

WHAT IS RIGHT WITH SQUARE DANCING

by Jeff Garbutt ~ Bunbury, Western Australia

One of the most common statements about Square Dancing lately is that we have problems. and that "something is wrong". Some people have been known to ask "what is wrong with the square dance movement?" Some say that maybe Square Dancing won't last.

First off - I'd like to make the following bold statement: Yes - Square Dancing is in danger of dying - not because anything is wrong with It -but because we are in danger of falling victim to a "self full-filling prophecy" if we keep looking at the negatives.

To digress here a little bit. Most researchers of the human "thought processes" tend to agree that our actions are directed by some default program running in our "sub-conscious mind". And that if you tell yourself often enough that you behave in a particular way it will become imprinted into your sub-conscious programming to the extend of controlling your actions.

Thus if you keep telling yourself that you are a failure - you will become a failure no matter how hard you try otherwise. (The self full-filling prophecy).

If you program yourself for success - then your subconscious will help you to find unique solutions to problems.

You may not be successful every time - but you will be most of the time. (Which is better than the alternative of always finding failure.)

Now here's where we, (The Square Dance Movement), fit in - some researchers also believe that this sub-conscious program applies to groups as well as individuals.

Now back to Square Dancing. Let's look at solving our "problems". Firstly I would like to take the statement "what is wrong" and turn it around by asking - "What is right with square dancing ?"

I'm sure we could come up with many positive statements about square dancing.

For instance: * Square dancing is easy to learn Now you may find this hard to believe. but think about it for a while. Early in our lives we learn how to walk, and the process is permanently programmed into our subconscious. We don't have to think about where to place our feet - it is automatic. We only need to think about which direction to walk to. Well guess what square dancing involves - "walking in defined directions." It comes natural - we don't have to worry about the placement of our feet as we would need to for 'ball room' or even "line dancing".

Square dancing is fun. Well if it isn't fun at your club - there is something wrong.

Square dancing promotes friendship. I believe we can all quote examples of life-long friends we have made over the years through square dancing.

Square dancing promotes team work. (if 8 people working together is not a team - I don't know what is)!

Square dancing is great to look at. (The public loves to watch demos).

Square dancers do a lot of travelling to different places they may not have otherwise gone to.

Square dancing is standardized world-wide. No matter where you go - it is done the same. (With some very minor Australian differences).

Square dancing is multi levelled, offering differing degrees of challenge. Some people may see this as a negative, but I think it is a bonus. What maybe wrong is that we don't exploit the levels available to us, (especially mainstream), to their full extent.

Now the above list is not complete. I'm sure everyone of you can add to this list. So let's exploit these positives. Surely there are people out there who are looking for activities that have some of the many positive attributes that square dancing has.

Now I would like to suggest some things that we - as dancers, callers, dubs and committees can do to help.

Put the movement first - If you take care of the movement - the movement will take care Of you.

I have a theory which I call the "act of ultimate self interest" which works on the assumption that if you are only interested in the short term and getting as much out of an

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activity (or business) as you can - you will not only damage that activity but your gains will only be short term - and you will eventually cease to operate.

But if you help that activity to thrive and grow - you and your involvement in will thrive and grow. Surely this is the "ultimate act of self interest".

In keeping with the above - forget petty squabbles within your club - and with other clubs. Surely they are insignificant when compared to the health of the overall movement.

Clubs should resolve to work together, committee's should be working to service all of their dancers.

Co-ordinate your clubs' activities with other clubs. (i.e. your beginners, party nights etc)

Welcome the prodigal dancer. Let's face it, people basically need to feel wanted.

So when a dancer who has been absent for a while comes back - make them feel welcome

Dancers have many good reasons for missing one or two nights - and already start to feel guilty about it - don't make it worse. Don't treat them with greetings such as "So you've finally decided to come back - where have you been" - no matter how innocent it may seem it will stiff come out badly.

Set positive targets. The human sub-conscious will work hard to ensure that you meet the numerical value of a target, to the extent of exceeding it to make sure - regardless of whether it is positive or negative.

If you are expecting a "drop out rate" from your beginners of say 10% -you will achieve it - you might even get 15%.

If you instead expect a "retention rate" of 90%, you have a good chance of achieving, (or exceeding) it. Now which do you think is better?

Don't accept failure as an option. Planning to succeed will not guarantee - but planning to fail will guarantee failure.

Bring the family back to Square Dancing. I can remember back 20 years or so ago to the number of children who could be found asleep somewhere in the hall.

This was about the same period that we had a lot of teenagers in the movement - it was seen as a family outing.

Most importantly - remember that square dancing is a people business. So look after the people you have and they will look after your club-and maybe even bring in more people for you to look after.

Of Course the above will not solve our problems, and the list is not complete - but if we all work together and work towards the overall good of the movement - we will find the answers we are all looking for.

But whatever you do - don't give up. The patient may be ill, but with some "TLC" (tender loving care) can be nursed be nursed back to health - instead of talking it into a "mercy killing".

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