

THOUGHTS ON NEW DANCERS - RECRUITMENT, TEACHING AND RETENTION

For any Mainstream club to successfully recruit and retain new dancers, three things are needed.

The first is a commitment by a majority of its members to actively join in the recruitment drive and then to dance with the new dancers and make them feel wanted.

The second is to have a core group of enthusiastic members dedicated to ensuring that the recruiting drive plan is made and executed.

The third is to find a way to have the new dancers join the regular club dancing after 10 - 12 weeks of lessons.

This third component requires concessions from the experienced dancers and a change in the teaching plan by the caller. (See below NEW DANCER SESSIONS)

SOME IDEAS (Based on experience and from articles in SD magazines)

PLAN #1

Engage all club members in the recruiting drive (Too often we sit back and let the publicity person(s) do all the work) Starting date needs to be determined.

1. Set a target age to approach. For example: Families, Teens, 20 - 40, 40 - 60
Decide if the club wants families with children and set an age limit on the children.
2. One-to-one, face-to-face - encourage club members (especially new members) to make a list of 5 - 10 people they can talk to (grocery store clerk, dental hygienist, bank teller, garage personnel, shop assistants etc.) to see if there might be interest. **Train club members in what to say. (Research needed here)** Recruit one by one or one couple / family at a time. Collect info (names, addresses, phone #) Ask the question: "What would it take to get you interested in Square Dancing?" and make note of the replies
3. In the Spring, before the season ends, make a data base for prospective new dancers with name, postal address, email address and 'phone number. As club members make contacts, have them send them in to the keeper of the data base. Check the included list of possible locations to post advertising and have club members volunteer for where they will put these up (keep a list of who and where)

4. For August have club members personally sign a letter - introducing the club, describing the activities (dance and non-dance) and describing the fun, exercise and sociability that the club offers to send to their prospects. (*This letter is something our group could compose*)

August is probably the best time for advertising. Make sure that the club posts zillions of posters - these now have to be redesigned and let's hope clubs can turn to the Federation for posters to download and print. Call on the list of volunteers and remind them the places they said they would post.

5. Four to six weeks before the New Dancer Sessions start, put on a party night - maybe a chili supper or similar, and invite your prospects. (They might have other prospects who may wish to attend) At the party, sell the club (not dancing) Let prospects meet members. (Mix and mingle, meet and greet) Call three weeks ahead to confirm acceptance and two weeks ahead send another invitation. Three days before, call and offer a ride to the party.

6. Do a demo square after the meal, keeping the choreo simple (Stars, Circles etc) and make sure the music is modern sounding.

7. Get the prospects up to dance.

8. Sign them up for the New Dancer Sessions before they leave and have an info note to give them that gives, date, time and place and a contact number.

Those club members who bring in prospects to the 1st night must come and dance with them and for several more dances.

PLAN #2 BLAST CLASSES

Shorten the learning time to 15 hours over three weeks.

Do three consecutive Saturdays 9:30 - 12:00 1:30 - 4:00. Feed them lunch, have refreshments available. (Hours are suggestions only - 2 1/2 hrs might be too much for one session.)

Experience has shown that some newcomers to the activity like to learn this way and will put in the time. After 3 Saturdays, they join the club's regular night for Mainstream dancing. They should have learned 40 or more calls and have confidence.

The learning is aided by having experienced dancers join in.

NEW DANCER SESSIONS

1. Offer 10 - 12 weeks of instruction up to the Christmas Party or Christmas break

• In these 10 weeks include the following calls:

Circle L & R, AI, RLG, Weave, Promenade, Ladies Chains (+ Chain 3/4) Flutterwheels & Rev F/W + Sweep 1/4. Lead Right, Veer Left, Couples Circulate, Chain Down the Line, Square Thru 2, 3 & 4 Swing Thru, Boys Run Bend the Line, Swing Thru, Boys/Girls Trade, Hinge, Boys/Girls Run, Trade By, Ferris Wheel, Grand Square, Alamo Style, Rollaway, Right and Left Thru, Star Thru, Eight Chains, Stars. (About 30 calls for the 11 weeks - more if the group is learning faster.)

This gives the caller enough choreographic possibilities to entertain the club when the new dancers join them at the Christmas Party.

Invite the new dancers to join the club in the new year, on the regular Mainstream dance night. Advise New Dancers of this on or about the 6 -7th ND session to see how many will be able to change their dance evening, It also gives the caller time to be able to judge if these new dancers will be far enough along for this to be possible.

In the New Year, ask the new dancers to come 1/2 hour early on club nights and teach them a new move from the Mainstream Programme. They will get practice doing this during the evening as well as floor time to dance what they learned before Christmas. Experienced dancers don't have to 'endure' another teaching Tip.

This gets new dancers into the club scene after 10 - 12 weeks and the rest of the season to learn and dance probably most if not all, the MS calls.

It might take a lot of one-on-one back room persuasion to get the club on board - but the hope is that with more dancers on the floor, there is more of a party atmosphere and the older members will dance happily with the newcomers.

Some thoughts:

How do we market to men (Wife: I'd love to but my husband won't)

What are the key words to aim at the different age groups?