

Summary of Roy Gotta's presentation on Square Dance Class success - January, 2008

The main message is that ALL OF US – as individuals and as clubs - MUST get the students to feel successful, and experience the great square dance COMMUNITY that we belong to. We have an obligation to promote feelings of happiness, success, and of belonging.

What can you do as individuals to enhance the students' experience?

- Go to a class, and to a class level dance (If you haven't done this, why not?)
- If you go, interact with them and find out about them and their interests. Do you actively seek out students to dance with? Interpersonal relationships are paramount to keeping the students.
- Watch your body language – don't show reluctance to dance with students, don't show them up by embarrassing them in a square – with big gestures, loud corrections, etc.
- Find out what the students' motivation is, and let the caller know. Find this out PERSONALLY, not through a questionnaire.
- Let the students initiate the moves to see if they know them, don't anticipate.
- Don't volunteer help, but give it if asked.
- Keep encouraging people. Balance between being welcoming and being pushy. Success brings happiness for dancers, and that will keep them. Students are so thrilled when they get it right!
- Dance tip: If a square has 2 angel couples and 2 student couples, make angels opposite couples.

What can your club do to engage and retain the students?

- Consider the students to be 'members' immediately. A lesson before each dance is one way, (Rutgers does this) or class level dancing before the regular dance. (minimal or no fee)
- If you have students at dances, ensure the caller knows about this ahead of time. Give the caller a list of calls the students know!
- Invite the class to dinner dances and special dances. Encourage social interaction.
- Have a 'dessert' dance on a class night and invite the club members to it.
- For the lessons: Are they 'Dances' or just lessons? Put in singing calls.
- Students should get all club info, by newsletter, email; however it is put out to members.
- Write up students in club newsletters, web sites, etc.
- Have open houses throughout the year, or 2/3 through session, when students are enthusiastic, and may recruit new members more easily.
- Encourage students who miss a class to attend another class somewhere else.
- Don't get proprietary: Let students go to other clubs if they want.
- Have officers give one tip per dance away to dance with student partners, if they are single.
- Start a class in January rather than September!
- Change the class night!
- Adjust the program of dances mid term so students can dance with the club
- Have class level tips early in the dance session.
- Don't be afraid to make changes to adjust to new information or new circumstances.