

BOD 2018
Region 8 Caller Teacher Association Report

After reading Past President, Norm Cox's report I had to ask myself, "Are we really doing that badly?" Are we only retaining 5% of the new dancers who come to us in the fall, so full of excitement, hope and promise? What keeps happening, and what can we do about it?

I don't know how accurate Norm's statistics are and it's not really clear whether he was referring to our performance province wide or reporting on what is taking place in Region 2. With that in mind, I polled the members of the Upper Vancouver Island Caller Teacher's Association to get a handle on what has been happening in my own region.

Region 8 started in the neighbourhood of 60 new dancers between September and February. To the best of our knowledge, we now have 35 or so remaining students, which is about a 58% retention rate thus far. The callers I spoke to felt fairly confident that a good portion of these remaining class members were in it for the long haul – we'll see!

What has been clear to everyone is that we're all facing the same challenges which seem to be peculiar to the age we live in. Students come and go, sometimes disappearing for 2 or 3 weeks at a time and then reappear with the expectation that we will reintegrate them into the class.

As teachers, we dream of having classes where the majority of our students will stick with us, persevere until they have completed the course and can join our clubs. This however, is not the reality.

The people who come to us think that what we do looks like a lot of fun and they're excited about fitting our activity into their busy lifestyles. But they soon begin to realize that if they wish to become members of our organizations they won't be able to go anywhere on vacation for 10 weeks (West Coast), all winter (Mainstream) and perhaps 2 winters to become a member of a Plus club.

The way in which we respond to this problem in large part determines the percentage of new dancers we will retain. In Region 8, we have been using the West Coast Program which essentially gives people a way to belong to a dance group on their way up the ladder. Even if that's as far as they go in their first year,

they will still be able to find dances from time to time at that level in our region. The program has been criticized by some who say that by not bringing a dancer to at least a Mainstream level, you are doing them a disservice because they will not be able to find a dance at their level when they travel. The hoards I've seen vacationing in Mexico aren't looking for square dances while they're away. I think the bigger question might be: How do the 95% of dancers who quit before attaining a level of dance acceptable to us feel about the level of "service" they received while in our ranks?

We need to find ways of accommodating people. What we've done in Region 8 is one way. Another might be to teach in 5 lesson modules. After the initial 5 lessons, a new dancer could collect credits for each module completed thereafter (in any order) until they were at say a Mainstream level – or Plus, etc. That way, a student could come and go and only have to wait a minimal period before getting back into the game. The problem with this of course is that learning to square dance is cumulative, but possibly a few tips following each lesson could be planned that would cater to the progress of each student working to complete that module.

The bottom line is that people come to us expecting great things – we can't afford to disappoint them!

Respectfully submitted by,
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