

## ***Advice for Square Angels***

This article was adapted from the October 2019 issue of “Behind The Mike”, a caller’s newsletter from Australia. It is a reminder to all callers and “square angels”. The success of the class depends as much on the attitude of the club as on the talent of the students.

Much of this advice is appropriate in *any* square dance situation, but it’s especially so with newer dancers. Your lesson success starts here; don’t blow it because of bad habits or because you did not know.

**Be friendly.** We want new dancers to have a good time, so please make them feel welcome. Ask them to dance with you, rather than letting them fend for themselves. Talk to them during the breaks.

**Don’t push.** This is a special case of being friendly. If a class member is unsure of a call, some of you angels may experience a great temptation to grab the person and push him or her into position. At the very least, this is simply rude behavior. Remember, the object is not for *you* to get through the sequence; it’s for the *class members* to learn. They don’t learn by being shoved.

Do your best to be in the right position yourself, hold out your hand expectantly and/or exert *gentle* (I repeat, *gentle*) hand pressure consistent with the flow of the call, but never, *never* grab or shove. It is *far* better to let your square break down than to start shoving people around to fix it.

Squares breaking down is great feedback to the caller about what moves the dancers are having trouble with. If you observe others shoving people around, please take them aside after the tip and encourage them to behave themselves.

If someone is already in the right position but is looking around frantically as if lost, the best thing you can do is nod and smile. Not that you shouldn’t be smiling even when the square is breaking down.

**Balanced squares.** If you can do so unobtrusively, attempt to balance the number of club and class members in a square. Experienced dancers in a square help to be good examples (please do), and reduce the likelihood that one dancer’s error will take down the whole square, depriving the other dancers of practice.

The problem that arises time and again is that club members remember that it’s important for class members to dance, and as result neglect to square up at all until they’re dragged from the sidelines to fill out the last square. Of course, that square ends up being club-heavy, while the class members in their enthusiasm have already formed very class-heavy squares.

Don’t let this happen--get out there when the music starts! One of the best ways to achieve balance is to preferentially ask class members to be your partner. Just think--if every class member was partnered with a club member, we’d automatically have balanced squares.

**Class members have priority.** Remember, they're here to learn, and so they need to dance. But many are shy, or not completely comfortable yet asking for a dance. If you see a class member sitting out, offer to give up your spot in the square, especially if you're in a club-heavy square. Of course, if you all do your job of asking class members to dance with you, we won't need to go bumping club members like this.

**Don't play caller.** Sure, you can whisper small hints to people who are momentarily confused, but while a tip is in progress, don't try to do any teaching or fixing on your own (and if you're on the sidelines, don't jump into the square trying to help). There's already a caller up front with a microphone, and we'd like to train new dancers to pay attention to him (or her). Reserve lengthier problem solving to breaks. Ask the caller for help with the move that was in question.

**No frills.** *Never* initiate a frill with a class member. In fact, don't even do them with club members during class tips. Frills make dancing more fun but interfere with learning, even if a class member is not directly involved in your frill. Save your frills for the club tips at the end of the evening.

Examples of frills are the twirl on Weave the Ring, the highland fling Do Sa Do, and the swing in the middle of Sides Promenade Halfway Round. And please dance hands up, at least for the class--it's still the standard styling for Mainstream and Plus.