

“ATTITUDE IS EVERYTHING”

by – Jerry Junck

In St. Paul, Minnesota at the National Square Dance Convention on June 28, 2002, Jerry Junck presented the Keynote Address at the Leadership and Education Seminar. We are presenting it here in its entirety and we thank Jerry.

Good morning. Welcome to another of the leadership and educational seminars sponsored by the 51st National Convention. It is my pleasure and privilege to address this distinguished body of leaders from nearly every organization involved with our wonderful recreation of square dancing. Without leaders and leadership, no business or recreation can expect to enjoy any degree of longevity. This presentation is a first for the National Square Dance Convention, and I commend the committee for having the courage to try something different. I applaud each of you for your devotion and leadership over the years, and for taking the time to attend this session today. The simple fact that so many have chosen to attend is a very positive sign for our favorite recreation. It is great to see this kind of participation.

Initially, the convention committee asked me to present an address at a leadership seminar for the state of Minnesota in 1998. As I began to think about that presentation, it became clear to me that although part of it is still appropriate, there are new and additional issues that need to be discussed. While it is my personal opinion that we are privileged to enjoy the greatest recreation available, it is apparent that our attitudes do not always reflect that fact. It is also my belief that attitudes play a major role in the success or failure of any endeavor. Therefore, I have chosen to title this presentation “Attitude Is Everything.”

There are two questions we need to ask. What attitudes should we be addressing? What

attitudes should be of concern to each of us? Quite honestly, today’s square dance activity is suffering from a great many more negative opinions than positive attitudes. However, to these negative opinions and attitudes apply only to square dancing, or do they mirror our society as well?



Let’s be perfectly honest and admit that this past year has been an especially trying and stressful time in our country. The events of September 11, 2001 changed the world and had a profound affect upon everyone in this country. It changed our attitudes about many things. Some have said that our world will never be the same. It is my view that the world has always been changing and that people constantly making adjustments to accommodate those changes. The attitudes of this country changed after the Revolutionary war. They changed forever after the Civil War. They changed again after World War I and the Depression. Then came World II and the whole world changed. Vietnam made a huge change in attitudes in this country, most of them extremely negative. We have been living and dealing with those negative attitudes for some 30 years. Woody it be too presumptuous to speculate that recruiting for square dancing may have suffered more from a change in our society, than from structural problems within our

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It is extremely difficult to look forward, have a vision, and see the whole picture. I challenge each of you to join me in this endeavor. I absolutely believe that we, all of us together, can accomplish anything we want to do.

It is my view that our society has never been a greater need for square dancing than now. I called dancers every night including the following the terrorist attack on September 11. It was a very difficult time for everyone. However, it quickly became apparent that dancers desperately needed to the company of others and that there was a great deal of comfort the riot from the feeling of family that square dancing has to offer. We have something that a great many people in our society that only want, but need as well. I think now is the perfect time to reach out and invite non-dancers to become a part of our family. However, before we do that we need to evaluate our own attitudes and feelings about square dancing.

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It is my opinion that we need to look at our activity with a more realistic and objective view than we have done in the past. We need to recognize that there are things we can control, and things we have little or no ability to influence. It is important that we identify those things that we as a group, can improve upon and work to address those issues, while not squandering our time with issues we have little or no ability to control. Now, let's take a look at some issues that I see that we have an ability to affect in a positive manner. Be sure there are other issues, but these are the ones I think are the most important.

Have you heard dancers say that they have asked everyone they know? Well how about asking someone you don't know.

Please bear in mind that some of these issues may be controversial to some. However, it is imperative that we, as leaders in the activity, try to be as objective as possible, and put our own personal feelings aside for the good of the activity. My approach to this presentation is that it should be the beginning of open and positive discussion regarding all of our issues, including those deemed controversial. If there might be a criticism we could make of ourselves, myself included, it is that we all suffer to some degree from tunnel vision. It is

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extremely difficult to look forward, have a vision, and see the whole picture. I challenge each of you to join me in this endeavor. I absolutely believe that we, all of us together, can accomplish anything we want to do. Our recreation is too great and our leadership too dedicated and too passionate, not to accomplish our goals. But, we must keep in mind that all of us, collectively, may have to make some difficult decisions. No one will do it for us. We will have to do have vision, the honest, open, and except the fact that some change will be necessary. We will have to be able to exercise diplomacy and negotiate. Some may not get everything they want, but we must support the decision made an order to rebuild and revitalize this wonderful activity we all love.

Let's begin by addressing our attitudes toward square dancing in general, caller and dancer attitudes alike. One attitude I would like to see is suffer this been completely eliminated its want I perceived to be an overall negative attitude toward square dancing as a whole. I can begin to count the number of times in the past year that I have heard callers and dancers say that the activity is doomed to die. I'm too much an optimist to except that perception of square dancing. But, let's be objective and recognize the square dancing isn't for everyone. Neither is skydiving! However, that does not mean to square dancing has no appeal to today's society. I firmly believe that is not possible. But accepting the fact that square dancing isn't for everyone does suggest that we need to work harder at recruiting. Obviously, there are numerous other recreations and pastimes attempting to recruit the same people. We need to convince non-dancers that we have a better product. We need to make those we do recruit feel welcome and part of our square dance family.

Being aware of the above, and at the risk of appearing to be simplistic, what one single thing would greatly reduce many of our current concerns? The answer is that we need an influx of new and energetic dancers. This one

factor would resolve a great many of our challenges facing the square dance activity. Having said that, let’s not be so naive as to think recruiting new dancers is easy. We all know better. However, we cannot escape the fact that we find new dancers through recruiting, and they will stay in the activity only if we make the necessary effort to obtain them. Rebuilding and revitalizing our activity is completely depended upon our ability to successfully address recruitment and retention.

Therefore, recruitment and retention of new dancers are the two most significant challenges facing our activity. Rebuilding and revitalizing our activity are completely depended upon our ability to successfully address these two issues. It will require an increase commitment from both dancers and callers alike. There is no way around that fact. We need experienced dancers to recruit and make the new dancers feel welcome, and quality callers to teach and retain them.

We must stop fighting reasons why we can’t recruit or retain new dancers. This is totally within our ability to address. For instance, using the issues that the program lists are too long or need to be modified before they can recruit is simply not true. In the program lists need change? Probably! Changes necessary and healthy for any business or activity to adjust to the current styles and taste of the times. But, modifying or consolidating the program lists will have little effect upon the recruiting of new dancers.

“Why not?” you may ask. The answer is simple. New dancers have no idea what calls are on the program lists. They all know they want to dance. The fact that there are 50, or 150 calls, on the program lists has no meaning to them. Only current dancers and callers are interested in program content. New dancers really don’t care. Therefore, the number and content of the calls on any program lists has very little bearing on recruitment.

That being said, the number of calls, and the length of time necessary for new dancers to achieve proficiency, does have a direct affect on

retention. The goal of new dancers is to be able to attend open dances. To that extent, program content does influence whether or not new dancers choose to stay in the activity. Areas in which Mainstream is the entry program appear to be considerably better able to retain new dancers than those areas where the Plus program is the primary destination for new dancers. Are we asking too much of new dancers?

Even acknowledging my statements about recruitment, I still honestly feel that we have recruited a sufficient number of dancers over the years to have some positive effect on the activity.

However, I also believe we can do better at recruiting. That will only take increased effort. Have you heard dancers say that they have asked everyone they know? Well, how about asking someone you don’t know.

Everyone – Mainstream, Plus, Advanced, Challenge, and even Round Dancers – are all going to have to contribute new dancers in order to perpetuate our beloved activity.

We can improve retention also, but that may not be as simple as we might think. Improving our retention rates will require a concerted effort from everyone to change our **ATTITUDES**, callers and dancers alike. This change requires all of us to take a hard look at our attitudes and work on two things - understanding and tolerance. Understanding that it is not easy for beginners to learn square dancing, and tolerance toward the new dancer during classes, and more importantly, after graduation. Remember, dancers tend to reflect, or mirror, the attitudes of their caller. Therefore, it is imperative that callers, as **LEADERS**, set an example with their **ATTITUDES**. Now, before everyone gets excited and begins denial, let me present some examples of the **ATTITUDES** we need to change. We have all heard the following statements at one time or another. I spent an entire summer collecting them. They are just a few representative examples of dancer and caller **ATTITUDES** pertaining to either, new dancers, teaching, or to the Mainstream program. They were collected from all over the country. First, and this is from a full-time caller. “I think the Mainstream program is a terrible program to call.” Do you know callers that have made the statement that Mainstream is uninteresting? I hope you don’t, but I do. Do you think the dancers that follow and support this caller will also reflect that position? Absolutely! Second,

when I asked callers about their beginner classes, the most common response I received was, “I’ve called a lot of years and paid my dues. Let someone else teach them.” Are you surprised? I was. Do you think this type of attitude will eventually be reflected in dancers attitude? How many new dancers will be brought to this caller by his club? Do you think callers will this attitude can motivate dancer to promote lessons? Can callers exhibiting this type of attitude be expected to do an effective job of teaching? Do any of these examples sound familiar to you? Do they express your opinions? Do you think these negative attitudes affect recruiting and retention? Definitely! Can we change our attitudes? I think we must. The bigger question is, **“How do we do this?”**

First, we simply must realize that the Mainstream program is the most important program in square dancing. It is the foundation for all the other programs we enjoy. We need only to look back in history to recognize that when square dancing was at its peak, 70% of the clubs danced the Sets In Order 75, which closely resembles today’s Mainstream program! That should speak volumes to us.

Having said that, does everyone want to dance only Mainstream? Certainly not. That’s the purpose and beauty of the variety of programs square dancing has to offer. Literally, we have something for everyone. However, those of us that enjoy the other programs need to recognize the importance of the Mainstream program. We must also support the Mainstream program because without Mainstream, these other programs cannot continue to exist. When attending a Mainstream dance, we should enjoy the dance for the music and the people. We must become more tolerant of the Mainstream dancer and be willing to enjoy the dance at their level of knowledge and ability. We should not go with the idea of dancing only when the Plus tips are called. This will take a considerable change in attitude by today’s dancers. But, it would do so much to make our activity much more inclusive, rather than exclusive.

Second, modern western square dancing consists of two types of people: recreational dancers and hobby dancers. Most recreational

dancers dance the Mainstream program and perhaps a few of the Plus calls. They typically dance once or twice a month. Hobby dancers, on the other hand, may dance Plus, Advanced, Challenge, and/or Rounds. They tend to love their program to the exclusion of all other programs. This includes the exclusion of helping with, and the recruiting for, beginner classes. Isn’t it a shame that our most enthusiastic dancers basically do very little to recruit for the activity they so enjoy? Are these dancers reflecting their caller’s attitudes? Obviously, we are not replenishing our recreational dancers as rapidly as we need. But, we cannot expect to do so, when only 20 percent of the square dance population is doing the recruiting. The current mainstream dancers cannot, and should not have to do all the work. Everyone – mainstream, plus, advanced, challenge, and even round dancers are all going to have to contribute the new dancers in order to perpetuate arm beloved activity. This will indeed, take a **big change in ATTITUDE**.

The attitude by callers that “I’ve paid my dues, let someone else teach them” simply has to change. The single most important thing we do is a caller is to teach both new dancers and new callers. How many callers have thought a new class in the last couple of years? There are roughly 2000 callers in CALLERLAB alone. If each one had a class of only two squares there would be 4000 new dancers, or 32,000 new dancers in one season!!! That’s with two squares each! Do you think that would help square dancing? Absolutely! But, **EVERYONE** has to contribute. We cannot survive with only a few doing the recruiting and teaching. Dancers, all of them, are our recruiting force. Callers, all of them, are responsible for teaching.

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Our responsibility as callers is two-fold. First, we must set an example that will provide the motivation necessary to encourage dancers to become ambassadors for the activity. Second, callers must be the best teachers they can be. We don’t want to lose any opportunity. We must be motivated ourselves and prepared to make classes both educational and entertaining. Preparation is the key. You can’t read a book into you can read a sentence. You cannot read a

sentence until you can read a word. And, you cannot read a word until you know your ABC's. Teaching square dancing is the same thing. We cannot expect dancers to be able to Coordinate when they have not yet learned to Circulate.

I have been discussing my thoughts on attitudes regarding recruiting in teaching. It is my opinion that our attitudes regarding new dancers are even more important than the retention of those people in the activity. Why don't we retain more of our new dancers? I feel the big reason for that is that we are not as friendly and tolerant of them as we should be. Earlier in this speech I said that we should be more objective when looking at ourselves, and our attitudes. Retention of new dancers is the area where we really need to re-assess our attitudes toward the new dancers.

Why don't we retain new dancers? A primary reason is that after we get them started, we don't nurture and cultivate them. We don't take care of them or, worse yet, we take them for granted. In the past, we were very careful with our new graduates. Not anymore. How many of you have heard club officers say that their class is at the dance for the first time, but the club would like some plus calls during the evening anyway? He will usually follow by saying that, "Although the new dancers don't know what calls, the club will split them up and **PULL** them through. They are going to have to learned anyway." Sound familiar? Is this an attitude we need to change? How different from the story Jon Jones related to me regarding a California Festival he did years ago. The main hall was full. However, the next hall and over 200 squares of new dancers. Jon asked to call for them. The reply was, "No way." They did not want an unfamiliar caller to destroy their confidence. Do you see a difference in attitude?

What else can we do to help dancer retention? Patients would be a big help. It is our responsibility, as callers, to provide an enjoyable dance experience. We have to be more tolerant and understanding that we must **SELL** our activity to those new dancers first. I believe that too much complexity in lessons in dance programs **DRIVES** dancers from the activity. Let's hook them online and friendship first.

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square dancing. It is also my opinion that most of us call material that is far too difficult for the recreational dancer. Please understand that I am not advocating limiting variety. I'm advocating been different with out becoming difficult. There is a huge distinction between the too. Today's square dancers are survivors in either enjoy, or tolerate, the challenge of today's dancing. But, it is evident that the recreational dancer has been intrigued with the challenge and has left the activity. They didn't complain. They merely last square dancing. Do we need to reevaluate our attitudes with respect to recruiting in retention? I think answer is absolutely, we do.

In my opinion, the topics just discussed may be somewhat easier to address than other issues we must also consider. Our activity is faced with some issues that are extremely controversial, and will be met with passionate opposition. I have been addressing issues that deal with callers, dancers, and clubs. This next set of challenges deals with clubs and State and National organizations. These issues include dance fees, caller fees, and the dress code. Whether we like it or not, we are going to have to address these issues sooner or later. The only way to approach a problem is to discuss it. Not to discuss it, is to believe that the problem will just go away. That can't and won't happen. Hopefully, this presentation will start the dialogue that will eventually evolve into positive results.

First of all, we must address dance fees. When I started square dancing, dance fees were \$4.00 per couple, hall rents were \$15.00 to \$25.00 per night, new automobiles for \$2500.00, gasoline 25 cents per gallon, square dance records were under a dollar, and complete amplifier and speaker equipment can be purchased for \$250.00. That was 35 years ago, in 1967. Today hall rents are \$50.00 to \$200.00, a used automobile will cost to nearly \$20,000, gasoline is around \$1.50 per gallon, square dance records are more than \$5.00 each, and a Yak Stack and Hilton amplifier will cost nearly \$3000.00! Yet, many clubs refused to charge more than \$3.00 per person at their dances. Thankfully, that is beginning to change, but it is a slow process, and we need to do more.

Dancers should not, and cannot, expect callers to call for the same fees they did 35 years ago. Is it any wonder we have had so many callers retire? Should we expect callers to donate their time to teach lessons so clubs can keep going? Club callers are so important to the survival of square dancing. They are the backbone of this activity, and should be paid fairly and equitable for the tremendous job they do in keeping our activity alive. There are so many ways to enhance caller pay, without jeopardizing the fiscal stability of a club. All it takes is some common sense negotiation.

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This is a two-way street, however. If dancers are asked to pay more for the dancing, they have the right to expect a quality performance from their caller. Controversy, if callers are to receive an increase in pay, or a percentage of the gate receipts, they need to realize that dancers have a right to expect them to make a conscientious effort to improve their skills. This can be done in one of two ways. Either they can attend a qualified caller school, or as someone they respect admire to help them on a one-to-one basis. My personal recommendation is to attend a qualified school.

Remember when I indicated that we need a vision. One of my visions is that every caller should have the opportunity to attend a caller's school. Because of the cost and time commitment, this is simply not possible for many callers. Attending a full caller school costs money. You may ask, "What can we do?" Caller training is where state and national dancer organizations could have a tremendous positive influence on our activity.

Another part of my vision is that I hope each state and national organization would, at least, consider sponsoring one caller each year to a qualified school. Just imagine how much good that would do for the activity. Furthermore, can we expect new dancers to want to be a part of our activity if we only rent "cheap" halls? Would we be better served to charge a reasonable dance fee so that we can afford a bright, clean, comfortable place to dance with good sound? Would that type of hall be more conducive to retaining class members? Would that type of hall

be an incentive for outside guests to want to attend our club dances? I propose that it would. However, we are going to have to raise dance fees to accommodate these two things. Again, this is completely within our ability to do. It will take a change in attitude, which starts with the realization that we need to take a more common sense approach.

Finally, every state and national organization will eventually have to address the issue of our dress code, whether we like it or not. It is surprising to me the intensity of passion exhibited by some when this topic is discussed. I would propose that this is another issue that can and should be discussed with a common sense approach. As I said earlier, our society has changed significantly. We need to realize that that is something we can't change. Instead, it is one of those facts that we are going to have to accommodate.

All we need do to recognize that fact is to step outside this coliseum and take a look at what non-dancers are wearing as they walk by. Do you see women in dresses? Very few are in dresses, if any. In fact, both men and women are predominately dressed in slacks. Most of the men no longer wear a suit and tie. Many are actually dressed in blue jeans. Just go to the mall and take a look around. We have become a blue jeans society. Keep in mind that those are the very people with whom we are trying to market our activity. Do you think they are of the mindset to follow a strict dress code? I have a couple of examples of attitudes that I collected this past year regarding the clothing issue. This first example is from a lady that attended a weekend in which I was part of the calling cadre. The afternoon session was designated as casual dress. This lady approached the three callers and, in no uncertain terms, expressed her disappointment that the session was casual dress. After some discussion, she was asked if she would rather dance with three squares of dancers in costume, or thirty squares in casual dress. Her reply was three squares. That should illustrate the intensity of feeling with this issue. Is the lady wrong? Certainly not. She is entitled to her opinion and should feel free to express that feeling. Furthermore, she has every right to expect that others should respect her opinion. It would be

my hope, however, that we might take a more open-minded view of the issue.

Another point in favor of a less stringent dress code is from my own experiences in Mesa, Arizona. I have one Plus dance that is a "square dance attire" dance. I have another Plus dance that has always had fewer dancers attend than the first. We changed the second dance to casual dress and the crowd more than doubled. And this increase comes from dancers who have been dancing for years! Our customers are speaking. Are we listening?

Finally, I did a dance in western South Dakota this spring. The club had two new couples in attendance. Both were in their mid to late forties, and obviously were enjoying square dancing. One lady wore a wrinkle skirt, while the other wore blue jeans and a vest. I decided to visit with them about their attire. The lady in the skirt indicated that she liked the wrinkle skirts and actually wore them to work. The lady in blue jeans said that jeans were all she ever wore. In fact, she related that the only dress she had in her closet was her wedding dress. She has not worn a dress in over twenty years!!! Can we expect that lady to conform to a strict dress code? Which would we rather do: lose that couple (and all their friends) from our activity, than change? These are the questions we must ask? These are the **ATTITUDES** that we have to evaluate in ourselves.

The situation is complicated further by the fact that our activity has a number of quality vendors that deal in square dance attire. Is it fair to them to eliminate square dance attire? Is it fair to those that love the costumes to take those costumes away from them? I think the answer is no to both questions. But then, how do we resolve this situation? It is my belief that the answer is in common sense compromise. Obviously, the clothiers are going to have to

consider alternatives in styles as to what they offer to the public. That is already occurring to some degree. But what about the feelings of those that love the standard costumes? How do we accommodate them? I think answer may be easier than we think. Instead of the statement "Square Dance Attire Required," why not use "Square Dance Attire **Welcome or Optional?**"

Everyone realizes that something has to be done if we are going to be able to market to today's society. The question is, "How can we address the dress code issue to make it acceptable to as many people, current dancers and non-dancers, as possible?" Again, we need to take a common sense approach to this issue. Just observing how churches had to change more at on this issue should be proof enough that change is inevitable.

In conclusion, how do we change our attitudes? Do we have to make big changes? Are these changes possible? I honestly feel the necessary changes in attitude are attainable. I also sincerely believe that there is nothing we cannot accomplish. However, we must make a conscientious effort to make that change. The most difficult part of making a change is to realize that change is necessary. Without change, things stagnate. The only thing certain in our world is that there will always be change.

How would I approach changing our attitudes? First of all, we need to motivate every dancer to recruit for classes. But, we need to do more. We must impress them with the fact that new people won't come to class unless we **BRING** them. In addition, we need to nurture these new dancers by encouraging club members to participate in

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the class and making them feel like they are a part of our square dance family. And, we must recognize that we are a family. Furthermore, once classes are completed, we need to again **TAKE** them to their first few dances. Joining the club, or attending another club, is like starting over for them. How many more dancers would we save if we did this? Would new dancers feel welcome, more and ease? With this be a change in attitudes?

If we are to rebuild a prosperous square dance activity, callers must recognize that we have a real need to call less complex dances and classes. Again, let's not confuse the issue that less complexity automatically assumes limiting variety. I'm not advocating limiting variety.

Rather let's make a conscious effort to use better judgment in what we call and how we call it. We must make a better effort at keeping everyone dancing. Our retention rate is mute testimony to that fact. I think it far more important that we change our attitude to one that restores fun, sociability, and the experience of successfully dancing to music rather than solving choreographic puzzles.

In reality, it will only take a small change in **ATTITUDE** in those of us who enjoy this activity so much. We must be more tolerant and understanding of the new dancer. We must demonstrate as much enthusiasm for square dancing as a whole, as we show for our favorite program within the activity. We need to extend some love and affection for our wonderful recreation of square dancing. We need to display a passion for the activity. We need to teach new dancers that there is more to square dancing than

executing geometric figures to music.

All of us need to look around at our circle of square dance friends. That is what square dancing did for us. That is really what square dancing is all about. It's the people. It's you. It's me. It's us. Each of us would like to see the square dance activity of the future as a vibrant, healthy, and exciting recreation. I firmly believe this can happen. However, it will take effort, understanding, and tolerance on the part of everyone. It will take leadership and cooperation from everyone; callers, dancers, and all the organizations associated with square dancing. Let's be positive, especially in our writing and our conversation. Let's be positive with each other. Let's see if we can't change our attitude and be positive and excited about our recreation.

Finally, it is my firm belief that our society needs square dancing even more so since the events of last September [2001]. Our activity has so much to offer in so many ways. It has been a long time since our society needed the warmth, friendship, and feeling of family that we, and our activity can provide. But, we have to market the activity and sell that feeling of family to a whole group of new people that are searching for us. We will have to make some changes to make that possible. I am absolutely confident that we can accomplish that. It will take some compromise, but is completely do-able. This is a wonderful activity with so many wonderful people. Most of us involved in square dancing share a passion and affection for the activity. Let's share that passion and affection with people that need what we have to offer. Let's enjoy square dancing and, more importantly, let's enjoy each other.

