

**Dear Square Dancers:**

**Below are four articles that I highly recommend, not need to read them immediately but please, if you have the time read them. Some of you already have—that's great. They will definitely help make you a better and stronger challenge dancer.**

**They include:**

1. **Learning Calls**
2. **Tips on Becoming a Better Dancer**
3. **How Good Is Good**
4. **A Look At Ourselves**

## **Learning Calls**

**By Bill Heimann, 1980**

The problem-solving, concept-oriented direction into which advanced challenge dancing has evolved necessitates knowing precise definitions. No longer can a dancer have a mental picture of a call and "feel" his way through it by blending in with the flow of the other seven dancers because, for one thing, phantoms don't flow well.

The really hard parts of challenge dancing are the concepts and the associated spontaneous problem solving of unique situations. For example, the hard parts of the call *interlocked phantom waves*, *step lively* are identifying the correct group with which to work and applying breathing theory appropriately, not the call *step lively*. The challenge dancer should know the call *step lively* so well that it poses no challenge at all, and so his mind is free to work on the real problems.

Being successful at square dancing is no different than being successful at anything else. The common denominator is to *form habits* of doing those things it takes to be successful. In this case, you must form the habit of memorizing calls. Here are some suggestions.

Since most of us don't have photographic memories, repetition is the only answer. You need 15 minutes a day, but take heart, you don't need an *extra* 15 minutes. Find some mindless tasks that require little concentration and fill that non-thinking time with memorizing calls. For example, take four or five calls each week, write them on a piece of paper, and put a copy in the front seat of the car to practice when you're commuting to work, on the mirror in the bathroom for when you're shaving or drying your hair, or on the refrigerator door or over the sink for when you're preparing meals. You can certainly devise others. These are just some that work for me. But the secret is to practice for 15 minutes each and every day in an existing time slot.

The key to memorizing is to *verbalize*. Never look at step lively and say, "Yes, I know that." or "yes, they go over here and the others do this." Always say, "detour, slim down, circulate." Say it out loud or say it to yourself, but say it. Verbalize the call whenever you see or hear it. Quiz each other at supper - but always, always verbalize it. When you dance at any level, verbalize each and every call as you dance. If you do, you will be forming habits of the things you'll need at higher levels.

Every Wednesday at our workshop, I hand out a sheet of four calls which each person is expected to memorize cold during the week by the aforementioned means. During the week I write one or two sequences themed around the four calls as a final exam. We then review them periodically in succeeding weeks. The plan has been well received by the workshop members and is providing successful results.

In summary, form habits of doing those things necessary for success; fill 15 otherwise mindless minutes of each day with memorizing calls; and verbalize the call each and every time you see or hear it. Hard work? Sure it is. Did you ever know anything worthwhile that didn't exact a price? These ideas were designed to be successful, not necessarily easy.

Go forth and *verbalize*.

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## Tips on Becoming a Better Dancer

by Janet Neumann

I have been asked by a few people to give them some tips on becoming a better dancer. So this is my attempt to put in writing some of the ideas that I have.

I believe that I can summarize my tips using these headings:

- Dancing
- Teamwork
- Definitions
- Identification
- Precision & Breathing
- Study & Practice
- Have Fun

### Dancing

This activity is called "Square Dancing", which I believe means to move with the beat of the music. If you move your feet in time with the music, you should not have to run to catch up nor be standing around waiting for the next call. I know this is ideal, but that is what we should strive for. A dance where the caller gives us the calls at the appropriate pace for us to keep moving and where we, as dancers, execute the calls as they are supposed to be done, is truly a beautiful sight. Of course, the reality is that callers don't always give the calls at the right time and dancers do make mistakes and have to be corrected. But if we all give our very best, we will get closer and closer to that beautiful picture.

Some other points about dancing--At a dance you need to make every effort to keep going even if a mistake is made. Try to correct yourself and keep the square moving. If you didn't see something, ask someone at the break, but don't stop in the middle of the square and ponder it. I insist on this same effort in a workshop. When the tape is going, everyone does their best to keep moving. Then when you are promenading home, you can raise your hand and ask for a repeat or a walk through or whatever, but you cannot yell "stop the tape, I don't see it". The benefit of this is that you make your workshops like a real dance where you either have to keep going or stand and wait for the next sequence. I believe strongly that you gain more from dancing, even if you are not in the correct positions, than standing at home or in the square with the tape stopped. If someone in the square, or the caller, says "lines facing", make any old line facing and keep moving. At least you will get more practice and you can ask questions at the break.

### TEAMWORK

Square dancing can really only work when there is teamwork. Each square is a team of 8 people, and all 8 need to participate and contribute. Every square will have a weakest dancer, even if you

have 8 top notch dancers, someone will be the weakest. So don't focus on who's in your square. If you start a tip saying "oh we have some bad dancers in this square so we won't get anything," you will be defeated before you start. Think positively knowing that you need to do the calls correctly and be in the correct position at the correct time. Everyone has the ability to help in the square. This does not mean you should push or pull people around. It means taking hands with people when you should, it means saying a definition or repeating the call to help someone who may be doing the wrong call or doing a call wrong, it means keeping your square tight and symmetric, it means communicating nonverbally with nods or pointing or a motion of the hand, it means waiting an extra second for someone who is behind and not just going on with your part and leaving them in the dust. No one likes to be helped when they don't need it, so subtlety and judgment are important. The goal is for the square to get through the sequence, not just one or two people.

### **DEFINITIONS**

Definitions are the most important fundamental you can have. We all learn how to do calls by some definition, but often we quickly forget that definition and do the call by "feel". This is a major problem for higher level dancers. Most calls can be done from many positions even though most callers may only routinely use them from a few. I believe that knowing and saying the definition quietly to yourself while doing each and every call is absolutely crucial for success. The basic and mainstream definitions are the most important because they are the building blocks for all future calls learned. You may think it is foolish to say to yourself "half right and half left" when you hear swing thru, but if you always did that, you would have no trouble doing it from a left hand wave, a tidal wave, or a phantom setup. Sit down with a list of calls from Basic up to the level you are dancing and then say the call and follow by saying the definition. If you cannot quickly state a definition, you need to study. Only when you have the definitions readily available in your brain, will you be able to execute them in the square at a dancing pace. And back to teamwork, if the person beside you seems to be hesitating, saying the definition a little louder so they can hear it may mean the difference between continuing to dance or squaring up at home waiting for the next sequence.

If you do not know or don't think you have a good definition of a call, ask someone. Many definitions originally given to you may be long and cumbersome. You may be able to find a much quicker/shorter definition by asking around. For example, the call Shake Down can be defined as Belles do a three-quarters zoom and the Beaus do a run and roll. That definition works, but the call is so quick that it will be over before you decide if you are a belle or a beau. A quicker definition is everyone quarter right, counter rotate and roll.

### **IDENTIFICATION**

Square dancing is loaded with identification. We have couples 1, 2, 3, and 4, heads, sides, belles, beaus, boys, girls, ends, centers, leaders, trailers, partner, and a whole slew of formations. You need to know which of these you are at all times, and you need to communicate that to your "teammates". When the callers says "boys trade" it may seem stupid to raise your hand, but if the other boy doesn't know who is who, you could break down. I would strongly suggest that you get in the habit of gently raising your hand or saying "leader, belle, etc." anytime you are an identified person. This will help you and the whole square. The way I learned to identify quickly was to practice at a lower level. When you go to a dance 1 or more levels below your top dancing level try this exercise. Each tip pick one identity (leaders, trailers, belles, beaus, ends, centers,) and then after each call quickly think to yourself which one you are (leader or trailer, belle or beau, end or center). You will almost always be one or the other. Also, take a tip and mentally

point to your partner after each call. This may seem so fundamental....and it is. Good fundamentals make good dancers!

Identifying formations is also critical. You must know what right- hand waves, left-hand waves, R and L two-faced lines, tidal wave, R and L columns, zero tags, quarter tags, half tags, three-quarter tags and full tag positions are. Callers give us many cues about our formation. If they say in your "right-hand columns" or "check a right-hand column", look around and make sure your square has a right-hand column. The caller is probably saying that because someone is NOT in a right-hand column. Teamwork again--help each other, look around and be aware of the whole square. Don't just say, "I am in a right-hand column" and forget the rest of your square. If you don't try to help your square get into a right-hand column, you are as guilty of taking the square down as the person who is incorrect. If you get the whole square into a right-hand column you have a chance of continuing with the sequence. If you don't you will probably soon break down and stand at home.

If you are not in the correct position and you know who you are out with, try to correct it along the way when you are next to each other and can simply trade. But don't ever break down the square trying to fix yourself if the square is dancing. I believe it is important to know that you have an opposite in every square and you can use that as a tool if you are confused, but do not use it as your mode of dancing nor blame the opposite if they are wrong and you followed them. While on this topic, I must say that I also feel strongly that you should look and work in your own square only. You know you have a counterpart in every square around you, but if you have your head turned to copy the square next to you, I can assure you that you are NOT being a team player and you are basically saying you have given up on your own team. Use a counterpart only when the square has broken down and you are trying to make a formation so that you can get going again instead of squaring up.

### **PRECISION & BREATHING**

Being precise in your dancing is vital. We do a tremendous amount of turning and casting in square dancing, and being a quarter off can, and will, often break the square down. I believe cast off three- quarters is one of the hardest calls in square dancing. It requires discipline to be certain that you have turned three walls, not five- eighths and not seven-eighths, but three-quarters. I count 1, 2, 3 to myself every time I do cast three-quarters. Precision also means being lined up with the other dancers in the square and keeping the square tight. If you have two parallel waves, the dancers should be close enough side to side to touch hands easily without stretching out their arms. The dancers should also be close enough front to back to reach forward and touch the person in front of them. Some people may think this feels too tight, but it is not if you use square breathing appropriately. The square should be in constant motion. Every call has the potential for all dancers to need to breath even if they are not active in the call. For example, from a squared set, when "heads swing thru" is called, the sides should take a small step backward to allow room down the middle for the resulting wave. Then if the call was "lock it", the heads in the middle would do the call "lock it", but the sides should also move a step forward to bring the square back to an appropriate size.

### **STUDY & PRACTICE**

Ongoing studying of definitions at all levels and constant practicing are essential to good dancing. Do not take it for granted that you will forever remember a call's definition just because you learned it once. Quiz with another person while traveling, review a few calls each day at lunch or while sitting at a long red light, and don't be afraid to ask questions.

Do I sound like a broken record?? Good!!

Dancing, teamwork, definitions, identification, precision, breathing, study and practice, these are my keys to good dancing. If you do all of these, you will become a better dancer and that will lead to the last point.

## HAVE FUN

Square dancing is a fun activity. Smile and enjoy yourself, it could be contagious!!

## How Good Is Good

by Barry Clasper Originally Printed in Zip Coder Magazine

In a [recent article](#), Bill Heimann did an excellent job of delineating the difference between high *quality* and high *level* dancing. I would like to take the liberty of summarizing the main points of Bill's article (or at least what *I* perceived to be the main points) so that I can use them as a springboard for my own remarks. Bill made the following points:

1. Good dancers are usually recognized as such by other dancers.
2. Most dancers aspire to be in the group that is so recognized.
3. Bill discussed the criteria he uses in evaluating how well or how poorly a dancer performs. In point form, they were:
  1. Number of mistakes - better dancers make fewer mistakes.
  2. Command of fundamentals - better dancers have a superior grip on certain fundamental elements which form the basis of a large number of calls and concepts - examples are circulate, rotate, trade, hinge, roll, etc.
  3. Ability to help - how much assistance is the dancer capable of offering to others in the square?
  4. Adaptability - better dancers can adapt to a situation that represents a logical extrapolation of known material without having to be taught or walked through.
  5. Ability to handle distortions - can the dancer handle distorted setups that are legal at the level being danced?
  6. Precision - better dancers make precise formations and adopt precise facing directions.
  7. Ability to recognize the *upright* - better dancers realize when something does not make sense, when a formation cannot be correct, and therefore a mistake has been made.
  8. Ability to recover - when good dancers make a mistake, or find themselves in a situation they do not understand, they can adjust so as to keep the square moving.
  9. Confidence - how confident is the dancer that he or she knows what they are about?
4. The above characteristics are level-independent. They transcend the material associated with any given Callerlab program. Thus, it does not follow that any given C4 dancer is necessarily a *better* dancer than any given A2 dancer, simply by virtue of their habitual dance level. It is entirely possible for an A2 dancer to be a *better* dancer than a C4 dancer, despite the fact that the C4 dancer probably knows more calls.

5. Because the square dance movement has not done a good job of articulating the characteristics that contribute to good dancing, a great many people mistakenly assume that there is a direct correlation between the level somebody dances and how well they dance. They assume that attendance at a higher level dance indicates that someone must be a better dancer.
6. Since we all wish to be well-regarded by our peers, this mistaken idea that dance level is synonymous with dancing ability fosters an inappropriate compulsion to advance through the levels.
7. The equation between dance-level and prestige has resulted in an unfortunate decline in the average levels of dance skill exhibited at the Advanced and Challenge levels.

Since my purpose is not to review Bill's article, but rather to expand upon it, I offer these points merely to refresh your memory. If you have not yet read Bill Heimann's article, I heartily recommend that you do so.

In reading Bill's article, the first thing that struck me was that Bill's list of *good dancer* criteria actually consisted of a single point, with a number of supporting elements. Most of Bill's criteria were in fact specific instances of his first point - better dancers make fewer mistakes. I think that better dancers make fewer mistakes *because* they have a good grasp of fundamentals, are adaptable, can deal with distorted setups, are precise, recognize errors, and know how to recover. Further, dancers who make few mistakes tend to be confident and are more liable to be able to help others. Therefore, I think that Bill's list actually boils down to a single point: better dancers make fewer mistakes.

While I do not wish to argue that a low error rate represents the only virtue a good dancer need possess, it seems clear that the level of error exhibited by dancers must represent the single most important criterion in evaluating how well they dance. This being so, I think it might be instructive to examine dancer performance from this point of view. How many mistakes is it reasonable for a competent dancer to make in the course of an evening? How many sequences out of a tip is it reasonable to expect a square to execute successfully?

First, we need to define what we mean by *mistake*. I'm not talking about momentary hesitations or false starts. I'm referring to those killer mistakes that cause squares to crumble. I call these **fatal errors**. I define a fatal error as follows:

An incorrect action (or inaction) which:

1. if left uncorrected, would result either in the square breaking down or an incorrect resolution, and
2. is not recovered by the perpetrator before it damages the square.

So my question is, **How many such errors is it acceptable for a competent dancer to make?**

In pondering this, it quickly became evident to me that there is no easy answer. It is easy to say **2**. or **17**. or **89**, but without a supporting rationale, the number itself has no meaning. The underlying premise in our concern with dancing errors is the fact that mistakes contribute directly to broken squares and broken squares result in dancers being transformed into spectators who watch the other squares dance. Our problem is that we consider the proportion of time spent spectating to be growing to unacceptable levels. This line of thought splits my original question into two:

1. For what portion of the total dance time is spectating acceptable?
2. How do mistakes influence spectator time?

The first question is a matter of personal judgment, but the second is open to analysis. Perhaps if we undertake the analysis we will be better positioned to make the judgment required for the first question. First we need to quantify our terms in a way that makes analysis possible.

Since we are concerned with the number of mistakes dancers make, it is useful to quantify that as an error rate using the number of sequences danced as a base. For instance, if a dancer makes fatal errors at the rate of 1 error every 5 sequences, it follows that he or she dances faultlessly 4 out of 5 sequences. In other words, you could say that the dancer executes without error 80% of the sequences called. This value can also serve to express the probability of that dancer executing any given sequence successfully. Henceforth, I will refer to such a dancer as an 80% dancer.

Now let's examine how well dancers with various probabilities for dancing error-free might be expected to do. Let's suppose that each of the dancers in the square dance 90% of the sequences without fatal error. A mark of 90% is usually considered pretty good in school. In dancing terms that means that you blow one sequence in ten. We are interested in is the probability of 8 dancers, each with a 90% probability of dancing error-free, making it through a sequence without any one of them making an error. Statistics tells us that the formula for this calculation is to take the product of all the probabilities. Therefore, a square composed entirely of 90% dancers could expect to make:

$$.9 \times .9 \times .9 \times .9 \times .9 \times .9 \times .9 \times .9 = .43 = 43\%$$

#### **LESS THAN HALF of the sequences**

Or in other words, they would be standing around **more than half** of the time. I do not think many would be prepared to argue that spectating for more than half of the time is satisfactory.

Let's look at this from another angle. Suppose we apply our 90% number to the entire square instead of the individual dancers? How well do the dancers have to dance in order for a square to make 90% of the sequences? We need a number n such that:

$$n \times n \times n \times n \times n \times n \times n \times n = 0.9$$

If you work it out, it turns out that  $n = 0.987$  or 98.7%. In order for the entire square to make 90%, each individual needs to be dancing at **98.7%**.

This seems like a very high performance level. After all, in school only genius level students get 98.7%. When you consider that the average 2-1/2 hour dance comprises 7 or 8 tips each containing 10 or 12 sequences, 98.7% represents, at most, **one** mistake per night. Perhaps attempting to achieve a 90% level of success for the square is shooting too high. However, we have already seen that 90% dancers will stand for more than half their time on the floor, so it is clear that whatever value we use will have to be higher than that. By now many of you will be saying to yourselves, **But that doesn't make sense. I've danced in squares with totally incompetent dancers, and we still got most of the sequences. These numbers can't be right.**

And, of course, they are not. What the above calculations overlook is the fact that many, if not most, mistakes are *corrected* before the square dissolves. In fact, when dancers know one another well, many mistakes are anticipated and *prevented* before they are made. That is, there are dancers in the square who not only dance their own parts flawlessly, they also correct at least some of the mistakes of others.

Another way of looking at this is to say that dancers who correct others are, in effect, dancing **higher** than 100%. They are dancing 100% of their own parts, plus some parts that should be executed by other dancers. For instance, let's assume we had a square composed of six dancers dancing 100% and a seventh dancing 80%. If the eighth dancer merely dances 100%, then the square gets 80% of the sequences. But if the eighth dancer can dance all of his or her own part, plus fix half of the seventh dancer's mistakes, the square could attain 90% success. Thus, it can

be argued that the eighth dancer is performing at 110%; 100% on his or her own behalf, plus 10% of the seventh dancer's responsibilities. If one of the other dancers could also manage this feat, then the square could theoretically attain a 100% success ratio despite the presence of an 80% dancer.

This phenomenon is an integral part of the dancing process. More often than not, when one dancer makes a mistake, another dancer is able to correct it and avoid damage to the square. This process is essential to a healthy square and is a normal part of good dancing. Where it becomes pathological, however, is when the help always flows in a single direction. Instead of a bi-directional interplay, we have one person who always helps and another always on the receiving end. I believe that this last point goes straight to the heart of the quality-of-dance issue. If we were to survey the dancer population at any given level, the skills of the dancers could be grouped into three categories:

1. Dancers who, on average, are not fully competent at the level. They would make very few sequences were it not for the presence of other dancers who correct their errors.
2. Dancers who, on average, dance the level competently. They can dance their own part without assistance. Their level of performance is very close to 100%. A square of such dancers should be able to attain success levels of at least 90%.
3. Dancers who, on average, are capable of dancing their own parts at the 100% level and, in addition, can help others. These are the people who make it possible for the dancers in the first category to be on the floor.

At this point it is important to understand that all three of these categories are *necessary*. Some might think that if we dispense with the dancers in the first category, our problems are solved. Not so! You can quickly see why if you look back at the three categories and view them as the three *phases* that a dancer moves through as he or she comes to master any given level. Therefore, in an ideal world, the people at phase 1 would be the novices at the level. Since there is a great deal of material at the advanced and challenge level that can only be mastered through experience, it is to be expected that people who are new to a level will exhibit higher error rates. Even after you intellectually understand Magic Diamonds, how many times do you have to work in them before you can dance such material with any panache?

So we cannot just dump these **phase 1** dancers - they are the future. Since they require help, however, they must be balanced by an appropriate number of **phase 3** dancers. In a perfect world, any given level would always be populated with dancers from all three phases in balanced proportions - for instance 20% in phase 1, 60% in phase 2, and 20% in phase 3. But the world isn't perfect and therein lies the crux of our problem. Because of the pressure to advance from level to level, many people are short-cutting the three phases. They progress from phase 1 to phase 2 and then move up to the next level (where, of course they are phase 1 again). As this becomes more prevalent the proportion of phase 3 dancers at all levels starts to erode which diminishes the help that is available to the new dancers. With less help available, phase 1 dancers progress to phase 2 less rapidly - or not at all.

Now comes the most insidious part of the process. New dancers arriving at a level find that there are no phase 3 dancers available to help them become competent. **Nobody at this level seems to know what they're doing**. But, of course, we all know that the better dancers all dance at some level higher than we do, therefore the answer is to memorize the calls on the list for the next level and move on up. This process results in dancers who have yet to master C1 showing up on C3 floors.



As Bill Heimann said towards the end of his article, it is time to clean up our act. We need to acknowledge that when we present ourselves on a dance floor at any given level, we have an obligation to the other dancers. That obligation is to dance *our fair share* of the material. To the extent that we cannot dance our fair share, we represent a *burden* on the other dancers, one which we imposed upon them unilaterally by arriving in their square. What is our fair share? I believe that it varies with experience at the level:

1. **Phase 1** - When you first attempt a level, your fair share will be relatively low, perhaps 75% to 80%. Other dancers have a right to expect you to know all the calls and concepts on the list, but it is not reasonable to expect a novice at the level to be able to flawlessly execute all possible contortions of the material.
2. **Phase 2** - After gaining some experience at the level, your fair share increases to 100%. That is, other dancers have a right to expect you to dance your own part without error. True, everybody makes mistakes from time to time. But they should be in the nature of transient aberrations caused by momentary inattention, mis-hearing a call, or because your shoe is untied. They should happen very seldom.
3. **Phase 3** - After gaining a great deal of experience at the level, your fair share again increases to something beyond 100%. It is now your responsibility to help those who are novices at the level and compensate for their errors.

It is important to recognize that while you are in the first stage you are *imposing* on the strength of others. The justification for doing this lies in the premise that, in time, you will progress from the first stage to the third stage and, in effect, *pay back* the help you were given.

If you move on without repaying the help you were accorded, you are short-changing the people who follow you into the level. If you move on before you are competent at the level you are currently in, then you are short-changing both the level you leave and the level you move to. But most important of all, you short-change yourself.

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## A Look At Ourselves

by Bill Heimann, November 1988

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Let's create a scenario. You and I are friends attending a C2 dance with someone we never saw before. After the dance you ask me if I danced with that couple in the red shirts. I said, "No, I didn't. Why?". You reply, "They're really good dancers."

That's a scenario that's probably happened to you if you've been around challenge dancing for any length of time. But let's take it one step further. What do you mean by saying they're good dancers? Did you ever try to analyze exactly what you observed that created that impression? Most people probably couldn't verbalize the precise reasons. It's just that their "general sense," their "gut feeling" was that the people were good dancers.

That's happened to me too, but those kinds of emotional responses to a rational setting bother me. Consequently, I've tried to quantify what's really involved in leading me to such a conclusion. Here are some of the criteria I use in evaluating a dancer.

1. **Mistakes** - This is the most common failing of most dancers. They simply make too many mistakes. Dancers must be able to execute the routine steps flawlessly. It's just like

baseball. Nobody wants a shortstop who is capable of making the spectacular plays if he can't be relied upon to make the routine ones. It's simply a matter of numbers. There are hundreds of routine ones for every spectacular opportunity. In this case the price of the spectacular play is too high.

2. **Command of Fundamentals** - Absolutely critical. If you can't split circulate, who cares if you know the latest and greatest call? I think a dancer is allowed one of these types of mistakes every time the United States loses a war!

Here are just a few examples of what I consider fundamentals: split circulate, counter rotate, single rotate, pass in or out, roll, left from right, beaus and belles identification, and the most difficult call of all, cast 3/4.

3. **Degree of Help** - How much help can a dancer provide at the level he considers himself? It's probably not unreasonable to expect him to provide some help to someone standing next to him, and to some extent to the square as a whole. Few people have the ability to provide dynamic help to a whole square on a consistent basis, but to be considered really competent at a level, a dancer should be capable of providing this help on an occasional basis.
4. **Ability to adapt to new situations** - Must a dancer be walked through a familiar call from a new setup before he can dance it correctly? A good dancer develops the ability to adapt to these new situations at a dance and at dance speed.
5. **Ability to recognize and deal with a distorted figure** - Examples are T-bones, concentric setups, magic columns, phantoms, triangles, and parallelograms.
6. **Precise formations** - Some people seem to spend all night dancing at a 45 degree angle with the walls. Can a dancer circulate exactly two positions on a Perk Up even if the centers are T-boned to them? Does he know where he is relative to the other dancers in the square? Does he stand *exactly* alongside his partner?
7. **Ability to recognize when something doesn't seem right** - For example, it constantly amazes me that some dancers can go several calls T-boned to the rest of the square and not know it. Some dancers just seem to be dancing to the beat of a different caller.
8. **How does he react when he doesn't know what to do?** - Does rigor mortis immediately set in? Does he move anyway hoping no one will notice he doesn't know what to do? Or, does he immediately find his opposite, listen for a cue from the caller or someone in the square, or try to blend in with the other dancers who seem to know what they are doing? Does he know how to wait?
9. **The dancer's demeanor** - Does he dance with confidence? Does he appear to have control of the situation? Does he dance with the other dancers or is he a solo artist? How's his timing? Can he dance at the right pace, not too slow or too fast?

These are some of the qualities I think constitute a good dancer. Okay, there may be others. It wasn't my purpose in writing this article to specifically exhaust the possibilities. My purpose was something else.

Take another quick look at the list - go ahead, I'll wait!

How many of the items are related to level? Maybe some of the distorted figures in number 5, but other than that, none of them! In other words, **being a good dancer has nothing to do with level!** Other things being equal, if dancer A makes fewer mistakes than dancer B, dancer A is a better dancer. If he can execute fundamentals better, he's a better dancer. If he makes more precise formations, he's a better dancer. How about if dancer A attends C3 dances and dancer B

dances no higher than C2? Is dancer A therefore a better dancer than B? Absolutely not. According to the list, considerations like what dances a dancer attends, how many calls he knows, how long he's been dancing, or what workshop he's in have absolutely nothing to do with evaluating his performance.

Aren't the criteria on the list the ones usually used by the challenge community to judge other dancers? Unfortunately, they don't seem to be. Let's look at an example at our C2 dance. I've heard many people say things like, "that last tip should have gone better than it did because we had two 'C4 couples' in it." Isn't the implication here that the square was potentially strong due to the presence of the two C4 couples? In other words, these couples were good dancers simply because they're "C4 dancers." But does that fact mean they're any good? Not according to the above list. It's been my experience that people can be incompetent at any level. Just because someone "dances" C3 doesn't mean he's a good C1 dancer. Indeed, that fact alone doesn't mean he's a good dancer at all! It simply means he spends part of his life inhabiting a C3 floor.

Why is it that we as a dancing community seem to value progressing through levels more than we value good dancing? Why do we value level movement more than quality? I believe the answer is ego, or status. We want others to think well of us, and the most visible way to do that is by advancing through the levels. Many think the progression through levels is the only means we have of showing our prowess. That's how we keep score. So much energy is put into learning a new level. Feelings are irreparably hurt because someone wasn't invited into that next level workshop, or perhaps asked into a star tip. His life is over. What a shame that we treat this wonderful activity that way. Just imagine how great it could be if this energy were funneled into improving our performance rather than our egos.

On the other hand, who are these people that many think will be impressed by their movement? I really don't know. They certainly aren't the people who dance with them when they obviously aren't prepared. The good dancers aren't fooled. The callers aren't. Who is? So much time and energy goes into the charade, to what end? Who's impressed? Honest folks, nobody is! The honest to gosh real fact of the matter is that *nobody* is.

What's the answer? We as the challenge community need to clean up our act. We need to appreciate the activity for what it is rather than use it as a means to improve our self-image. We need to take harder looks at ourselves, to more accurately and honestly evaluate our ability before deciding to attend a dance. We need to understand that it's no disgrace to spend time at a level, to become good there, to become comfortable dancing the level, to enjoy it, before moving on. We need to accept the commitment to the other dancers to be reasonably competent at a level before attending a dance. We must understand and believe that it isn't fair to impose ourselves on other dancers who in many cases have spent considerable time and money to be there.

I guess what I'm really trying to say is that we have to stop abusing this activity. I've always felt that the most wonderful aspect of square dancing is that there's a place for every level of ability and interest. Some people only want to dance once a month while others enjoy workshopping several times a week, or dissecting the calls, or studying hours at a time. There's a place for everyone. But dancing a higher level doesn't make you a better person. It simply means you know a few more steps than someone else.

In the grand scheme of things, how important is that, really?

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