

SECRETS OF ADVANCED DANCING

It is obvious that to be an Advanced Dancer one needs to learn the Advanced calls. But there are 5 SECRETS to Advanced Dancing that many callers either ignore totally or only mention briefly.

Each of these Secrets is vital for success. Ignore these Secrets and you may "hang out" at Advanced, but you will never be good. Make these Secrets part of you, and people will fight to get in your square.

SECRET #1: DANCE BY DEFINITION (D.B.D.) The fact that D.B.D. is required at Advanced is not a secret. The Secret is how to implement it into your thinking. This is often not explained to dancers.

You must train yourself to ask this question: "WHAT IS THE TRUE DEFINITION OF A CALL?"

Any time a caller tells you the definition of a call, you must ask yourself: "Is this the true definition?" The true definition will involve the words "leaders" and "trailers"; and/or it will involve the words "centers" and "ends".

The true definition will almost NEVER involve the words "boys" or "girls." There are only 6 or 7 sex calls in square dancing, and they are all in Mainstream. So once you have graduated from beginners class, if a caller teaches you a call by saying "boys do this" or "girls do that," you have not been given the true definition.

It is up to you to determine the true definition, either by asking the caller or by reading the Callerlab definition. Unfortunately, a few callers do not know the true definition of some calls, so it is up to you to find out. If your caller does not know, ask other callers.

SECRET #2: YOU MUST GO BACK AND RE-LEARN THE MAINSTREAM AND PLUS CALLS WITH THE TRUE DEFINITION.

Your caller should do this for you while you are learning the Advanced calls. There are about 35 Mainstream and Plus calls that require D.B.D. understanding, and there are about 35 calls on the A-1 Teaching List. So for every A-1 call taught, your caller should review a Mainstream or Plus call D.B.D. Thus, when you have finished A-1, you will have finished your Mainstream and Plus review.

Unfortunately, many callers do not do this review, or if they do so they do it very lightly. It seems that these callers are so enamored with the Advanced calls that they just ignore the Mainstream and Plus review.

Why this emphasis on Mainstream and Plus D.B.D.? Because these calls are the FOUNDATION of square dancing. All subsequent calls are based on these calls. So if you learn the Advanced calls but do not understand the Mainstream and Plus calls, you are top-heavy - you do not have a strong foundation. A structure that does not have a strong foundation will crumble under stress, and you will crumble if you do not have the strong foundation of the Mainstream and Plus calls D.B.D.

What do you do if your caller will not give you Mainstream and Plus D.B.D.? You have a problem, and it is up to you to solve it. Study the call definitions extra hard, go to workshops, hire a caller for a few private workshops. You must do something, because it is VITAL that you get this training.

By the way, once you get this understanding, it is important that you maintain it. This is why it is recommended that callers follow this RULE: At an A-1 dance, 25% of the material used should be Mainstream and Plus D.B.D. At an A-2 dance the figure should be 10%.

SECRET #3: BE ABLE TO SAY - IN WORDS - THE CALL DEFINITIONS.

Why is this important? Because if you hear a call from a formation with which you are not familiar, you can slowly say the words of the definition and move your feet at the same time. This will get you through it.

Callers will always give you extra time in unusual situations, so you will have plenty of time to do this. In addition, if you have a temporary mental block on the total picture of a call, saying the words will enable you to move through it.

I am aware of a few people who are successful at Advanced who can not say the call definitions. **THEY ARE THE EXCEPTION!** Do not assume you are one of these people - you probably are not.

SECRET #4: YOU MUST BE ABLE TO ACHIEVE PRECISE POSITIONS.

Put another way: **YOU CAN NOT BE A "FLOATER."** When you move to a position, you have to occupy it **PERFECTLY** - you can not be 10 or 20 degrees off in your facing direction.

Dancers can get away with sloppy dancing at standard Mainstream and Plus open dances, but not at Advanced. Let's qualify that: Yes, people can get away with sloppy dancing at Advanced if the entire floor is sloppy, but then the caller will call a watered-down dance so that people will survive.

Unfortunately, some people only experience watered-down Advanced. So when they do go to a good Advanced dance they have a bad experience and consequently blame the caller, the dancers, the atmosphere - they blame everyone except themselves.

If you are a "floater," you will never be a good Advanced dancer. In addition, people will not enjoy dancing with you, because they always have to "fix you" to the proper position.

Regrettably, "floaters" never seem to realize they are "floaters." They think nothing of being adjusted into position time and again. Because, people are polite, they do not say anything, so the "floaters" think everything is fine. This is a team activity, and how people can be oblivious to the fact that they are constantly hurting the team is beyond my comprehension.

SECRET #5: YOU MUST HAVE THE ABILITY TO RESPOND TO DIRECTIONAL CALLING.

Most Advanced callers will do a lot of directional calling. This means telling people how to do the call after they have given the call name. They will do this to help those who are unsure, and they will definitely do so when the set-up is different or unusual.

After giving the call name, the caller may just give the call definition. Of, if the caller sees someone hesitate, they will immediately give directional calling based on that person's location in the square. I do this all the time.

If a dancer responds to this directional calling, they will be successful time and again. If they can not respond, they are dead in the water.

Let's take an example: LEFT SQUARE CHAIN THRU. At an Advanced dance I will always call this directionally after giving the name, because I know some people may be unsure. After saying the call name, I will say: "Left hand pull by, Quarter In, (right) Swing Thru and (right) Turn Thru." Even though I don't need to say the word "right", I add it as an additional aid.

Even if someone has never heard the call before, if they have completed an Advanced class they should be able to respond to these commands. If they can not respond, then I have no sympathy. I have done my part - I have led them to water, but it is their job to drink.

Note: Secrets #4 and #5 are rarely mentioned by callers, yet these are fundamental to success at Advanced dancing.

A WORD ABOUT PRACTICE. Someone has said that they thought the secret to Advanced Dancing was practice. That's no secret - that's just common sense. But it is the KIND OF PRACTICE that is important.

If someone is using the wrong technique in an activity, whether it is bowling, golf, tennis, or learning a subject, then all the practice in the world will not do a much good. QUALITY PRACTICE is the key to success.

The 5 Secrets outlined in this 3-part article will result in one's practice at Advanced being QUALITY PRACTICE, and the end result will be a good Advanced dancer. If these 5 Secrets are not followed, then a person will never be a good Advanced dancer no matter how much practice they do.

I always root for, and encourage, QUALITY. It is my hope that you will make these 5 Secrets an ingrained part of yourself. If you do so, I would consider it a privilege to be in your square.