

Today's discussion will be about clubs and weekends, and how to keep them stable and growing. I will offer some ideas to help when creating a new club or weekend, and I will offer some suggestions about the management structure required to keep both activities successful.

Most of my experience comes from trial and error, creative processing, and learning from failures along the way.

Having a strong dancer base, when creating a club or weekend, is essential to success.

Ideas for creating a successful club

A club needs to have something to offer that is different from other clubs in the area.

The difference may be as simple as having a different caller. Other ideas that can make a club different; having periodic social gatherings besides square dancing, having theme dances, running regular specials with a guest caller sharing the program, offering a different dance program, or the same program but with more (or less) choreographic complexity.

Starting a new club is much easier with an initial core of interested dancers to help promote it.

Sometimes that core is a new class. Sometimes it's a group of like-minded existing dancers. A caller can start a club without support from a group of dancers, but it requires plenty of promotion and possibly, more than a few nights of an empty or nearly empty hall; promotion and determination may pay off, but it could be a long process.

Shop around for locations

Location is an important factor when starting a new club. If you are starting with a class, the club can be somewhat isolated from other clubs, but if you are relying on existing dancers, you should be near enough for them to drop in casually to try out the new club. Also, it should not be located in a part of town people would generally want to avoid. The venue is also something to consider; schools, churches, and social halls are common, but as long as it is a clean environment in a safe part of town, most dancers will accept any dance space.

Some other thoughts on the location:

Select different areas to start a club

When a new caller starts a club, it will usually be close to their home. Even an experienced caller starting a new club will, most likely, make it close to home unless a group of dancers has initiated a new club and arranged with the caller to help lead the effort.

As a full-time caller, or a caller working to build their business, the thinking should take a broader scope. Making the new club 30 to 50 miles away from an existing club puts them in a

new marketplace with a different dancer base to draw from, and class recruiting would be from an untapped population. If adding a third club, I'd make it the same distance away in a different direction.

Teaching Lessons

Many clubs and callers run classes every year. That is a logical approach to maintain or grow the club, but as a full-time caller, it's not a practical approach. A caller who works for six clubs in their home area cannot teach every year for every club; the obvious solution is to designate one or two nights a week for teaching and alternate between the clubs from year to year. There are advantages to not teaching a class every year for each club.

Share the lessons between the clubs by alternating the lessons every other year.

If the club dances every week, another option is to teach the dance program before the club dance by adjusting the time, such as 7:30 pm to 9 pm lessons, then 9 to 10 club dances. This method requires support and cooperation from club members since they will be giving up some dance time, but it also has the advantage of providing some review for club members who might benefit from it.

Managing the club

Have an individual or couple that can manage the club in the manner you want.

You have to have confidence in their people skills, their ability to keep track of attendees and stay on top of email group or calling tree.

A new club needs to have an advertisement campaign.

Create an eye-catching flyer

Join the area dancer association.

Word of mouth

What will the fee structure be for the attendees?

If Caller Run,

Will they pay by the night or some method of a dues structure?

One method is to pay for 4 nights at a lower cost per night charge.

If Club Run,

Clubs may pay a flat fee.

Clubs could pay a minimum plus a portion of the total monies collected for the evening. Example: a minimum of \$125.00 plus a percentage to the caller of 90% of the total collected for the evening.

You can negotiate all of the above.

Learn what your expenses will be.

Negotiate with the facilities on pricing.

Advertisement cost

Manager cost

Comp their dance fee

Dancer association dues

The need for Insurance, will it be through the dancer association or caller association

Ideas for creating a successful weekend

Like with a club, it helps to have a group of dancers committed to the project from the start.

The base could be your club members, or it could be another group of dancers who want a weekend in a particular location or at a specific dance program. (DBD, A2, C1, Plus)

Having dancers from your home program may be the best group to form your base because you know them, you know their strengths and what you can count on them to do without oversight.

If you're working with dancers from another area, be sure you have enough communication with them to keep things on track, but don't pester them by checking on small details. In a situation like that, I might go a day early the first year to work out little details.

Know the area you will be drawing on for dancers.

What are the existing dance programs in the area?

Are there weekends already being held that could create a conflict?

How large are the clubs in the regional area?

Know the promoters in the area. And draw on them to learn what programs those area dancers prefer.

This information will tell you what dance programs you should offer and help you decide the need for a 1 hall weekend or a 2 hall weekend.

Hotels and how they work

Most hotels will give a comp room with every 15 to 20 rooms you fill

Hotels have a couple of ways to work with getting the use of the ballrooms comped.

Room Night -The number of "Room nights sold" is one method and is the best negotiation dealing with rooms and comp ballrooms. It means if the hotel says you need 100 room nights to get the ballrooms comped, you have to book, on a Friday Saturday weekend, 50 rooms on Friday and 50 rooms on Saturday or any variable that equals 100 rooms sold for the weekend.

Rooms Per Night-The hotel may insist on a fixed number of rooms per night. That option is not as easy for us to meet, so we try to negotiate for the "Room Night" method.

If you fall short of the planned number of room nights, some hotels will negotiate a percentage deal; If you meet at least 80% of the room night obligation, they charge \$1000.00 per ballroom per day, less than 80% they will charge \$2000 per day. This offer can be a safety net for the caller, but you need to carefully examine the numbers to see if the weekend is worthwhile.

Meal package: Many hotels will want to negotiate a meal package. It may be a good option if there are not a lot of nearby restaurants, but hotel meals are expensive, so it drives up the price of the weekend. Having meals together can add to the fellowship among the group, so it is something to consider. If you have to include some kind of meal package, a buffet breakfast is usually the least expensive option.

Cancellation policy: You will have to set a cancellation date, a date by which you can cancel without cost. The hotel will want it several months from the planned start date. The caller will want it closer. Shoot for something in between. Square Dancers are slow to signup.

Once the area and hotel for holding the weekend are secured, the work begins.

Decide if the weekend will be a one, two, or multi hall event.

Decide on the dance programs for the halls and if round dancing will be a part of the weekend.

Select the staff who can call all the programs

Who will be the registrar? Will it be you or a couple from the area?

Registrar will create a database of those registering for the weekend, keep address's, emails, phone numbers. You will need an accurate list of attendees to crosscheck with the hotel's list to ensure you are getting credit for every room night.

Will dancers register with the hotel separately from the weekend, or will the registrar make all hotel registrations.

Keep track of all monies and expenses required to run the weekend.

If the registrar will be you or another couple, there is usually a percentage off the top paid to the registrar for their work.

Decide on the price per person for the weekend

Decide on a cancellation policy

Decide about the flooring in the ballrooms.

If the ballrooms have carpet, check with the hotel and let them know you would like to provide silicone spray for the bottom of the dancer's shoes. Let them know it doesn't harm the carpet. If they agree, you can get carpet squares at Lowes, Home Depot to spray, so the dancers can wipe their shoes on it to slide more easily on the carpet.

Decide how and if you want to raise monies at the weekend.

50/50

Raffle for baskets

Decide on providing a pizza party or wine and cheese party or hot dog roast (if it is a camping weekend).

Decide if there is a need for Skits.

In most cases, the longer you are with a hotel, you will get more forgiveness if the numbers fall short, but this is not a guarantee. Learn to negotiate with the smallest expectations for the number of attendees for the weekend. It is much easier to shoot for lower attendance and end

up with more. This method works well with the hotel management and helps you meet your numbers required to access the ballrooms at little to no charge.

Most importantly, for continued success, learn about the dancers who attend your weekend. Find out who the leaders are, who is promoting the weekend in their home area, and who is responsible for more dancers attending each year. When you know who these dancers are, find a way to reward them as a Thank You.