How do your leadership capabilities express themselves? Here are thoughts from several known caller-leaders.

**DIALOG**

**LEADERSHIP IN SQUARE DANCING**

**MARSHALL FLIPPO • FRANK LANE • BOB PAGE**

Calling a square dance is only a portion of the caller’s many responsibilities. He is looked up to as a “leader” and there are many opportunities for the caller to evidence good judgment, to develop sensitivity and to provide the type of activity that the dancers hope to receive. We asked three nationally known callers a series of questions and we think you will be interested in their frank replies. We began by asking, What do you consider the caller’s responsibilities in a club run by the members themselves?

**Bob Page:** I think the caller’s first responsibility is to present a good and varied program each meeting night the club gets together. Secondly, he owes it to the club, even tho’ it is a club-run function, to help guide the club in leadership. This means giving them suggestions so that they may operate properly.

**Frank Lane:** How a caller is going to execute those responsibilities might become the problem. In our own clubs we have been very fortunate. Even tho’ they are dancer-run the dancers often come to us for advice and we are invited to decision-making meetings. However, if the caller is not welcomed in this fashion, he must get his leadership into the operation in a little more subtle manner. As their caller, I think he must lead the club along paths to good dancing habits, common courtesy habits, things that should be stressed continuously.

**Marshall Flippo:** I think a caller should be there exactly on time, early enough to set up and be ready to go when the dancers arrive. Also, if he is invited to business meetings, he should attend if at all possible. This doesn’t necessarily mean to give them thoughts voluntarily but if they need advice, he would be present so they could ask questions and his place would be to kind of lead them in the direction which his experience tells him is right.

If a visiting caller came in to dance with one of your regular clubs, would it be your responsibility to ask him to call a guest tip or would it be up to the club?

**Flippo:** I believe it would be the caller’s prerogative either to ask him or not to ask him. The caller has his program planned and wants to stick to it, but it might depend on who the visitor was whether he would ask him to call; he might be terrific or not so good. In any case, I think it should be left up to the caller alone to decide about this.

**What can the caller do to help maintain a happy attitude among his dancers, regardless of who runs the club?**

**Lane:** Primarily I think it is just making sure he does a program for the club that will ensure the dancers who are coming the utmost enjoyment of square dancing, keeping the work involved to a minimum and making the club a real recreation. The caller can help with this by having the dancing program oriented around the abilities of the people in the club where they are doing the things they enjoy — not being forced or, on the other hand, bored — but finding that happy medium.

**Page:** The caller’s attitude towards the dancers and the club itself will have a great deal to do with the club’s attitude. If the caller takes dancing lightly and happily, it is going to reflect into the club and his dancers. This lets them be happy in their dancing and not become too serious.

**Flippo:** As Bob says, the caller’s attitude reflects in the dancers. If he is just naturally
friendly and likes people — and most callers I know love people — it is going to generate friendliness in the club. The caller can be a big influence in keeping things at a happy level.

Sometimes the politics that gets into clubs will tend to split them a little and the caller could have some bearing in helping to get people back together by being impartial, for one thing. Of course, the officers have a great deal of responsibility along this line, too.

That brings us very nicely to the next question. What do you, as callers, think are the dancers’ responsibilities towards the clubs, apart from just coming out and dancing?

Lane: Well, this can be real interesting. I think the dancers have certain responsibilities that they may not even be aware of and that the caller can help to realize. It can be done best in the class or training period of becoming square dancers. There is so much more to being a square dancer than just learning a Right and Left Thru or Do Paso. If the people in the club can be made aware of this and made to feel a part of our whole movement and proud to be a part, that is important. I guess what I am trying to say is that a caller should constantly be a salesman for square dancing.

There is more to being a club member, too, than just paying dues. The physical presence of the dancers is needed. Here again, if the caller is doing a good job, chances are they will be there, will want to be there, not only to enjoy the dancing themselves, but to help others to have more fun by their presence. A big responsibility of the square dancer is to be enjoyable to be with and to dance with. And this goes further into being willing to take part in a party activity or promotional activity to make the club successful.

Flippo: Frank has hit the nail on the head. A big responsibility of the square dancers is to benefit other people by their presence. I believe they should move around all evening long, dance with as many couples as they can and also be willing to take their turn at seeing about refreshments, etc. Somebody should see about the hall, too, and someone should be at the door greeting people. If it is a large club, maybe all the officers should be at the door to greet the members and get their evening started happily. It all boils down, again, to liking people and showing it.

Page: A club member should support his club and this means serving on committees, etc., to do whatever is best to make the club function properly. I don’t think he owes his life to it, however. Every club member, whether he is an officer, or committee member, or whatever, should be able to dance and enjoy the evening without being overly burdened with committee work.

What can the caller do to help in the conservation of the present crop of dancers? How can he directly influence dancers so that they will stay in the club activity?

Page: Both Flip and Frank have emphasized friendliness in this conversation and here again is where this is important. I know that certain couples in clubs sometimes feel left out. They may not be as outgoing as others and so do not come so readily to the front. If a caller will show interest in each couple sometime along the way, they will feel closer to the club and know that the caller realizes that they are there. If such interest is shown, this is going to keep them in dancing that much longer. Programming is important, as we said earlier, but the personal interest and contact is probably more influential than we generally realize.

Lane: Friendliness, for sure, and programming, too. I think we have to use the best judgment possible in club dancing programs. We know we are going to make mistakes but we must try to be right as often as possible. We must give the dancers enough to make them interested but not so much we drive them out of the movement. We must always have at the backs of our minds what will happen to the person who has had to miss square dancing for two or three months for any reason.

Programming must be kept so that when they come back they won’t feel as if the dancers have gone off and left them. At the same time we have to do a program that will interest the people who have been coming every week. All of this takes a lot of thought, to be constantly searching for new ways to do things with the knowledge the dancers already have at their disposal — just the kind of thing being stressed with Gold Ribbon Reports in Sets in Order.

The danger spot in keeping dancers goes right back to the point where you bring them from class to club. I’m a nut on this subject and I think it’s a place where we really fall
down 90% of the time. Our teaching programs are not adequate to the point where people can walk comfortably from class to club. They get discouraged, as has been said before, and they fade off. If we ever get a teaching program that will cope with this I think we will solve the greater percentage of our drop-out problems.

Flippo: To make people stay with us, the caller has to make them have fun. If people are having fun, no reason or excuse is going to make them leave a dance early. The caller's responsibility is to give the people a good time, relax them. He has to strive to get this to them where they will enjoy themselves so much they want to come back. Of course, there are times when people have to drop out of dancing for a good reason but if they have left a happy club they are going to want to return to it.

How about all those new things Frank was talking about, that might keep the dancer from coming back because he doesn't want to be embarrassed by not knowing them?

Flippo: I'm with Frank all the way on that. Here is a real big responsibility for the caller — to plan his program so that if he knows people are coming, he will make sure they get thru as much as possible their first night back. He might have somebody else drop out who doesn't enjoy a little less advanced dancing but I still think he should make sure that when somebody does make the effort to come back, he can do whatever is called.

Do you feel that caller-leadership thruout the country not just in one area, is all it should be?

Lane: I don't know how to say this kindly, but I really don't. There are far too many callers who don't know what square dancing is all about, who need to develop the philosophy that is behind it all. It is deplorable that so many callers are teaching the mechanics of square dancing and don't really know how to dance themselves. We have discovered this in the past several years when we have done caller clinics, etc. You wouldn't believe the number of callers who don't know how to do a Square Thru or Spin Chain Thru and yet are calling them every night. Not understanding themselves, they may only present the explanation half-way and they are doing only a limited bit with a certain basic.

Flippo: This is so true. Guys go to caller school and learn something about calling but nothing about leadership or judgment. A leadership course should go right along with a callers course but we surely don't have it in some places I've seen across country.

Page: Unfortunately, I have to agree with both of the boys. The problem is — how do we get the training to be a caller? The local callers organizations could do a great deal by having experienced callers who have worked with people and are capable of teaching leadership, run short term courses in that very thing.

How can a caller help individually with leadership training?

Page: In his own area, if he sees one or two new callers coming up who are very good, it would be wonderful if he could take the time to sit down with them and share some of the wisdom he has gained over the years.

Lane: How can we instill in the minds of the fellows who need this stuff that they do need it? How do we get more people to come to sessions like Summer Asilomar where there are caller training sessions and where people certainly go home with so much that they can apply in their own areas? It would be great if we could establish more of these teaching sessions in various parts of the country and then sell promising callers the idea of attending.

When you think of it, those of us who have been around for a while didn't have courses so close at hand, either. We took off at every opportunity for some place where we could get caller and leadership instruction. We were grasping for things to learn and how to work with people.

As to the successful caller helping nowadays, there are any number of ways. By the very virtue of his success, this caller is very busy but it would certainly be to his advantage as well as to the advantage of square dancing if he would take time to work with new callers who seek his help. It isn't a matter of forcing your opinions on anyone but of helping them to develop themselves, their own style, etc.

Flippo: A new caller could be advised that he would be wise not to study all this new material but to concentrate more on trying to develop leadership ability. He should find out something about the history of square dancing — its great leaders of the past and present, people like Pappy Shaw, and what they contributed, and what it's all about.