How To

BE A CALLER

Also: HOW TO BE A MENTOR

– i.e. a caller who teaches someone how to be a caller

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RPM

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SQUARE DANCING

KEEP IT ALIVE ……

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

HOW TO BE A CALLER

WHAT'S INVOLVED IN BECOMING A SQUARE DANCE CALLER

NB: In the following the word HE is used to represent both he and she for ease of reading

First of all, what has given you the idea that you'd like to become a caller?
I expect you like the music and enjoy singing along with the caller when it's a song you know. I expect you are also intrigued by the choreographic tricks the caller uses to surprise you and make you laugh. How does he do that, it catches you every time!

What are the basic requirements?
It certainly is an advantage to have a pleasant singing voice but it's not essential. It is more important to feel the urge to try and work out some of those tricks, just to see how he does it.

Perhaps you find it satisfying to sit at the table moving the egg cups and salt and pepper pots around, maybe drawing some diagrams using little squares and circles with noses on to represent the dancers.

How do I get started?
A question you need to ask yourself is will my Club Caller take kindly to me trying to call and will he help me. If the answer is no then you must look else where for help, perhaps at another club where the caller is friendly and won't feel his position threatened by encouraging you to call. (If neither of these options are open to you then contact the Secretary of Callers Club who will be able to advise you).

Choreography:
You could try writing a very short piece of choreography, 6 - 8 moves say, and asking this caller to call it for you to dance. Judge yourself whether the moves flow smoothly into one another, do the right and left hands alternate properly and do the dancers end up where you hoped they would.

Singing Calls:
Buy or borrow a singing call record (CD or MP3) that you particularly like and practice it. Then record yourself doing it or dance the moves whilst singing it, just to see if the timing works out right. You must be aware of the number of steps required to do each move so the dancer can dance it without rushing and without having to stand waiting for the next call. When you are satisfied you can do it efficiently, tell this friendly caller what you have done and ask if you may sing it through for the club to dance it sometime. He may suggest you wait till the next party night, in which case be patient. He must put the interests of the club first and also he may need to ask them how they feel about a very new caller working with them.

And then…
Continue to practice your song and also write more little bits of choreo. Read and learn all the definitions in the Mainstream programme, study the timing and hand availability of each move. If you are serious about this then please try to spend some time every day working on choreography, try to make this a habit. A little every day could be better than trying to spend a whole evening on the job and maybe getting tired and frustrated. Find a way that suits you to be able to do this work any where, any time. A small notebook and pencil in your pocket

or brief case that can be brought out when waiting for someone, sitting in a traffic jam, or whilst eating your lunch.

Choosing a "Mentor":

After you've worked with your caller friend for a few weeks make a decision. Decide whether you could continue to work with this caller and then ask if he would be willing to act as your Mentor whilst you continue the learning process. It is vital that you and your Mentor are on good terms. You have to be able to trust his judgement and follow his advice. But remember this may be a first time for him too, not everyone is born a teacher.

Remember he will be critiquing you and this may mean that you will sometimes feel hurt or discouraged. A new caller's ego is a very fragile thing.

Hopefully your Mentor will introduce you to the local Regional Callers Assembly and to the Square Dance Callers Club of GB where you will meet more new callers and eventually participate in a Callers School and other workshops.

Some general considerations:

Each person will take their own time in the learning process. Be patient and don't forget to involve your dancing partner in your plans. Make sure your partner understands what you are taking on. I can assure you life will never be the same again. You will experience more fear, embarrassment and frustration, more satisfaction, fun and heaps more friendship. Good Luck and keep learning.

HOW TO BE A MENTOR

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A MENTOR

How it starts:
You may first give some thought to this when one of your club members comes up rather hesitantly and asks where can he buy a certain record or get an MP3 download of a song. Or he may approach you with a computer print out (probably in a very small font that makes you squint) and asks you "will you have a look at this please; does it work?"

Are you the right person for the job?
If you are scared that here is someone who might threaten your position as club caller, or that working this closely with someone does not appeal to you, then be honest and suggest he goes elsewhere for help. If however you feel able and are keen to keep Square Dancing alive then you could offer some time to give advice and help.

Assessing choreography:
If the piece of written choreography looks OK then call it for him so he can dance to it. If you can't see any glaring errors, like expecting a "scoot back" from facing lines, encourage him to write some more, may be suggesting a theme such as all the different ways to use "flutter wheel". Use your imagination.

How to encourage the candidate:
Once a pleasant relationship is established you could plan a party night and ask for guest callers from amongst the dancers to have a go. This will give your eager friend the chance to get on the microphone, together with those two loyal dancers who fancy their skill at singing but have no wish to pursue it any further. This way the limelight is not glaring on just one person.

Committing to becoming a Mentor:
If you then feel you have the capability and it is appropriate, you could offer to help on a regular basis. This would mean that you become a Mentor.

Will your club help?
One thing you must establish initially is whether your club will support you in this project. If they are reluctant then you should find other ways to help, like gathering a square of dancers elsewhere on a regular basis.

If the club says "yes":
If your club is willing to help your new caller then a couple of tips every week, using your choreographic suggestions to give structure to the sessions, might be the way forward. Try to keep your comments positive and be encouraging at all times; a new caller's ego is very fragile.

Work together with the candidate:
You should agree on a mutually acceptable plan for development but be prepared to allow your student more time to assimilate material if he appears to be floundering. Whatever you do don't leave him stranded and never be afraid to say, "I don't know but I'll find out for you". This is probably a new experience for you as well but treat it as a challenge from which you will learn too.

Your responsibility as a Mentor:
With regular practice and encouragement a new caller will either show incremental improvement or it will become obvious that he is not doing any work towards a new career in calling. If you seriously believe that this is the case then tactfully suggest you defer your arrangement until he has more time available to do the work. Point out that it is not fair on the dancers who are giving up valuable dancing time to help him.

Help available from SDCCGB:
Help and advice is available to both of you from the Callers Club Training Director or any member of the SDCCGB Council. Take the new caller to your local Regional Callers Assembly where he can meet and interact with others in the same position.

Help available from CALLERLAB:
There is in existence a structured teaching system based on the CALLERLAB Curriculum Guidelines which it is advisable to follow simply so that every caller ends up with all the knowledge they need to be successful.

Attending a Caller School:
It would be advantageous for both of you to attend a Caller School, yes even you, as an experienced club caller would find it challenging. Haul yourself out of that safe little rut. Your club members will notice and appreciate it if you take a fresh look at what you have been doing for years. When encouraging your new caller friend to attend a school it would be much better if you knew what is being taught there so that you can help more effectively.

Self improvement and future development:
The most important recommendation to be made to any caller at any level of experience is to continue your education. We owe this to the dancers who come to us to be entertained and who trust you to teach them to dance with confidence any where in the world.