



DEALING WITH DIFFICULTY

Square Dancing is a Language.....

...and like all modern languages, it has rules of grammar and construction. In written English, we communicate in the form of sentences, paragraphs, and stories. Verbal communication is best achieved the same way.

The same is true of square dancing. We call our sentences "sequences", paragraphs are "tips", and our stories are "dances". All good sentences in English grammar are structured around one idea, and therefore so should our sequences.

Keep each sequence to a single idea; avoid sequences that have several "ideas" in them. Just like run-on sentences, they overwhelm the people with whom you're trying to communicate.

The Carrot and the Stick

Do your dancers make lines if they break down? If so, you're calling sequences that are too long, and taking away an important reward for success: The carrot is successfully getting to the Allemande Left and Right and Left Grand and getting back home. The stick is the punishment of breaking down.

What happens is that after we've broken the dancers down with long run-on sequences, they get in lines of four, dance for a little while longer, don't come to a successful conclusion, and can't figure out what they did wrong. We leave them very frustrated.

Instead, call succinct, short sequences so people can feel rewarded by getting to their conclusion successfully.

Triage

Some years ago Jim Mayo wrote an article that dealt with the content of our dances and how we call them. We make constant mini-decisions in the course of calling tips or even individual sequences.

We also do triage based upon the results of those decisions. Triage is a medical term — given a situation where a large number of casualties come in, the one in-charge looks at the casualties and divides them into three groups:

- * those that will survive without your help;
- * those that will survive only if they get your help;
- * those that will not survive no matter how much help you give them.

That describes how we call every dance and every sequence. We make these decisions from the microphone to judge how much help we can be to the dancers. And most importantly, how to be most effective with the dancer's times. Talking to a square that is totally confused; talking in a battle with each other; not recognizing floor positions ... you've seen them. It is a waste of your time and the dancer's time. It's better to pull the plug and take away their life support and go on with the next sequence. We have one advantage over doctors — we can resurrect our dead on the next sequence!

Cueing, No! CLueing, Yes.

Cueing calls is BAD for four reasons:

1. The dancers never learn the call; they just listen for the crutch you always give them and never recognize what to do with the name.
2. Dancers who have taken the time to learn the calls are never rewarded for their knowledge.
3. Dancers who know the call may intercept the cue as a command if it is given too slowly.
4. Correspondingly, dancers who have hearing problems may not be able to digest the cue if it's delivered too fast because it runs together.

Instead, try "clueing". Just put the 'L' back in the word.

Clues help dancers find the right facing direction, who's where, the handedness of the formation, or even what the formation is. E.g.: Eight Chain Thru formation with boys inside, girls outside, say "Square Thru 3 and the boys come *into* the middle with a left hand..."

That told them, "Yes, the boys are ending up in the middle," and "Yes, they're about to use their left hand on the next call." You've set up the next call for delivery; you've also given reinforcement that what they've done is right and if they've done something wrong-how to make corrections.

Cast Off 3/4 *should* end with lines of 4 facing in. Very naturally follow it with "Up to the Middle and Back". Those that didn't successfully get to that point know they have to turn around, and you've provided the hint.

There is no need to avoid problem areas if you look for what causes the problem and try to avoid the results. The key is dancer accessibility giving clues to solving the problem without making the solution so easy, so meaningless, and so worthless that the dancer doesn't want to bother.

Dealing with Difficulty

Uncommon Calls: Fan the Top: Set it up so it resembles Spin the Top, by preceding it with Box the Gnat. You make it a call with which they already feel comfortable. Box the Gnat committed the right hand, so the natural tendency to alternate hands leads them to use the left hand for the Fan the Top. Another approach is from half-sashayed lines which duplicates the Spin the Top that they're most comfortable with. *In other words, we can help make it 'feel right' for them.*

Obscure Call Usage: For facing couples Walk and Dodge (the Beau walks and Belle dodges) body flow becomes important. Create success by preceding the Walk and Dodge with a Flutterwheel. The one on the left has the walking action-forward and the one on the right has the sliding action from the Flutterwheel so it's natural to dodge over. *Adding proper body flow leads the dancer to success from an unusual position.*

Unusual Formation: *Start with easier formations, and build to the more difficult.*

Example: Peel the Top from a left-handed wave. Obviously, that's not the first thing you do.

First, Left-Handed *Columns*, so it feels similar to the standard Peel the Top setup. Then isolate four dancers in the middle of the set, going the same way you're going to set up the ocean waves (i.e., across the heads or sides). Arrange things so you can cue to the sex of the people so that when you finally do hit the final left-hand wave, you've done enough examples of it that you maximize the dancer's possibility of success.

Unfamiliar Starting Arrangements: *Make everything else normal.* If I'm going to reverse roles on Relay the Deucey, (boys start in the middle and the girls start on the end), I'm certainly not going to compound the felony by putting them into a left-hand wave. I'll make it as standard as possible and then just change the one factor so they're not overwhelmed.

On half-sashayed recycle — talk to the girls — tell them they're leading the action and stay in control of the fellas they're working with. Make it a joke.

On a half-sashayed Wheel and Deal, remind them after the Pass Thru to take hands before they do the Wheel and Deal because where they get re-sashayed again is starting to move individually.

Unfamiliar Ending Formations or Arrangements: Again, *clues are the key.* Sex is a universal identifier and the easiest clue to get across.

90% of errors are because dancers faced the wrong way or they've exchanged positions with the partner. The way you solve the problem is to get them to turn around or to trade with the person they mistakenly traded with.

Half-Sashayed Slide Thru from an Eight Chain Thru formation, giving lines facing *out*. What they did (making themselves feel right by facing in) can be solved by having them turn around. "Slide Thru — and now that we're all facing out..." and they've picked it up.

You must analyze calls for potential mistakes, and then provide the extra clue that will help them succeed.

On the Slide Thru — boys working with each other and ending up with right hands. Remind them they end that way.

All those clues create dancer success.

Unusual Use of Call Rules: Use the unusual rule as the clue; again, a joking tone works well: “Men, as you’re *Partner Trading*...” And follow up with something that makes it clear what you wanted.

Cut the Diamond when the points are both facing out will have some dancers turn around in order to do an arm trade rather than a more unusual ‘Partner Trade’. Follow up with a call that can only be done facing in — ideally, “Centers Pass the Ocean”. The dancer facing out will know to turn around. You’ve given that clue instead of a cue that can help make the dancer work at being successful rather than you leading through it all.

Unusual Call Patterns: *Anticipation is a problem; timing is the answer.* Give the call that is not anticipated farther in advance so that you change their thinking process *before* they need to do the move.

You want to change presumption? Pauses: “1/2 Tag, Trade, Fan the Top” opposed to “1/2 Tag..., Trade..., and Fan the Top”. They’ve already gone into what they expect, rather than hearing you. Give it far enough in advance — you’re not really rushing them — you’re giving them information to make effective dancing.

Timing is the answer, but applied differently. Slow the delivery of all the information down so that when they are about to need it they get the information — not 10 minutes ahead of time.

EXAMPLE: Spin Chain the Gears, only turn the stars 1/2, men when you meet Trade; Heads, if you meet, do a U-Turn Back each time; Ladies Spread.

And make the decision ahead of time “Was this necessary? Was it good theater?” Obviously not.

Breaks in Flow: *Never ever, ever, ever disrupt the flow of the dance* to “add challenge.” You’re just shirking your job. But if you *need* to change flow, consider stopping. Just stop what you’re doing; give them a beat or two in place. There is nothing wrong with a pause, keeping in rhythm, but not advancing in any particular direction. You’ve broken that flow pattern so you can start a new one.

Focusing Attention Wrong: *Use clueing to refocus attention to the proper place.*

EXAMPLES:

* DoSaDo make a Right Hand Star: “*DoSaDo, Stick up a right and* make a right-hand star.” You give them a clue without killing it.

* Touch 1/4, Fan the Top: You may want to duplicate the Touch 1/4 by stepping to a wave, Follow Your Neighbor and Spread, Scoot Back. That equals Touch 1/4, and you can call Fan the Top without having to remind the dancers of where they need to go.

* Dive Thru, Centers Partner Trade: Remind them that they’re working beside themselves. You don’t have to say a lot; you don’t want to mess up the timing, but you’ve provided that one clue that makes it possible for them to perform the call.

Putting It All Together

These are all suggestions for resolving the problems, but they are functions for from behind the microphone rather than planning it out ahead of time.

Remember, by simply withdrawing those clues and not providing all that extra information you can increase the difficulty without adding more calls from another program; without having to use experimental calls in your calling. What this does do is force YOU to do planning; use knowledge; to be a professional — and I think that’s what we owe the dancers.