

CLUB EROSION



This Pamphlet was developed by the Education Committee of the UNITED SQUARE DANCERS OF AMERICA, INC. and provides an insight into the definition, causes, effects and cures of Club Erosion.





Club Erosion **By Jim Seagraves**

How is your club doing? Growing? Having a great time each dance night? Financially sound? Supporting other clubs, area association and state association? Feel welcome each dance night? Feel part of the gang at the club? Attractive dance facility? Aware of the dance activities in the immediate area and state? Each dance night a real fun trip? Are you missed when you are absent? Are you aware of all the club activities for the next few months? Is the club enthusiastic? Large class? Plenty of workers and volunteers?

Think about it and go over these questions and answer them truthfully. If your club is like many clubs throughout the nation, something is seriously wrong with its operations. The truthful answers to the questions above may be shocking and a signal of great danger to the welfare and longevity of your club. Has your club dwindled in size and ceased to be a great source of fun and fellowship? WHERE ARE THE GOOD OLD DAYS? WHAT HAS HAPPENED? Your club may have eroded into its present condition.

"CLUB EROSION" is merely a *laissez faire* attitude possessed by everyone in the club. With this type of attitude the club soon loses its desire and ability to achieve its intended purpose --- "fun and fellowship through square and round dancing." Club erosion does not happen from a single incident but from a long series of incidents, omissions or fumbles.

In this type of environment, many necessary club functions, responsibilities, and operations are bypassed or neglected and the club just rocks along, progressively becoming less organized and functional to respond to the prime purpose for which it was formed. Soon the club becomes a ho-hum type

of organization with no spirit, no excitement, no fun and soon --- no members. The club assumes the role of total frustration and aggravation to its members, leaders and the caller/cuer. Amid this frustration, many innocent and sometimes harmful incidents can occur very easily and compound the problems of the club. Lack of adequate communications, short tempers, misinterpretations, instantaneous reactions and responses are abundant in this type of an environment. The club has now deteriorated from an established formal organization to an unmanageable, divided club, floundering for a way to get back to the "GOOD OLD DAYS." But the club has "ERODED" to the point that it is no longer an acceptable hobby to compete with other entertainment activities. Therefore the club members seek other clubs or forms of entertainment, and the club dies!



"Club Erosion" is easily detected by the experienced leader or dancer; however, many times it is not vocalized to the current officers. The experienced leader is reluctant to comment or analyze a situation where they do not have all the facts. They are also reluctant to speak out or to volunteer guidance because it can so easily be interpreted as "one of the old timers butting in where he doesn't belong" or "he is trying to run the club."

"Club Erosion" over the last several years has resulted in the loss of many club members, some club officers and callers, and clubs have folded throughout the USA due to this "disease." How do you cure an ailing club that has eroded almost into extinction?

Just like caring for the sick, one must diagnose the ailment, study and analyze the sickness, and then commence a concentrated and dedicated effort to cure the sickness.

CLUB AILMENT

Let's look and see what causes or leads to the erosion of a club. To analyze club erosion requires the collection of data. Collect and document the observed or stated problems, rumors, facts, gossip, complaints, etc. Any type of information will be helpful. Without doubt, this collected data of an eroded club will duplicate many of the following listed problems:

Club:

- Has a good, but not great, club caller
- Officers are untrained leaders
- Many officers are just out of class or new in the square dance activity (less than three years)
- Membership has decreased over the past year(s)
- Has some dedicated, loyal members, officers and caller
- Has no bulletin board or display table
- Has little or no refreshments on dance nights
- Has few or no social activities
- Does not visit other clubs or participate as a club at specials or conventions
- Has little or no communications or association with the members other than on the club dance night
- Club sessions are a real drag



Facilities:

- Hall is inadequate
- Club banner is not normally displayed
- Facilities not ready prior to start of dance for members and guests

Caller:

- Is not dynamic or enthusiastic any more
- Does not call new material
- Calls too fast/slow

- Does not motivate the dancers
- Teaches club/class too fast, causing the loss of members
- Teaches too many new calls
- Calls at a level that is too high/low
- Calls the same thing every week
- Doesn't make it exciting and fun

Club Officers:

- Do not arrive early to assure the hall is set up
- Not present to greet members and visitors before dance
- Do not thank the members and visitors for attending and encourage them to come to the next dance
- Do not appoint club committees
- Do not publish a club newsletter
- Did not assure a good class for last couple of years
- Do not check on absentee members
- Do not schedule visitations
- Do not retrieve club's travel banners
- Do not hold regular board meetings
- Do not make complete or well-organized announcements
- Take no apparent action to keep the loss of members to a minimum
- Leave early before the dance is over
- Do not dress in appropriate dance attire
- Are not aware of local/state dance activities
- Do not support other local/state activities
- Have no leadership training plans for club members
- Do not furnish club governing documents to new members
- Do not furnish club rosters to class or club members
- Do not set a good example for club members to follow

Club Members:

- Some were unfriendly to class members
- Many sit out several tips instead of dancing
- Many arrive late and leave early
- Did not get a large class the last few years



- Do not listen to club announcements
- Some do not wear appropriate attire
- Never volunteer to help
- Refuse to take an office or be on a committee
- Do not square up without begging by caller
- Do not dance with visitors/solos
- Dance in "set squares"
- Do not dance with any enthusiasm
- Do not attend workshops
- Complain about officers/caller/cuer
- Do not assist in the set-up/clean-up of hall
- Do not take any responsibility for club functions
- Do not participate in club functions
- Do not attend other local/state dance functions
- Do not dance with caller's law

These are some of the typical "problems" of an eroded club. The club has become negligent, delinquent, lazy or unaware of normal club leadership obligations, in areas such as:

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|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Monthly Newsletter | Fund Raising Activities |
| Annual Calendar | Officer Responsibilities |
| Visitations | Membership Responsibilities |
| Banner Retrieval | Caller Responsibilities |
| Club Announcements | Education of Officers |
| Education of Club Members | Square Dance Classes |
| Club Publicity | Club Committees |
| Club Cliques | Renewal of Contracts |
| Club Internal Support | Square Dance Month |
| Fun Badges | Member Involvement |
| Square Dance Fun & Fellowship | |
| Support of Area/State Organizations | |
| Support of Area Club Activities | |

Sounds like a club in total disorder, confusion, chaos? Yes, it is. It is just a typical run-down, ho-hum, diminishing club on its way to oblivion.

You will note that no one accepts any responsibility for the problems of an eroded club. Human nature seems to demand a scapegoat for every undesirable situation. Who is responsible for Club Erosion? Here is an answer to that question:

The club members!
The club officers!
The club caller!

CLUB ANALYSIS

How could everyone in a club be responsible for the deterioration of their club? It's easy to explain after further research. What has caused the erosion of the club? Let's take a look:

Club Members:

The following are typical failures of club members that contribute to club erosion:

Arriving late to the club dance. This certainly does not honor the caller, officers or fellow dancers. It depicts lack of respect, support, care, enthusiasm and certainly does not set a good example for other members to follow.

Leaving early gives the appearance that they are not interested enough in the caller or the club to stay for the last tip. How does that make the caller and club officers feel? Could it also indicate that "early departees" do not want to



do their part in the clean-up of the hall --- "Let George do it"? Ducking their responsibility?

Not squaring up immediately when called by the caller.

This gives the impression that the calling or dancing is nothing to get excited about, and sitting out to gossip or socialize is more important and satisfying than dancing. This is very rude to the other dancers and a real slam to the caller. We say the caller is not dynamic, not enthusiastic, not motivating. But have we given him any reason to be dynamic or enthusiastic, when we sit on the sideline and do not respond to his first, second, third, forth call to "square-up"? When a caller has to plead and beg the dancers to get up and fill a square, something is definitely wrong with the club.

Not obtaining a large or average size class. Can the caller or officers be motivated by what we have presented them for a class?

Unfriendliness to class members. Some club members may have a lack of patience with new dancers or give the impression of being upset or unfriendly. This can be found in any group, whether it be in the work force, church, school, etc. It takes a lot of experience and working with people to know when someone is really unfriendly, when someone is unhappy with you or when someone is unhappy with themselves. Many class members and new club members may not be able to discern what is the real intent or meaning of many of our reactions, gestures or facial expressions. But as members we must be very sensitive to what we say, what we do and how we do it when we are at the club or class.

Loss of club members. Have you ever noticed that some club members always dance together, in one square? We call that "set squares" or a "square clique". Did you understand what was happening? As an experienced dancer and club member you should have. Once a group

starts that, they will be gone before long to another club, to a higher dance program or will drop out all together from the club. What action did you take? Didn't know what to do? If you attended some of the educational seminars taught at the National Square Dance Convention® or local leadership seminars, you would have known exactly what to do. If you had taken appropriate action, those dancers would probably still be in the club.

Membership involvement. When club officers announce a visitation, nursing home demonstration, or call for volunteers to perform certain club functions, do we all jump at the chance to do our part? Do we make the job of our officers a burden, distasteful, and impossible to perform without begging, pleading and repetitive urging? If we assume that "Let George Do It" attitude, that is death to any club.

Education of members. Most club members deem it unnecessary or undesirable to attend leadership seminars. Why don't the members take advantage of the square dance leadership seminars and learn the methods of detecting the first signs of club sickness, how to heal a club, how to lead a club, and also how to be a "good" club member? Another case of "Let George Do It" attitude?

The club members will blame the officers and the caller for any undesirable club situation without analyzing the problem and solutions to the problem.

Courtesy to officers making announcements. Usually, club members are not good listeners!

Honoring club officers and caller. Members do not show appreciation to their club officers and callers/cuers, the very people that are sacrificing their time, talents and in many cases their funds to plan and lead YOUR organization.



Club Officers:

The following are typical examples of failures of club officers that contribute to club erosion:

Club officers have no interest or desire to obtain the knowledge or expertise required to successfully lead a non-profit social club.

The Officers blame the Caller/Cuer/Members for club problems.

Neglect to appoint/reappoint committees upon election.

Fail to conduct an annual review of the governing documents, contracts, policies, etc. (permanent club records).

Do not plan, prepare, distribute and maintain an annual club calendar.

Do not promote special club activities to assure club unity, cohesiveness, fun, fellowship and assure the appearance and recognition as a top quality square dance club. These special activities could include visitations to other clubs, banner retrievals, theme dances/parties, presentation of or earning fun badges.

Do not promote club publicity in local, area, state, national media.

Do not promote activities as a "total club" function in lieu of only "part" of the club. Visitations to other clubs, retrievals, nursing home visits, exhibitions, and other activities are many times instigated on short notice (lack of advance planning) and only a few members are asked to participate. When one square of volunteers is obtained, the asking or

invitation stops, and therefore it "ceases" to be a "club" function. It becomes a function for only the few volunteers. The rest of the club may find out about what took place later by some means and will probably feel "left out". If the club is going to perform, let it be offered to all club members. Wouldn't it look great for the club image to go visiting with five or six squares rather than with one square?

Do not promote or support area association activities and other club specials. It appears to be much too far for the club to travel 50 or 60 miles to support our sister clubs, but we sure expect dancers from these areas to support our club specials.

Do not plan and prepare for club announcements. Most dance night announcements are not planned in advance and are made extemporaneously, thereby omitting many items that should have been covered or giving incorrect data.

Do not bid welcome and farewell to visitors and members each dance night.

Do not plan for the education/training of class and club members and officers. Teaching club and class members about the square dance movement, activities, club operations, members and officer duties and responsibilities, club history, area and national organizations, national square dance conventions, etc.

Do not prepare a class plan or assure the implementation and execution of an adequate class recruiting plan.

Do not prepare and distribute square dance handouts to class so that class members may learn the customs, procedures, do's and don'ts, etc.



Do not distribute Constitution, By-Laws, Policies, Roster, etc. to new club and class members.

Do not plan each dance night, giving consideration to fun activities, caller gimmicks, recognitions, awards, fun badges, announcements, etc.

Do not maintain effective communication with the caller and club members.

Do not detect or recognize the existence of club problems or react promptly to resolve problems.

Do not adhere to the established club governing documents, rules or policies.

Have questionable financial judgment. They make hasty decisions without thoroughly examining the impact of the decision. This may be an indication of a lack of foresight or experience and knowledge of "long range" typical club operations and club leadership. New short-sighted officers that have never experienced 3 to 5 years of cyclic club operations may have that innate desire to "spend the money" if the club treasury appears to reflect a surplus of funds.

Do not do a thorough job of planning and preparing for club board meetings.

Do not motivate club members or club caller.



Club Caller:

The following are typical examples of failures of club a caller that contributes to club erosion:

Does not advise the club officers of potential club problems. As the quarterback of the Square Dance Team, and possessing many years in the calling profession, the caller should recognize potential club problems and advise the club officers before the club suffers club erosion.

Does not take timely appropriate action to discourage cliques or set squares.

Does not call the lackluster response or attitude of the club members to the attention of the club officers and recommend solutions or methods of improving the dancer's attitude.

Contributes to the loss of club enthusiasm. The lack of enthusiasm of club members may be emulated by the caller.

Does not present an adequate program or stimulus to motivate the club officers and members.

Does not plan or present a stimulating dance every club night. Uses caller gimmicks, new calls, new material, surprises, etc. to stimulate the dancers.





CLUB CURE

We have analyzed our club and detected the problems, now what do we do to cure the club?

The first step in the curing process or rebuilding program is to recognize and thoroughly understand the events that have taken place and why they occurred. Identify the specific club problems and recognize that each and everyone in the club, individually, is probably responsible for the club condition in one way or another. There is no one specific individual or group responsible for the erosion of the club. With a few meetings, letters and discussions, everyone should realize what happened to the club. This is only the first step.

The second step is to commence picking up the pieces and moving out on the rebuilding effort. This step is not possible unless there is 100% support from the membership. Full support to the rebuilding efforts must be pledged by the club members. The members of any "hobby/social" club must recognize their individual responsibilities to an "all volunteer" organization. Also the members must recognize their responsibilities to other club members, club officers and the caller and be ready to shoulder their share of the club rebuilding process.

The third step is to do the club planning. Planning should include immediate plans for required actions, short range plans and long range plans. Coordinate or solicit input to the plans from the club caller and cuer. Follow the standard guidelines for developing the plans and publicize the status to the club members. Keep the club members fully informed of the club plans. Provide a "12 month club calendar of activities" to each member so that their other personal activities may be planned around the square dance activities. Always plan and maintain a 12 month calendar for the club.

The fourth step is to successfully execute the club plans. Make every club event a success and something that the members will remember. Make the event so exciting and fun-filled that the members will not want to miss any future club function. This requires a lot of thought, planning and outstanding leadership abilities. Involve the total club membership in activities of the club. Make them all feel as if they are an integral and vital part of the organization.

The fifth step is to evaluate club operations as they unfold and revise the club plans accordingly. Seek feedback from the members, callers and visitors and analyze this input. Develop revisions to existing plans to incorporate improvements.

Rebuilding an ailing club cannot be accomplished overnight. It will take time, talent, thought, patience, planning and cooperation of every member of the club. When the new rock-solid foundation is laid and the club is on the road to recovery, don't let up! Keep after it and improve it every month.

One evening, everything will just fall into place. Excitement, enthusiasm, and camaraderie will fill the air. Why would this happen? Because we all made an honest attempt to do our part, and lo and behold --- it just happened! The club has come to life and suddenly, all is well! After this great evening of dancing, fun and fellowship, everyone will realize that we are back to the "GOOD OLD DAYS."

HALLELUJAH! THE CLUB IS ALIVE AND WELL!



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