follow-up question: Make what?

When you think about callers who have "made it", who comes to mind? Most of us think of a few "stars" - you know, the ones that appear at every fly-in and convention, the ones that get the thunderous ovations, the adoring crowds, the adulation, the glamour, the big money ... well, that's getting a bit carried away - but you get the picture. We agree that they have made it. They have hit the big time. So - is that what you are paying your dues to achieve? Is that where you are trying to go? Is that really the only place there is to go? As Peggy Lee asked, "Is that all there is?"

There are a couple of problems with this conception of making it. First, even if you achieve it, it takes years. It takes time to pay all those dues, build those skills, practice, practice, practice. Second, all that work may not be enough - it's a necessary but not sufficient condition. Stardom is a state conferred by others, invariably for reasons that go beyond calling ability. It requires dancers to view you in a certain way, something which you can influence but not directly control. They have to think not only that you have what it takes, but that you have something extra that makes you stand out, makes you special. And, of course, it requires some luck - getting the right opportunities when you are ready to take advantage of them. In some ways it is like winning the lottery - only you have to work for 10 to 20 years to buy the ticket. As Nick pointed out, this is a discouraging prospect.

Fortunately, making it is not only about "stardom" - in fact, stardom as described above does not even have to be part of it. Pam and I were taught to dance by a great local caller. He gave us the foundation that

has let us dance for 32 years and work our way up to C4. He taught us how to think about dancing and that framework followed me into my calling. And all the while I thought I was having fun! Over the years he has turned out thousands of enthusiastic new dancers. I occasionally still see him at conventions and I find I want to make him proud. In my eyes, that man is as much a star as any of the "big name" callers. He's made it - a different "it", but he's made it.

At CALLERLAB in 2005 there was a square dance demonstration done by a group of handicapped dancers. These were primarily people coping with the sort of mental and cognitive challenges imposed by conditions such as Down's Syndrome. The calling and dancing was, as you might expect, somewhat different. A bit more slowly paced with more helper words and instructions, often directed to specific individuals, than you would expect on a festival Mainstream floor. But it was "dancing as we know it" - it employed the same calls, some surprisingly complex choreography, the same music, the same format. And, if the expressions on the dancers' faces were any guide, it provided an intensely enjoyable experience for the participants! Their caller was not someone I recognized from the "big time" circuit, but there is no question in my mind that he has "made it". His accomplishments speak for themselves.

So there are other ways to "make it." But the examples discussed above are again long-

term, taking years to accomplish, and also requiring some luck - the right opportunities at the right time. So it still can be dispiriting to sit at the beginning of your calling career and look out at decades of work before achieving a goal. But fear not - there is a solution. When you boil it down, what we are talking about here is success. Success is about achieving goals. Goals do not have to be things that take years to achieve. Even if your end target is years away, any goal can be - indeed, should be - broken down into intermediate steps. Why not set goals that allow you to "make it", to achieve a goal, more often? I'm happy to say that I have made it many times. I made it the year I called my first guest slot at a convention. I made it the year I learned to sight call. I made it the first year I had a club of my own. I made it the first time I had the nerve to sight-call a Plus tip on the big stage in prime time at the Canadian National. I made it the first time I was on full staff at a major festival. I made it the first time I did a singing call with another caller (that was with Nick, actually, and Bronc Wise). I made it the first time I was hired for a fly-in. I could go on, but you get the idea. Making it is really about setting goals, achieving them, and, most importantly, recognizing that we have accomplished something.

And someday - who knows - after enjoying all those accomplishments over the years, you might one day discover that people view you as a "star". But, regardless, you still will have "made it" - lots of times.

Annual Meeting

This year's annual meeting will be:

Friday, June 30, 2006, from 5:30 - 6:30 pm in Salon E at the Marriott.

Note that this is before the convention starts.

