

SQUARE DANCE STYLING

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Enhance your dancing experience with good proper styling as has been described by CALLERLAB. CALLERLAB has recognized that there are regional differences in styling. But, wouldn't it be really, really nice if everybody danced the same way? Held their hands the same way? Turned their bodies the same way? Connected their arms and hands in the same manner? All of these things would make square dancing a much more enjoyable and danceable pleasure.

The best tip I have ever danced had five callers and a round dance cuer in the square. It happened to be a Plus dance and every hand was in the right place at the right time. Every call that required a forearm hold was in the right place at the right time. EVERYTHING was as near perfect as possible. When the caller called Swing, everybody in the square did at least one full turn. There was not of what is seen on too many floors, of almost no swing but a twirl instead. It was a great experience to not have to worry about "How am I going to have to join hands or arms with the person I am facing?"

This very thing is a real problem at the US National convention. Dancers spend a lot of time trying to figure out how to connect with a facing dancer. It would be so very nice if we all did the same thing. Research has shown that the only way it has been written to hold hands, is the way it is described in the CALLEERLAB definitions. This will be pointed out further in the text of this paper.

Many callers have said they don't have time to teach styling. I say they don't have time to NOT teach it.

In May, 2013, CALLERLAB published the "Abbreviated Definitions" for the Basic (B) and Mainstream (MS) programs. The calls are defined in alphabetical order rather than the teaching order. Callers and dancers should refer to this document for styling and timing of these calls.

The styling for Alamo Style and ALL ocean wave type calls should be done in the "Hands Up" position. This includes Swing Thru, Spin the Top, Spin Chain Thru, Touch $\frac{1}{4}$, Pass the Ocean and when in a Column formation. The "Hands Up" position is described as the fingers pointed up. When the hands are joined, the fingers should be rotated about 45 degrees and the crook the ends of the fingers for turning assistance.

Of course, all Arm Turns should be done with the forearm hold. This would be for Allemande Left, Turn Thru, Scoot Back and Allemande Thar. The Hand Shake position is used for Right and Left Grand, Right and Left Thru, beginning a Dixie Style to and Ocean Wave, Eight Chain Thru, Two Ladies Chain and Square Thru.

The theory that more calls use the hand shake position, therefore, the hands up position and the forearm hold should be eliminated is NOT shared by this cowboy. As a longtime member of CALLERLAB, I believe we should all abide by the written word in the definitions. I dance and teach by this wording and have been very successful with it.

All of square dancing is "take a hand, turn it loose", "touch a hand, let it go." Constantly, over and over. Dancers should NEVER grab hold and hang onto this hold. NEVER, NEVER !!! This

practice can be very dangerous. The older our dancers are, the more afraid they are that they may fall, therefore some hold on for dear life. This is not necessary as they can, and should, be taught how to do the calls without a death grip.

Gentlemen should treat the ladies as if they are delicate crystal glass. That they could break at any moment and they must be handled with extreme care. If a man helps the lady beside him look and dance the very best he can, he will look good beside her. If he makes her look bad, he will look even worse. Dancers should be taught how to execute the calls with resistance rather than by force. Dancers should be taught "counter dancing." This includes moving around each other as needed and with pressure resistance for all of the calls.

Good call execution and styling for every call must be shown (demonstrated) many times during the class; perhaps 20 times for each call. If you are teaching your children to say "please and thank you, " you would have to teach them more than once to be successful and for it to become a habit.

Now to the individual calls. All calls will not be reviewed in this paper. Only those that are problematic.

Alamo Style; usually called after an Allemande Left or Shoot the Star. The handholds should be adjusted from the forearm to the hands up position. All callers need to also teach the dancers how to balance. Too many dancers think a balance is to stand on one foot and kick the other one. NO !! that is called "stand on one foot and kick the other one." A balance is; step forward on one foot and touch the other toe beside it and step back on the foot used to touch and touch to other toe beside it. It makes no difference on which foot you step forward.

Allemande Left and Arm Turns require the same styling; resistance but NO squeezing or tight holds. It is really poor styling and dancing when the other person offers no resistance. Men should adjust their arm position where it is most comfortable for the ladies.

Bend the Line is very easy to learn but can appear very sloppy if not danced correctly. As the ends move forward, the centers back up an equal amount. Too often the centers don't back up. Often times it is because the caller did not give them enough time or they were not taught correctly. If a new line is formed, the center dancers should join hand immediately. A lot of dancers don't do this and it may cause them to look awkward doing the next call. If facing lines are given the call Forward and Back, the center dancers should NEVER touch hands with the centers of the other line. Only the ends should touch.

When the call is Box the Gnat, Star Thru or Touch $\frac{1}{4}$, it is the man's responsibility to reach for the proper hand. If he reaches for the wrong hand, she will probably give it to him.

For dancers to execute Box the Gnat with style takes a lot of practice. Start with a handshake position. The joined fingers must be held so that the man's fingers may turn over the lady's fingers easily while still providing some degree of security and stabilization. The action begins with a very slight pull, release the tension as the hands go over the lady's head and reconnect at the end with the same handshake hold. It is very easy to do. Some callers teach that the lady makes a fist and the man places his hand over the fist and uses this action as a ball and socket. This is incorrect and awkward. Doing it correctly is just as easily taught as it is to teach incorrectly.

Cast Off $\frac{3}{4}$ -- The dancers retain their handhold be it a Mini-Wave or Couple. Callers should make certain the new dancers understand that the pivot point for a Mini-Wave is exactly between them. From a Line of Four, the end dancer is the pivot point. When teaching Cast Off from Waves, have the dancers keep their inactive hand down until the end of the call. Having it up too soon may cause them to join other dancers too soon.

When calling Centers In from a Completed Double Pass Thru formation, teach the lead dancers to slide apart and extend a hand toward the center of the formation. The trailing dancers will step forward and join adjacent hands with the leaders. DO NOT USE AN ELBOW HOOK!! This was eliminated thirty five years ago. The elbow hook can get dangerous. While the dancers hands are joined correctly and the next call is Cast Off $\frac{3}{4}$, they should apply some pressure along the arm to the elbow for ease of doing the Casting motion.

Dancers should ALWAYS have their hands in "Ready Dance Position." The hands should not be in the pockets. Dancers should not have to reach down to get another dancers hand. Some dancers Circle Left or Right and Promenade with their hands below their waistline. A lady said this is awkward and embarrassing. The hands should be above the waistline.

When dancers Circle to a Line, too often the Left side dancer does not continue to slide sideways while the other are completing the call. They often are going forward and back way too soon. (Perhaps we callers are not giving them the full 8 counts to do that call). Also, the lady dancer going under the ending arch, begins too soon or the man beside her raises his hand too soon and the lady looks real awkward trying to get into the proper place. The arch should begin on count 6. And, if the next call is Forward and Back, 8 counts should be given.

The way many dancers do a Courtesy Turn is not as pretty as it could be if it was done correctly. Too many are executing the call with the Left hand in a Handshake hold. It is believed that this is done because we call so very many Square Thru's. The left hand of a Square Thru is the handshake hold and when dancers do a Right and Left Thru, it starts just like a Square Thru and they automatically (from muscle memory) join the left hand incorrectly. The man's left hand should be extended with the palm up and the lady should put her left hand in his with the palm down. The lady should then curl her fingers over the first finger of the man so he can lead her around him as they turn. The lady should provide a very slight resistance but not pull back. The man should place his right hand in the small of the lady's back while she holds her skirt or simply has her hand out a but and up as if she were going to "High Tea." The lady should NOT put her hand behind her back. If she does and the man puts his hand over hers, the man, most often, takes hold of it with a strong grip and may not let go soon enough. The right hands need to be ready for the next call.

A lot of dancers do Dosado by putting their right arm around each other similar to a Highland Fling. This should not be done. We teach our dancers to NOT do this. I believe it is dirty old men coping a feel.

Callers need to place more emphasis on the Courtesy Turn portion of the call Eight Chain Thru to maintain the correct formation throughout. Otherwise they may lose sight of where the call ends and not be in the proper position for the next call.

If the formation is a Quarter Tag with the girls in the center wave and the call given is Extend, most of the men will not move forward and vice versa. Teach that everybody should step forward to form the ending waves regardless of the arrangement.

When dancing a Ferris Wheel, the in-facing dancers should make sure they form a Two-Faced Line by the inside dancers touching hands before starting the Wheel and Deal action. Often times, with these dancers in normal couple arrangement, the men tend to cut across to their ending spot causing the ladies to back into the ending position. This looks awkward and dances awkward. Too many callers don't give the dancers enough time to execute the call properly. The timing is 6 dancing steps.

Flutter Wheel/Reverse Flutter Wheel; the active dancers should join their forearms for this call. The inactive dancers should begin moving forward as soon as the call is given and join hands with the opposite as soon as possible.

Forward and Back; Callers must give the dancers the proper amount of time to dance this correctly. If not, it looks very sloppy. Check the timing in the Abbreviated Definitions.

Grand Square is very pretty to watch and dance, if it is done correctly. If not, it looks VERY sloppy. There is NO SWING at the halfway point nor at the end. Teach the dancers to touch hands with the facing dancer at the midway point and at the end. If the call begins with "Heads Face" then the Sides would touch hands in the middle of the action on step 16 and the Heads would touch hands on step 32. Dancers should be taught to "square" the corners of each set of 4 steps. Many dancers have been observed dancing this call almost in a circle motion and they seem to have no conception of the proper way it should be done.

Two Ladies Chain – The men must be proactive and move into the spot their lady has just vacated in order to receive the lady coming to them. He should angle his body slightly to the left in order to be ready to initiate a proper Courtesy Turn.

Recycle dance action is not complied with by many dancers. In many cases, this is caused by not having enough instruction in the very beginning of this teach. Since it is the last call in the teaching order, the dancers do not get enough practice in class before graduating. We need to make sure they get more floor time, with good description, even after they graduate. We teach it as "Hinge, Fold, Follow and Face." This seems to help the newer dancers understand the correct way to do the call. It is NOT "Centers U-Turn Back and Wheel and Deal." It is NOT a "Crank 'em on Around." The end dancer can help guide the center dancer around and behind them to start the action.

The Right and Left Grand Family has gotten some flourishes, twirls and back-lashes inserted by many dancers around the world. In some cases, injuries have occurred –some serious. Some to the extent that dancers have left the activity because they could not handle roughness. In most cases, it is the men twirling or cranking the ladies around the square. When we do a styling session, we Half Sashay all the dancers and tell them they are now dancing this way. Ladies do the man's part and vice versa. We tell the ladies to twirl and crank the men around in a Right and Left Grand and during a Weave the Ring. They get some fun out of it but more importantly the men begin to realize that a lot of this could be harmful to the ladies. The ladies are very delicate and the men should respect that.

Spin Chain Thru and Spin the Top have similar styling. Dancers should keep their hands in ready dance position but, they must learn all parts of each call so they won't try to connect with another dancer too soon.

The Swing can and should be one of the best and prettiest calls in all of the programs. Being a good swinger takes a lot of practice. One dancer can do the walking step and other the buzz step very smoothly, if done correctly. NO bouncing up and down, just a smooth flowing body action will blend together very nicely. Once the couple is in the swing position, the lady should lean slightly back and the man should hold her up. Slight pushing against each other (man's left hand and lady's right hand) will aid the swinging action. The lady should push against the man's right shoulder or arm as necessary. This will permit the man to control how far the swing will go. The man should swing the lady until he is where he should be and then place the lady beside him. Anytime you swing, that person becomes your partner. We see, way too often, in singing calls when it is time to swing the corner and Promenade, the abbreviated swing lasts one or maybe two beats of music, then the man twirls the lady into a Promenade. THIS IS NOT A SWING !!! In areas where this is done, many ladies say swinging makes them dizzy. They think a twirl is a swing because that is all they know or have experienced. When we show them the difference they say "Oh, I like that. That doesn't bother me." There is nothing better than swinging with a good swinger.

When calling an Allemande Thar with the men in the center and they are moving too fast and won't slow down, have them Shoot the Star, put the ladies in the center and tell the girls to go real fast. Often times this will work to slow the men down.

In summation, we callers have let the quality of our dancing really decline over the past thirty or so years. It is now time to work really hard to bring it back up. The only way to do that is in our classes and workshops. When a session is done about styling, the dancers must be on the floor participating. Presenting a lecture about proper styling will not accomplish very much. The USA National convention has had some sessions on styling the past few years and those that were done with the dancers on the floor were much more successful.

We have had many dancers tell us that they appreciated the sessions and they wish their callers would show the more good and proper styling. Also, many ladies have told us that they appreciated us showing the men how to treat them like a lady.

Good styling really does enhance the dancing experience by assisting in the flow and connectivity of one call into another.