

News, Notes & Nonsense:
A Newsletter for Callers

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EXTRA

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Hello again!

I recently asked Mel to compile an article on the differences between the concepts of CALLER SCHOOLS and CALLER WORKSHOPS. As with anything that Mel creates, he runs with it to the extent that I always know that I am going to end up with even more than I asked for...which is always great!

The problem with the article that Mel sent to me is that it is a lengthy one ... very necessary to fully understand the differences here....and one that would take up a major portion of the newsletter just by itself. I felt that it was important for this article to be read in its entirety and not in parts spread over two or three issues. The only way left was to present it as a stand-alone extra issue (similar to the Program Report present in December).

Mel has covered every aspect of this subject in great detail in order to avoid any possible misunderstandings. I know that many of our callers here in NSW have regarded what we have been doing with our Educational sessions and weekends as Caller Schools, but they really do not fit under this category or concept. Mel has clearly defined the differences.

A continuous program of Caller training and education is necessary, not just for honing our skill set, but for giving each of us that extra enthusiasm that we all come away with after these sessions and weekends. We need all forms of caller education systems, from clinics to full day sessions, weekends and full Caller Schools.

At the end of his report I have added a very typical photograph of Mel....with cup of coffee in hand.

I hope to have the April issue out the week before the National Convention in Bendigo. Lots of interesting articles and ideas again, including a look at some of the good microphones available these days, microphone technique, and lots of other goodies.

Cheers

Barry



GALLER SCHOOL VERSUS GALLER WORKSHOPS

This is probably one of the most difficult articles I have been asked to write. It is important to clarify what this article is not based on. It is not, nor ever was intended to be, about which is better. The truth is, they are both extremely valuable to the square dance movement as a whole. Both benefit Callers and more importantly the dancers who benefit from caller development improvement and training.

Both schools and workshops are designed to work in symbiosis (together) to improve caller fundamentals and techniques and expand and develop the caller's knowledge and application of his/her craft. Depending on curriculum, they can be designed for the brand new caller, the newer and experienced caller, or even purely challenge calling or single topic focus.

GENERALLY SPEAKING:

Caller schools are longer in duration, usually 5-7 days, and cover a number of topics across a broad spectrum of calling. They are designed to introduce, refresh, expand and provide guidance and direction across a wide range of calling and dancing development.

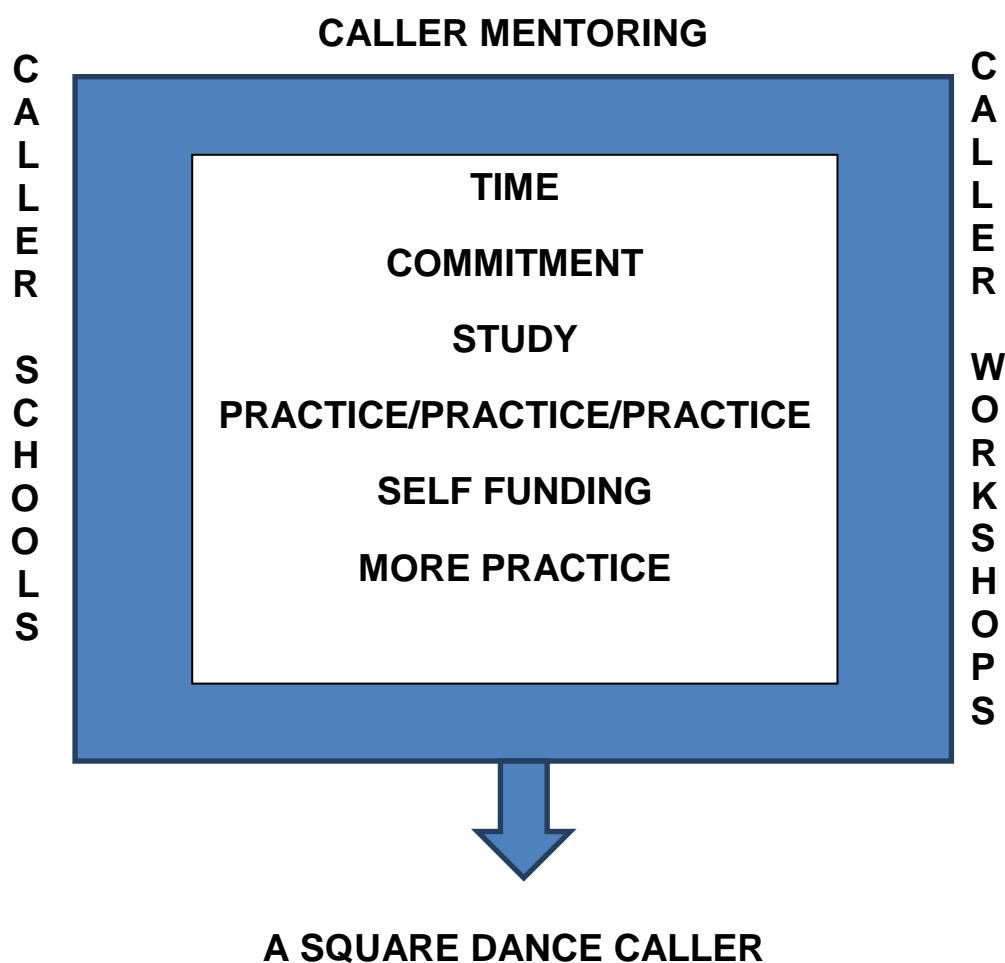
Caller Schools are essential to the development of new and newer callers as they present the base fundamentals and outline the development parameters of being a square dance caller and all it entails.

Comparatively, Caller schools are akin to primary, elementary and high school education and in some cases moving on to college or university. You learn the fundamentals, you develop the associations and progression of building what you have learned and you establish the base foundations of education and application of those foundations as a caller. This is the tool box that all callers need.

Caller workshops are usually shorter in duration, and usually conducted over a weekend of 2-3 days. By necessity the topic list is restricted and more focused on one to four specific aspects of calling. Workshops are generally designed to focus and develop a specific skill(s) or specific aspect of calling and not cover a broad range of topics.

Workshops are essential to callers in order to further develop and expand on the knowledge and application of tools learned through caller schools or individual mentoring. It is essential that attendees have a base understanding of the topics being presented and a minimum knowledge base and application base is assumed.

Comparatively, using the primary to high school analogy again, Caller workshops would be more akin to summer specialty Math, basketball or Swimming camps or University circuit lectures. As opposed to general broad ranging school education subjects, Weekend workshops are designed to hone and develop specific skills more associated to specific topics on a single aspect of the whole. Like Math Camp, Basketball or Swimming Camp, or even summer camps for Army or Rural Fire Service Cadets; a Caller's Workshop would be akin to specialized trades training to improve specific skills such as locksmithing or medical training seminars. It is assumed that at each focused training seminar, you are already able to perform in that field, and the sessions are designed to improve specific techniques or develop and show new ones.



As you can see, each caller school, and each weekend education workshop is generally tailored to meet a specific need or target. Schools are usually

multi topic to provide and expand on many basics and fundamentals across a broader range of skill sets. The material is presented and discussed but application is limited. The onus is on the individual to further explore the tools given. Workshops by contrast, are usually focused on development of a limited number of specific topics with much more time devoted to one or two particular skill sets.

Both schools and workshops, the good ones anyway, generally cover the broad spread of ability from New to Experience callers and instructors are able to develop positive engagement that is of benefit all ability levels – even though the material is on the same topic.

Both are not only necessary but part of the box that makes a good caller. Caller Mentoring is the support given by callers that recruit and support new callers and help them develop the skills. Caller Schools are where callers go to obtain the vast number of tools in the caller's tool box and to get shown how they work. Caller weekend workshops are where callers develop, sharpen and hone the tools and really focus on techniques to become masters of how to use them in the best way.

Of course, none of this is possible without the time, money, commitment and practice of the caller him or herself to put it all together.

So getting back to the fundamental question, why is the topic:

Caller School VERSUS Caller Workshop

Simply put, it is down to two things.

1. Are you looking at Caller education as a means for limited benefits as a short term business transaction to achieve a quick profit;
 - Callers generally pay to cover cost of training
 - Organizers and associations benefit from dance profits
 - Dancers enjoy single event function with a feature headliner
 - No overall investment return or long term progression is achieved in caller education

OR

2. Are you looking at Caller Education as a long term investment in the activity where the individual gains may be smaller in the short term but the benefits great and self-supporting in the long term benefiting the activity as a whole?
 - Callers still pay for the cost of individual training
 - Organizers and associations still benefit from dance profits

- Dancers still enjoy single event functions with feature headliners; **however -**
- Dancers benefit and see value and progression of new callers
- Callers benefit from both multi topic (school) and focus topic (weekend workshop) training
- Dancers benefit throughout the year as callers build and develop school topics further improved by workshop focus in the development and improvement of caller skills and application
- Profit raised from Caller Education is applied back into caller education and development where for every three weekend profitable workshops held a caller school can be ran at no significant cost to event organizers but incalculable benefits to both the callers, dancers and to the longevity of the square dance movement as a whole.

Depending on where you are in the world some caller schools are hosted by associations, usually at a three to one ratio with weekend workshops. In other cases, some individual callers and some associations have recognized the benefits of caller schools in conjunction with weekend workshops and normal monthly meeting, training sessions. A few annual schools are even privately ran and organized – supported by local clubs.

Weekend training workshops by contrast are usually hosted by either a Caller Association or jointly with a Dancer association as a caller training event. The good ones are well structured and deliberately focused on limited topics of interest to develop and enhance a specific skill set in the tool box. Where a week long caller school may spend two hours on the one particular important topic like formation management, a weekend caller school may explore the subject in detail and spend two complete days on only certain aspects of that same topic.



It should be clear that there is no method of determining which is better or worse. Neither is the answer. The two are complimentary.

The Calling Metaphor – building a house.

If square dance calling was house building, then the caller school would be getting the tools and learning how to hammer nails, frame walls and pour concrete in order to make an enclosure to live in. you would be given introductions to wiring, concreting, gyprocking and roofing so that you could assist as a labourer on a job site.

The weekend workshop would be the specialty training for the finishing carpenter, or the plasterer or the electrician or even the landscape designer that is focused on the particular specialty. The labourer knows how to hammer a nail and put up gyprock, but the plasterer knows how to mix the mud, apply the plaster, smooth the edges and do the cornice because after much focused practice, he/she has improved and developed the basic knowledge from that which was learned at the building school (Caller School). However, if the base knowledge wasn't there in the first place, there was no way the builder could master the craft and specialize

Unfortunately and sometimes more frequently, Caller training and development has begun to be looked at with the purely dollar sign short term view – in other words annual weekend workshops as a short term gain and profit making venture.

This method of periodic event profit focused training can be effective; but it only works, if the funds raised are put directly back into caller training. It is not sustainable because it excludes the presentation of the foundation tools and the basic fundamentals needed by new callers and experienced callers. New tools come out all the time in every business and square dance calling is no exception. If all you want to do is continue to present old ideas over and over again the same way, then eventually simple attrition will end your caller base and your dancer base because neither can survive without the other, especially if either one is stagnated.

Ideally, 3 caller weekend workshops = 1 weeklong caller school. Cost recovery is through membership and event dances. Overall profit/loss margin is neutral. Benefit to the activity – immeasurable.

There are still a number of Square dancer and Square dance Caller associations around the world that maintain the view that The way to keep square dancing alive is to keep the dancers happy, active and wanting to come. The only way to do that is to give them something they want to come to. The sale is the caller at every level, club through festival. The way to keep in business and keep the activity thriving is to ensure that we keep our callers trained refreshed current.

If you are in an area of the world that does not have access to private caller ran Caller Schools, or training then the onus of responsibility must fall upon

the Dancer and Caller associations to keep education and development alive. The easiest method of achieving this with the “best bang for the buck” is provide caller training venues for development of new callers and improvement of experienced callers. This can be done through funding and supporting

1. At least two caller training weekend workshops per year; and
2. At least one week long Caller School every two to three years

These, if funded by the joint Caller and Dancer Associations are generally cost recovered through attendee payment and hosted dance event to showcase the featured caller instructor. (At caller schools, there is usually a dance every night for the students to call at and a big feature caller dance at the end which is called by the instructors. All of these usually make a profit.

On average a Caller Workshop Weekend costs about \$50-100 (depending on venue and cost of feature caller/instructor. A week long Caller School ranges from between \$200 to \$600 again depending on venue and feature caller instructor costs.

In well run associations the development of caller education is left with the Caller Association and the support mechanism for venue, administration and dancers is left with the Dancers Association. The joint committee cost evaluates the event and together, sponsor the funding outlay. I know from my personal experiences in Europe, and Canada that the Dancer associations generally usually bore the brunt of the initial costs associated to venue and administration and the caller associations usually paid the cost of the feature instructor(s). Both of these were usually recovered through attendance payments and the event dance profits.

Dance profits and any caller school profits were then put aside for further caller development. Weekend workshops were done similarly and all profits were again added to the caller training and development fund.

Although periodically a weeklong Caller School might make a small loss or just break even rather than make a profit, the dancer and caller associations both recognized the benefit of the school and the workshops. It was also known that the weekend workshops almost never lost money. The profit would then go back into specific caller training and development. Overall, once the initial investment was made by the Caller and Dancer Associations, education costs and training in the long term would always be relatively small but “in the black” and over the long term self-funding. The benefits to the Square Dance Activity as a whole however are priceless.

UNDERSTANDING THE COMPARISON - SCHOOL AND WORKSHOP.

One of the most successful caller development professionals I know is Ken Ritucci. Ken is the owner of five separate Caller Schools, spanning from Massachusetts in the east of the United States to Sunnyvale California in the West. Ken also runs a yearly caller school in Russia which is attended not only by Russian callers but many European Callers. He also travels extensively around the world doing schools and seminars. His is not a unique situation, but it is probably the best example I know of that highlights both “good for the activity based training” with local follow up workshops as part of a good business method.

These schools run 5 days in length and cost on average \$400 (500 AUD) per caller. They are always full usually with attendance at about 15-20 callers.

Costing: Attendees pay their own transport and accommodations willingly and the cost of the school covers all the training, materials, and the other caller instructor costs of the presenters.

There is a dance nightly to showcase the new callers or attendees to see and show how they are progressing and there is a large feature caller event dance at the end of the school which highlights the instructors as the feature callers.

I have attended Ken’s schools on more than one occasion and other instructors include the likes of Tony Oxendine, Randy Dougherty, Bill Harrison, and Randy Page just to name a few. Even as an experienced caller attending, I came away refreshed, eager and wanting to do more.

These schools develop the new and experienced callers giving them the fundamentals and tools to want to be a caller. Many that have attended who were just interested in learning to call but not really seriously pursuing the path, have gone on to become extremely successful callers.

I recommended these schools to six of my own student callers whom I had been training for at least 2 years and each of them came back refreshed, excited and eager to go on. The dancers could feel the difference. That is the long term view of the benefits of the Caller School.

Profit or professionalism. Ken does make money at these schools. He makes enough to cover the costs of the facilities, (usually supported by local dance clubs who act as dolls and guinea pigs for the training sessions). He makes enough to cover the costs of employing excellent teaching staff. He makes enough to cover his own travel and expenses. And he makes enough to put the money back into caller education and continue to run the schools

across the world. What he doesn't make is money to get rich on. In other words, small profit, large professional development and professionalism.

I may be biased because I consider Ken a friend of mine, but I do know that he believes in putting the money earned from his schools back into caller education to develop new callers and improve the skills of existing callers.

In perspective the cost of running a caller school is about \$5000, 12 students = \$4800 (covers the costs only). 20 students = \$8000 (a little profit which is rolled back into the caller schools). Now that is a long term positive view of believing in the activity of caller development.

The short term view.

In the US, Canada and in many parts of the world, week long Caller Schools used to be organized and supported by Square dancer and square dance caller associations. This is lost however because of the short term perception that many Dancer Associations, and even a few caller associations have, and that is look at the bottom line of the bank account to ensure it is going up – unfortunately the numbers of dancers and callers are ignored which continue to go down. It is a short term view of quick profit means success rather than the longevity of the square dance activity as a whole means existence.

Without new callers, new dancers, good basic and mainstream calling and dancing foundations and development and education for both to progress and become better, the square dance activity will continue to decline into oblivion. It is a basic premise and fundamental fact that education development benefits the square dance activity as a whole, regardless of what level it is at, or the concentration of that education.

- Dancers want to learn and hire someone to teach them
- Callers learn to call in order to teach dancers and hopefully make a little money at it.
- Callers teach dancers – dancers learn, get better and have fun
- Dancers encourage other dancers to learn and caller has more students
- Caller develops more skills to become better at his/her craft



- Dancers benefit from caller education and skill development and become really good at the craft
- Dancers become better dancers and have more fun as a result of caller improvement and education development.

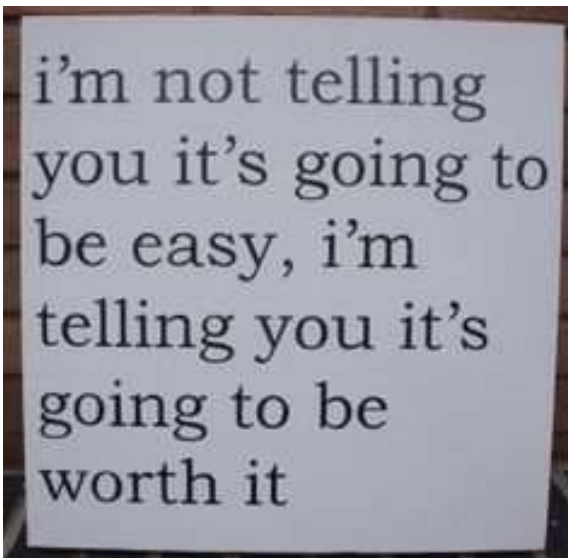
And the wheel keeps on turning.

Lesson learned:

(Positive) The more the callers learn, continuously refresh and develop their craft the better the dancers learn, develop and have fun.

(Negative) The less that Callers learn, expand and develop their craft without refreshing and improving through Schools and workshops; the more the dancers stagnate, lose interest and either move on. Worse, in some cases the callers have great specialty skills but no foundation on which to use them and the dancers the dancers know less and are able to dance less capably due to the lack of caller education and development. This is frustrating to dancers, the dancing activity and square dancing as a whole.

A closer look at the School compared to the workshop



Whether you are just getting started, or want to improve your calling career, Caller schools will provide you with the tools to make you a successful caller. Calling school staff members have decades of calling experience between them. Together, they have the knowledge and leadership to assist any caller regardless of experience in the development and progression of their career as a caller.

To understand this better let's look at the program for a caller school (weeklong) and a Caller weekend Education Workshop

The Caller School:

Most Caller Schools offer up to **Three Levels of Program Instruction:**

1. **Beginners Level:** Designed for brand new callers who need all the basics, including basic choreography, microphone technique, voice control and introduction to Music and Rhythm. Discussion on the proper use of equipment, Digital Music and programs.

2. **Intermediate Level:** For callers with experience between one to 4 four years, emphasis will be on Beginner Sight calling Techniques, better timing and body flow as well as Creative Choreography plus much more.
3. **Experienced Level:** For callers who have been calling five years or more. Emphasis will be on Advanced Sight calling Techniques, more intricate ways to resolve a square, Methods of Choreographic Control. A clear understand of Timing and Smooth Body Flow as well as being able to work your Singing calls and have the ability to change figures within the song.

Key Benefits:

- Develop confidence in your calling ability
- Improve your choreographic skills
- Learn how to program your dances
- Acquire the skills necessary to make yourself a more professional caller

Topics of Discussion usually cover at least:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timing • Mechanics of Choreography <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set ups and get outs • Zeros and equivalentents • Terminology • Voice/Delivery • Smooth Dancing/ Timing and Body Flow • Choreographic Management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sight calling techniques • Singing call techniques • Programming • Teaching • Self-improvement techniques | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Music/Rhythm • Ethics/Leadership • Leadership • Ethics • Business side of calling |
|---|---|

Other topics may include:

- The caller's partner
- The square dance party
- History, heritage and tradition
- Rounds, contras and Mixers
- Showmanship
- Promotion and communications

And of course there is the advantage of breaking into groups for specific training appropriate to the levels of the callers in attendance as well as lots of Mic Time.

Each night has an open dance MC'd by the attendees and called by the attendees. The last night is normally a large "Feature Caller Event Dance" which is called by the attending instructors.

The Caller Education Weekend Workshop

To better understand this section quickly go back and review the list of topics covered in the full week. I will use the last caller weekend training workshop as an example to explain the difference.

1. It is assumed that the callers attending have a basic knowledge or awareness of the basic tools of calling.
2. It is understood that the focus of the workshop is the further development of one or two of the skillsets presented at the caller schools.

The topics chosen for a full weekend workshop were

1. Formation Management
2. The mechanics of Choreography and

These two topics would usually be one or two hours at a Caller School. Callers would be presented with the basics and explained how they work and how to use them. There would be limited practice but enough to ensure that the concepts are understood and can be built upon.

By contrast, at a Caller Weekend Workshop, these topics are further broken down into:

Topic 1 – FORMATION MANAGEMENT

1. Formation Awareness
2. Recognition
3. Movement
4. Analysing a call
5. F.A.S.R. simplified

And

Topic 2 - CHOREOGRAPHIC MANAGEMENT

1. Reading – brief concept awareness
2. Memory – brief concept awareness
3. Mental Image – brief concept awareness
4. Modular
 - understanding the module concept
 - building choreography for variant movements
5. Sight
 - a. One Couple Sight – “Burnt Image” or “snapshot calling”
 - b. Two Couple Sight – “Isolated Sight”.
 - c. Full Extemporaneous Sight Calling.
 - resolution techniques line or box
 - how to free wheel call with a focus theme in mind
 - d. **using singing call (modules) with modules and sight calling**

Well, if you got this far into the article, you will know that there really is no **Caller School Versus Caller Weekend Education Workshop**. Both are necessary and complimentary each supporting the other.

You might as well say let's only do plus and advanced without ever teaching basic and mainstream as a foundation and level in itself. We all can accept that that just would not work, but over the last 20 years we have seen the problem that shortcutting the foundations has done to dancing. Calling is the same. In order to be a good and successful caller you need:

- Individual desire and drive to become a caller
- To set aside your personal ego and learn to improve for the benefits of the dancers first.
- A mentor to support you in development of your skills
- Dancers who are willing to support you as you grow and develop
- Caller schools to give you the full tool box and teach the basics on how to use the tools
- Weekend Caller Workshops to specifically develop and sharpen the tools and the Caller's capability to "Master Craft" with that tool
- Caller and Dancer Associations support to make progression available and possible for both Caller's and Dancer's benefit.

There can be good money in calling. There can be good money in Dancing and Calling events. Most times however; Callers pay out of pocket to get better and support groups make small profits to help host the next event. If the small profit is used wisely both workshops and schools will survive and be self-funded – and the whole activity profits.

The only sure profit is the smile on a dancer's face from a job well done.

