

## THE ALL IMPORTANT FIRST TIP

The music starts, the caller says, "let's square up", the dancers step on to the floor with a feeling of anticipation and excitement. Maybe they've had a trying day at work, caring for family, or various personal problems but now that stress is the farthest thought from their mind as they are focused on what is about to happen at the square dance. These folks have spent months in class learning call after call so they could be here today. Some of them may have started and re-started multiple times due to life getting in the way of finishing a single class series. Some of the dancers may not have danced for weeks or months and they are more than a little nervous as they step into a square for the first tip. Some of the dancers are starting to experience physical limitations or other difficulties but want to keep dancing. The common denominator is they all enjoy square dancing and are ready to experience that joy.

What about our caller? He may be dead tired after working extra hours in his day job. There may be haunting thoughts of unfinished projects from the day. Perhaps there was a disconcerting conversation sometime today; perhaps it occurred during the drive to the dance or when he walked in the door of the dance hall. Taking all these factors into consideration, it's amazing how terrific dances come from recipes that seem headed for disaster.

Launching a successful dance is a great first tip. To help make great first tips, here are some thoughts.

1. Mentally, set your day aside on the drive to the dance hall. A room-full of dancers need you to bring joy and excitement to their lives so let's focus on that task only. You are the greatest caller in the room so feel honored by what the dancers have bestowed on you. Remember that for the dancers, your smile, your warmth, your empathy, your enthusiasm – for them – is magic. It is tough to be a good caller but it is your choice to be a blessing to others.
2. Set the dance material – what calls you will use – clearly in your mind. Dancers must start out with 100% success and that is accomplished by using calls they are 100% comfortable with in combinations that flow well from one to the next along with being clearly called. The first tip is a confidence builder or killer. Dancers breaking down as soon as the dance starts are usually doomed to break down all night no matter how simple the material is. Great callers know it is smarter to start the night out easy and build in difficulty than to attempt the opposite.
3. The sequences should be memorized or modules saving the extemporaneous sight calling for later in the evening when the dancers have warmed up to movement and music. As they experience 100% success, they will have a belief in themselves and the caller that will allow them to dance beyond their skill level. Using memorized routines or modules in the first tip also allows the caller to determine how the dancers are moving today. Remember, some of these folks have had a difficult day leading up to the dance, some have new medications which might alter their dance skills, so the good caller will evaluate their limits before pushing their limits.
4. Give yourself time to warm up by using memorized sequences or modules. Even the best callers in the world have "off days" and the caller who can't resolve a square in the first few sequences will lose the dancer's confidence. Calling flowing modules that your dancers

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can handle without hesitation will free up the caller to focus on his/her presentation skills. Are you giving your calls clearly and ahead of the dancers so they won't wait for you? Are you smiling and enjoying the moment?

5. Select hoedown music that will excite the dancers. Whether it is boom-chuck or shuffle rhythm, chose music with a clear dance beat so dancers will FEEL how they should be moving. Music with a modern sound is a great choice just be careful to use music WITHOUT singers, background voices, or busy instruments as all of these will compete with the caller for the dancer's attention, at least on the first tip when folks are still fresh.

Some of my favorite shuffle rhythm hoedowns for the first tip are:

"SHOWDOWN" - Blue Star 547

"HOEDOWN NUMBER NINE" - Blue Star 555

"HONEYCOMB FIDDLER" - Blue Star 571 (great if you use choreo to feature the fiddle)

"HERE COMES THAT RAINY DAY HOEDOWN" - Blue Star 577

Favorite boom-chuck rhythms:

"DOWN THE LINE" - Blue Star 581

"RUNNING AWAY" - Blue Star 576

"SAINT ANNE'S REEL" - Blue Star 580 (great if you use choreo to fit phrasing)

"DARREN'S BREAKDOWN" - Hi Hat 1017

6. Use a singing call that dancers can associate with and probably sing along. Modern, exciting music will energize the dancers who are full of anticipation just be careful to not "over drive" them because if you start at the top of the energy scale you'll have nowhere to go but down.

Some of my favorite shuffle rhythm singing calls for the first tip are:

"BEAUTIFUL SUNDAY" – Blue Star 2553

"GET READY" – Blue Star 2613

"NEVER ENDING LOVE" – Blue Star 2617

"SUGAR SUGAR" - Blue Star 2573

Favorite boom-chuck rhythms:

"GREEN GREEN" – Hi Hat 5336

"SINCE I'VE BEEN HOLDING AN ANGEL" – Hi Hat 5351

"AMIE" – Blue Star 2593

"GHOST RIDERS IN THE SKY" - Rawhide 1001

You can't make a second first impression and the first tip of the dance is just that. Even with dancers who regularly dance with you, the first tip launches everyone into the entire dance. Plan and practice your first tip in advance because what you practice in private will be applauded in public. Happy dancers are dancers that feel good about coming to your dances. They have to win.

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