

How To

RECRUIT

Published By

BAASDC & SDCCGB

JOINT COUNCILS' RPM COMMITTEE

rpmgroupuk@googlemail.com

RPM



■ recruit ■ promote ■ maintain ■

SQUARE DANCING

KEEP IT ALIVE...RPM

In order to keep Square Dancing alive we need a way to bring in a steady flow of younger people.

Why Recruit?

Every organisation must recruit or it will die. Our dancers have aged by about 50 years since we started in the 1950s so we need to act now.

How urgent?

We need to understand the arithmetic:-

Every year one set grows older by

8 (people) X 1 (year) = 8 people-years.

More on that, later.

Who needs to recruit?

Some people think that only Mainstream clubs need to recruit. However, Plus dancers, A dancers and C dancers also have birthdays. Plus clubs, A clubs and C clubs need to do their fair share of the beginner recruiting work to keep square dancing alive for future generations. Like Pot Luck, it will only work if everybody contributes.

Can you recruit?

You may have heard that it is not possible to recruit.

This is not true!

In 2004, 60% of clubs that tried to recruit got 10 or more new people and only 10% failed to get anyone.

Like most worthwhile things, it takes time, effort and money to successfully recruit. I have many examples of clubs **determined** to succeed who have worked hard at getting new people and **have** succeeded. Unfortunately a few other clubs who **felt it was hopeless** but just went through the motions, found that for them it **was** hopeless. This booklet offers help.

How?

You need to be confident that you **do need** people, that you **can recruit** them and that you **will** get them. First you must sell the idea to one or two other members of your club. To spark useful ideas needs more than one mind. Involve the club committee. They must feel it is their campaign, not just yours.

Many ideas are enclosed. Go through them and select those that will suit your situation, manpower and pocket. I tend to use three main ones and perhaps another three that come up as we work. Start telling the club as soon as possible and keep reminding them. Ask for help and ideas as they **must feel involved** or it won't work.

Plan First

Plan out your ideas and helpers with a time scale up to your proposed class start date. Allow a minimum of three months, (more if possible), to think up ideas, find helpers, print posters, post adverts in time for publication deadlines to reach your target people and allow them time to arrange to come to your first night. Get a large calendar and write in when each task must be done.

The traditional way is to start classes in September. However I have also had a successful start at other times of year. Announce your start date early. Make contact with people who show interest early, by letter, if they need to wait some weeks before joining. (Remember not all who show interest will turn up on the night.)

Tell all your square dance friends. Advertise at local clubs and dances.

If you are able to start a couple of sets of beginners at the same time, the group will become friends, help each other and hold together with less dropouts than you get with starting individuals or smaller numbers. I have found that this is a great advantage. (Remember not all of your class will turn up every night. Attendance may average about two thirds.)

Some clubs take beginners at any time. This is good, as people do not have to wait to join. However it is not easy to get experienced dancers to accept this with goodwill and programming the evening is more difficult for the caller. The beginners will lack peer group support and may need to sit out more advanced tips. Never the less some clubs manage to make this work successfully.

I have also read of "multi cycling". This involves starting a class every 12 to 17 weeks and overlapping two or three classes. It has worked in the US but I have not heard of anyone trying it in the UK. Written details are available from Callers Club.

Before Advertising

It is natural for us to say "Come Square Dancing". You and I know what this means. Most members of the public have not heard of Square Dancing and do not know what it is. Consider what you would do if you read "Come ##### dancing". This presents us with a problem when drafting any advertisement. To be able to advertise

effectively it is important that the public knows what "Square Dancing" is.

The answer is to make ourselves known to the public by holding demonstrations and open evenings, by sending letters & photos to the press when we raise money for charity, and by taking part in carnivals etc. (try to show at least half the dancers **not** wearing SD dress and always feature your clubs badge or logo) Every club needs to be in the public's eye more than once a year. This ground bait type publicity takes work and will not bring in beginners by itself. It will however make your future adverts more likely to work.

Open evenings, Western Barn Dances, Demos in shopping malls, and taking part in Carnivals are all good opportunities to show the public what Square Dancing really is. All clubs, whether recruiting or not, can play their part in helping to secure the future of Square Dancing by helping in this way. Festival and weekend organisers can include a public display in their program to help. It is after all your future we wish to protect.

Local papers are always seeking news to attract their readers. Can you find a club member who is willing to be your newspaper correspondent? If you can send in news reports of your activities with facts, names and photos directly they occur you are likely to get some, if not all, printed. This is an ongoing task. The correspondent needs to build a relationship with the Editor. Regular correspondence will bring you free publicity and make your paid adverts more effective.

Targeting

We **need** couples. (But would still make singles welcome). We **need** people who are younger than us. (But would still make those who are older welcome). Younger is obviously a relative term, so check out the average age of your own club by holding a secret age ballot. Finding beginners just a few years younger will begin to offset the natural ageing of your club.

I said at the beginning that each year a set grows older by 8 people years.

To offset this, it needs one new beginner who is 8 years younger than the age of the set.

For a whole club, the figures are even more.

Example: -

If a club has **32** members (4 sets) and the last beginners intake was **2** years go

The club will have aged

32 X 2 = 64 people-years.

This ageing can be offset by recruiting 4 couples each 8 years younger, that is:-

8 people X 8 years younger = 64 people-years.

We must recognise that recruiting 4 couples who are the same age as the club will not stop this club continuing to age and eventually die out. Not even Square Dancers can continue dancing for ever.

We must find ways to target our advertising at people a little younger than ourselves. For instance when children leave home their parents suddenly find time and freedom to take up a new interest. These "empty nesters" may be 40 to 50 years old and looking to expand their circle of friends and follow a healthy exercise hobby and would make ideal recruits. In practical terms they will learn more rapidly than older people and have more dancing years before them. We have limited resources and an urgent need to halt the decline in square dancing, due to dancers ageing. It must make sense to direct our aim at those people we most need, while at the same time making everyone welcome.

Fixed Advertisements

Some forms of advertising cost little and may be left in place throughout the year. Your club hall notice board is an obvious place to display details of your club throughout the year. Your local library may have a notice board for clubs and will have a list of clubs. The local council and the tourist information centre will keep lists of activities Ask to be listed on these and any other list that you can find. Both paper lists and web sites are important as people now look for information on their computers. Some councils employ an entertainments officer who publishes details of club events. Many clubs already have their own web site and these do bring people into square dancing. A club website has become a necessity, so find a member who is computer literate and set one up. The national web site is www.squaredancing.co.uk and you can be listed on this. Your local papers and magazines publish "What's On" lists for free and you need only to write up to be included.

Advertising

The club's logo or badge is of prime importance. By using the same design on all paperwork and advertising, it will become recognised by the public. You may need to explain this clearly to all committee members and supply each of them with a master copy. (Place your badge on a flatbed scanner or a Xerox machine to print it) No ticket, advert, letter, handbill or notice must escape without this design.

Basic Paperwork For Promoting a Class

1. An A4 poster under the club logo including the vital facts, using the minimum number of words. Put the action you would like the reader to take e.g. "Join now". Always include a contact number. Keep it simple. Accentuate just one or two key things. To check your design, place it on the far side of the room and turn your back to it. Now glance over your shoulder for a couple of seconds and see what you can read. To involve your club members produce two designs and invite them to choose which they prefer. This will make it **their** poster. I find the computer will print the same design in A4, for posters, A5 for hand bills and A6 sizes, thus saving much work. The A6 size will go into car windows easily. A business card size is also worth laying out as these are very convenient to hand out.

It is good to include suitable photos or drawings if you can find any which are up to date and do not over emphasize square dance dress. Coloured paper is more eye catching and cheaper than colour printing.

2. Take this design and rework it to ask square dancers in local clubs and at local dances to assist your recruiting campaign. Send a copy with (3).

3. Draft a letter to local S.D. clubs asking for their help if they are not recruiting at present.

4. Draft a letter inviting other organisations to join you and asking if they will display a poster. (to send to P.T.A.s, social clubs, etc.)

5 Draft a note describing the class details. (For public announcements & radio stations).

The first night.

First impressions are vital. You have sent out invitations, maps and directions, advertised everywhere you can think of and

even put a sign outside the door. Some people will be early so ask eight dancers to come, wearing plain clothes, half hour before the start. Bring some photos and literature for the first arrivals to look at. Set the hall to look its best and play some music softly to make a welcoming atmosphere. Try to shake hands with each new person if you can and ask them to sign in and give a phone number. Exchange names and try to remember their names and use them. Start on time using dancers if you need to make up the sets. Get them moving to music without delay. If more come in make the tip short and get the latecomers involved without delay. Do not make people stand through long explanations or leave them to sit out and watch. Never present an expert display before asking beginners to get up to dance.

Retaining

Keeping the newcomers is almost more important than teaching them. It requires care and skill from the caller to provide a program of dancing success with teaching woven into it. After all they come to dance for pleasure, not to study for technical qualifications. The club members they come in contact with have an equal responsibility of care. Their friendliness and easy acceptance of the simple beginners program is vital. In the weeks preceding the start of class it may help to "ask" club members how best to approach the task of making new people welcome. (This will involve them and get their commitment). Keen dancers may need to be cautioned that telling new people that they have to spend at least three years to reach the plus program, or that they must wear square dance dress, is extremely off-putting to people new to our hobby.

Social events i.e. meals and party nights will help to integrate new people and make them feel part of the group.

Viewpoints

Experienced square dancers and callers naturally look to beginners to fill their clubs. This leads them to wish to teach the newcomers up to club level dancing as soon as possible, but this may not be in the beginners best interests. There is also a natural temptation to jump in and explain how fascinating it is to master the complexities of the higher programs which many years of dancing have enabled some of us to now enjoy. But from a beginners

viewpoint this is drawing attention to their inferiority, and the size of the learning task may frighten them off.

Beginners have come out to enjoy an evening dancing and have found that after a few minutes instruction they are doing just that. They have never heard of the Mainstream Program. After dancing a couple of tips with dosado, swing and promenade, they have discovered that they can square dance. Who needs programs?

It is important to concentrate on showing them they **can dance** rather than pointing out that they can't. Time will provide a proper perspective and lead naturally to questions about SD dress, graduation and programs. These subjects can sound very off-putting to somebody new.

Finally.

On the second or third week of class give out slips asking in detail how students heard of the class. This gives vital information on the effectiveness of recruiting methods. With knowledge gained in this way and public displays to prime the local population, next year's recruitment drive will be better.

Conclusion

Square Dancing is a group activity. All eight dancers in a set must participate if it is to dance successfully.

Recruiting new dancers is a group activity. All 170 association clubs working with all 4000 British dancers are needed to find and teach enough new people to secure the future of Square Dancing in this country.

Like pot luck, it will only work if all contribute.

Methods used by clubs who have recruited successfully :-

Village magazines, newsletters and church magazines

Flyers in shop windows and on various notice boards & Libraries & Churches

Library handouts. Main library paid to send to all branches. (Some will do this without charge.)

Business card size adverts to hand out or display in shops or sub Post Offices & supermarkets.

Other clubs informed of the future class

Word of mouth by club members

Big prize (e.g. £100) to the club member who introduces the most people

Newspaper ads (paid) together with articles and photos for maximum effect

Free entries in papers and magazines that have a "coming events column"

Mailshot to 100 local clubs & associations chosen from council booklet "What to Join"

Letters and flyers to youth clubs

3000 leaflets through doors by club members

Leaflet offering free admission --- offering free admission for three weeks.

Advertisement in local magazine going to every household in the district

The internet:- local council, library information bureau websites, plus club's own site

Adverts on local radio

Hold a hoedown or two for charity and an open evening. Get newspaper publicity on this.

Writing to PTA's offering to raise money by offering a One Night Stand. Suggest they invite the press.

Over 50 friendship clubs and U.3.A. (University of the Third Age)

Car stickers

Local colleges

Photo displays in town centre

Paid leaflet drop

Accumulate names and addresses throughout year of interested people

Advertise for friendly people to come and talk, socialise and dance a bit.

NEW IDEAS ARE ALWAYS WELCOME – PLEASE SEND THEM IN

Eric Curtis tel. 020 8363 5247 ericcurtis@tiscali.co.uk August 2008

This booklet was written with the help of information provided by the experience of 29 association clubs who set out to recruit over the years 2003, 04 and 05. The author has himself recruited and taught a class of beginners annually for many years.

Publications you may find useful :-

How to **RAISE FUNDS** for recruiting By Zoe Bremer 2006 (Re-issued 2008)

How to **MARKET** Square & Round Dancing to **RECRUIT** New Dancers by Linda Gill 2008

How to **RECRUIT** By Eric Curtis 2008

How to **ARRANGE YOUR FIRST NIGHT** of class By Joan Black Lune Valley Ocean Wavers
2005 Re-issued 2008)

How to **RETAIN** Square Dancers By Irene Dimmer 2006 (Re-issued 2008)

rpmgroupuk@googlemail.com