

**Where Have All The Dancers Gone?**  
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Where have all the dancers gone? Maybe they haven't gone anywhere. That could be the problem: they are staying at home and not going anywhere. Certainly not to square dances. Why? There are several things that could be the cause of dancers not wanting to get out and participate in what we all know to be the best activity/recreation in the world.

1. They simply don't want to put forth the effort it takes to get ready to go to a dance. It can be related to the effort it takes to get ready to go to church. In most cases, a change of clothes/costume is required. That takes a concentrated effort and often times, after a hard day at work, it's just not worth the time and trouble. If they knew they were going to have more fun than could be imagined, they might want to make the effort to go.
2. Speaking of fun, let's look at this aspect. Are the dancers having as much fun as we would like for them to have? Probably not, in many cases. Why not? Maybe club politics are bad and they don't feel welcome. Maybe they don't fit into the "click." Maybe the experienced dancers don't make them feel welcome. Numerous things can cause someone to not have fun. We all need to be more aware of those around us at the dances and make every effort to make everyone feel welcome. Often time's dancers say they had more fun in learners' class than at any other time. Perhaps we callers need to look at what we did to make the class more fun than the club dances. Maybe our calling is boring. Maybe we could make the evening more interesting and fun if we would change our pro-gram. Maybe we are calling the same things over and over too much. Maybe we put too much emphasis on climbing the program ladder too high too fast. If people are pushed too hard, they will simply leave and never come back. We must put more emphasis on the three F's (Fun, Fellowship & Family).
3. What about club politics? Often times a new excited dancer/club member gets elected to an office and all at once they are expected to do more than they care to. And, if they get pushed too much, they will quit the activity and may never come back. Perhaps we need more caller run clubs with two or three couples helping to do the things that are necessary and then everyone else could attend the dances, have fun and go home without all the worry of the politics.
4. What has been happening in the area of recruitment? Existing dancers are not recruiting friends as new dancers like we used to, because it takes too long for the friend to learn enough to dance with them. How long does it take? Three years! One can almost get a college degree in that length of time. Of course we don't tell new dancers it takes three years to learn or we

would never get anyone into class but, we all know this is how long it takes for a new dancer to dance an entire evening of Mainstream, Plus and Rounds. Our favorite activity has become a survival of the fittest.

Therefore, existing experienced dancers are NOT going to recruit their friends. Perhaps they did once, but not again. The new dancer friend asked when could they go dancing together? The experienced friend said, "Not until you learn all the Plus calls." "How long will that take?", asked the new dancer. "Another year", replied the experienced friend. After learning the Plus Program, the new dancer asked again when they could go dancing together? The experienced dancer then replied, "As soon as you learn through Phase III rounds." "How long will that take?", asked the new dancer of two years. "Oh, at least another year." WOW!!! The experienced dancer will never recruit again because they don't want to be embarrassed about the length of time involved to be able to have fun together. We don't get out and do demonstration dancing to advertise. It takes a lot of time and effort on the part of the caller and dancers to promote square dancing and it is simply NOT being done like it needs to be.

5. Too much emphasis is placed on the higher levels of our programs. Most of the people running the square dance world are Advance dancers and they won't hire a caller unless he/she calls that level or beyond. Recently this author had the opportunity to attend a fairly large festival with four of the best callers in the world. The most popular hall during the daytime was the A-2 hall. The most popular one in the evening was the "fun" Plus hall. The Mainstream hall had to be closed down for the entire three days due to lack of participation. It made no difference that these four world renowned callers were scheduled at different times in this hall, NOBODY would "lower" themselves to be classified Mainstream. Yet all four of these callers used Mainstream calls as their best material, even in the A-2 hall.

The attitude of the people running our activity MUST change or modern square dancing, as we know it today, is going to die. The attendance at the National Convention is a very good example. The numbers keep dropping every year. At the recent National in Anaheim, the Mainstream Squares with Rounds was the smallest hall of the entire convention and it should have been the largest, in the opinion of this author. Fortunately, there was a Mainstream hall that featured the Ghost Riders Band that was very large and very well attended. Why? Because the dancers were having a GOOD TIME and good callers were programmed.

The same scenario that is happening in square dancing is also happening in round dancing. Too much emphasis is placed on the upper phases of the activity, and the average dancer simply cannot handle it. Too much emphasis is being placed on the international ballroom moves and our amateur dancers cannot do them.

Where do 99.9 percent of our round dancers come from? Square dancing, of course. Are the round dance cuers helping callers and clubs recruit new square

dancers? NO! At least not very many. The numbers who are could probably be counted on one hand. Too many cuers are waiting in the wings; waiting for the new square dance class to graduate so they can be recruited into the round dance class, and in many cases they are not seen on the square dance floor for a year. These are the people needed to help get new square dancers NOW!

Almost the same scenario applies to the callers who are not teaching new beginners. Are they helping anyone to get new dancers into the activity? NO! They too are taking newer dancers away from the Mainstream, pushing them as fast as they can into the upper levels and are doing nothing to build the base. We better wake up if we wish for square dancing to survive!

To get our beloved activity to grow again will take a lot of work on the part of those willing to put forth the effort needed. It will also take the cooperation of **EVERYBODY!**

We keep hearing that we need some new young callers: well folks, we will not have any young callers until we get more young dancers. The average age of the new callers attending callers' colleges today is approximately 48. All Caller-Coaches are delighted to have these prospective callers attend, but they are not young people according to the world standards, and it takes them longer to learn this new profession. By the time they get good, they are in their mid to late 50s and they start thinking about retirement.

*Our attitude MUST change !*