

DO YOU HAVE AN OPEN MIND? ARE YOU WILLING TO TRY SOMETHING NEW?

Please take the time to read the information contained in this document. It can truly be a lifesaver for many clubs and most certainly a model for the future of Square Dancing.

Are you having trouble selling 30 weeks of lessons? Try 2 weekends!

We want to thank both Bill Harrison and Vernon Jones (CALLERLB Executive Board) for their help promoting alternative class structure. We need to thank Ruth Riegelhaupt-Herzig for her help and sharing her experience with all of us. We should thank Mac Letson and look forward to endorsement of Weekend Classes by the American Callers Association. Last, but not least, we want to thank everyone for their help getting this information in front of every club in America.

Conventional wisdom tells us we can get new people dancing pretty well in a couple of weekends. The collective support for this concept by many high profile leaders is overwhelming. So, we are making this information available for all clubs and callers to consider. The neat thing is, every time we get one square ready to go, we can now have a class in someone's garage or on their patio. With only a 2-weekend commitment, we feel this is something truly marketable and suits most life styles today much better than 20, 30, 40 weeks of class.

Those who have been following this thread of Emails understand that the winning compromise is the acceptance of building shorter destination programs. This should always be a welcomed idea: "Learn to Dance in ONE Weekend" or a "Couple of Saturdays". The secret is creating a fun place for the new dancers to come enjoy dancing, at whatever program suits your needs. Good luck!

For more information and ideas on other alternative class structure, contact the incoming Chairman of the CALLERLAB Lesson Systems Committee, "Arnold Gladson"
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Accelerated Learning Program (known as ALP)
by Bill Harrison

This acronym was thought of by callers in the Virginia, Washington D.C. and Maryland area. The idea based on the Blast Class or Fast Track weekend programs. This name was selected to be more in tune with today's "metropolitan" community.

The ALP's process is to engage folks to attend a weekend of learning square dancing. The weekend begins with Friday night, Saturday morning, afternoon and evening. In some cases, Sunday morning is included. During this period, the instructor will focus on the Basic/Mainstream program. Having lunch and dinner supplied is essential in keeping the new folks at the event. Having experienced dancers volunteer and help is essential in the success of the weekend.

In our area, the ALP's weekend has been very successful averaging 30 new folks to learn square dancing. It's the after the weekend that cannot be successful without a plan. The plan would be to have a place for those who wish to continue to learn more about square dancing. In our area, a caller took this idea to his club and said if we do not get new folks we will eventually fold. This club had traditional square dance lessons. Here is what the club had to offer to the ALP's process.

1. Selected the weekend.
2. Charge is about 25 dollars a person which includes lunch and dinner.
3. For lunch and dinner if a club is behind the idea, they could participate by having potluck or deli sandwiches prepared or pizza and salad for dinner.
4. Taught as much of the Basic/Mainstream program as they could (in this case I would suggest no more than 30 to 35 Basics/Mainstream--the meaty, fun calls).
5. Did lot of advertisement through local area community papers, two pages worth, not just a 1" X 4" area.
6. Seek assistance for funding from area dancer organizations.

7. Club regularly dances every Friday. After the ALP's weekend, the new folks are invited to the following Friday night dance and the learning and review continues.

8. Club furnishes the new dancers club badges and makes them a part of the club with small duties.

The key to the success after the ALP's weekend is completed is having a plan to continue with those who wish to learn more about square dancing. As we all know, having the ALP's weekend and thinking we will have accomplished "mainstream" dancers at the end is unlikely. What is impressive about the idea is about 30 new dancers attend the weekend and it seems about 17 new dancers continued on after the weekend was completed. The ALP's weekend was a success and the plan after the weekend was a success.

Fast Track

by Vernon Jones

Consecutive Saturday Learn To Square Dance.

In today's busy world, people seem to have less time to participate in leisure activities than ever before. The world today is in an "instant gratification" state of mind. For the most part, people just don't want to commit to anything that is going to take a long time to do or learn. That is why we came up with the idea of multiple Saturdays to learn square dancing. The idea was also conceived when CALLERLAB was seriously talking about reducing the Mainstream program. It was thought that a reduced program would fit nicely with the idea of a multiple Saturday learn to dance system.

Consecutive Saturday Learn To Square Dance has evolved into several different names: Fast Track, Blast Class, Accelerated Class along with many others names have evolved since we first began doing this. There is no official name and whatever name you choose to use will probably work just fine.

The first Consecutive Saturday lessons that I ever was involved with started as an experiment with a club in the Dallas, Texas area. The club recruited a

number of people and invited them to a party on a Sunday. They had a chili supper and also had some Square Dancing along with line dancing and mixers. We danced for about 2 hours and then we invited the people to come to 2 consecutive Saturdays to learn to Square Dance.

These Saturdays were to start a month later. We were very upfront with these people as we told them that this was an experiment and we were not sure how far we were going to get with their learning. We got approximately half way through the CALLERLAB Mainstream program in those 2 Saturdays. Before we let the people go home on that last Saturday, we sat them down and asked them questions about their experience. One of the questions that we asked was how many Saturdays would they commit to learn Square Dancing? Almost to a person, they said they would commit to 3 Saturdays. So we started using 3 Saturdays.

We started the day at 8:30 AM, and we were planning on going until 5:00 PM. I knew at some point during the day the people were going to hit a learning wall and that they were not going to be able to absorb anything new. That happened about 2:30 p.m. I told the folks that for the rest of the afternoon we would only be dancing what they already knew and that we were not going to be learning anything new. Right about 3:30 p.m., the people started having trouble with "circle left" so I knew that our dancing day had just about come to an end.

It was not hard to figure out that 8:30 AM to 5:00 PM was going to be too long a period. We now start at 8:30 and go until 3:30 pm. We have found this time frame works best. 23 people were in that first group. 95% of those that started finished. 85% of those that finished were still dancing a year later. This was in 1999. Many are still dancing today.

This paper is not intended to belittle the current class structure. Consecutive Saturday Learn to Square Dance is offered as an alternative to the current class structure. When people say that they don't want to commit to 30, 25, or 20 weeks of learning, you can now offer an alternative to their objection. Many clubs and dancer association have adopted this type of learning experience and many have tweaked it to fit their own needs. Absolutely nothing wrong with that. For example, many areas have gone to 4 consecutive Saturdays in order to learn more of the CALLERLAB Mainstream program. These areas have reported that they have been

successful in teaching all the calls. I now use 4 Saturdays and believe that this is a good number which has a better chance for optimum results.

IT'S A PROCESS! Consecutive Saturday Learn To Square Dance is a process that includes not only teaching people to dance, but what should be done with them during the entire day that they are there along with a finishing program at the end of their experience,

THE TEACHING PROCESS

I have been asked several times what kind of lesson plan I prepare for a full day of learning. Many people think that there must be some kind of magic teaching order that must be used. Nothing could be further from the truth. Whatever teaching order you are using now will work just fine for consecutive Saturdays. Just start teaching and see how far you can get. Watch the people. You can tell by how they act and their body language whether or not you can go any further.

One thing that you must keep in mind is that this process must always be kept moving forward. You should not allow really slow learners to bog down the process. You just can't! In order for this to work, you must keep moving forward. When you run across someone who is just not getting it, then you must take action. You must work this person during breaks. You must get existing dancers to help with this. If you allow this person to continue then you run the risk of losing more than you gain. I believe that for too long we have been catering to the minority and then wonder why the majority do not come back. Don't get me wrong here, I am not trying to train dancer who are absolutely flawless. It is just that sometimes you have to realize that this type of dance is just not for everyone and everyone is not going to get it just like some folks are not going to golf or pick what ever activity you want. Some folks are just not going to be able to do it.

You should demonstrate the call you are about to teach very well before you get the people on the floor. You should explain the call very well before you ask the new dancers to try it. You should give the dancers several walkthroughs before you let them dance it. You should dance the new call several times and then you have to move on. Sometimes hard measures are in order even to the point of explaining to someone that perhaps this is not for them and they should consider thinking about whether are not they should continue. This is a very hard thing to do but sometimes it simply must be done.

One interesting item of note is the amount of time spent on going over calls that the new dancers have learned the Saturday before. I really should say the lack of time that is needed. My experience has been that most of the people really retain what they learned the week before and very little rehash time is needed if you do it correctly. They retain more than we think they do.

A word of caution here! This system will not make a good teacher out of a bad teacher. You should only be using the best teachers available. A bad teacher will be just as bad in this system. Here in the Dallas/Fort Worth area of Texas, we are blessed with having many callers who are also capable teachers. We try to use multiple callers if at all possible. The main reason we do this is because it gets the new dancer used to hearing different voices. We have all seen new dancers at their first dance with a different caller than the one that taught them. The new dancers are comfortable with the voice of their caller. They hear a different voice and it scares them to death. This helps to eliminate that.

When we use multiple callers, we go straight down the CALLERLAB Mainstream program list. This may not be the best way for an individual teaching, but it is easier when using multiple callers. There is not guess work on what to do next. Just see where the last caller stopped and continue from there. As with many other things, there have been some callers who agreed to the teaching order and then went ahead and jumped all over the list as they saw fit. This is not a good thing. Make sure your callers are following the teaching order. If they don't, then it may be time to look for another caller.

You have to be careful with how long you keep people dancing at any one time. Remember, you will be going all day long so conserve energy. You may want to mix up your time on the dance floor with short sessions followed by a longer session. Sometimes shorter sessions with small breaks will work very well. Again, watch the people. Their body language will tell you all you need to know. Don't let breaks or down time go to waste; Use this time to your advantage.

Show the people some styling. Gather up some couples and show them how some of the dance moves should be done. For example, show them how they should be adjusting their body weight on a Forward and Back. Be sure that you only use the best existing dancers for this part. Using dancers who

are not strong will only instill bad dancing in the new dancers. One thing that I also show during these breaks is the number of beats that it takes to execute the calls that I am about to teach. Teachers should be showing new dancers how many beats it takes to do a Square Thru from a Static Square as well as from Couple Facing such as in a 0 Box and Lines of Four. The timing is different and the dancers need to know this.

Learn some Square Dance history and use this time to educate the new dancer. I have found that new dancers are really interested to find that Square Dancing is done all over the world and all the calls are in English.

TEACHING IS NOT THE ONLY PROCESS!

The learning of Square Dancing is not the only thing that you should worry about during the day. There should be refreshments of some kind. We have coffee or tea for the folks to drink. During the recruitment process, it would be to your advantage to advise the people to bring something to drink. We have found that they will usually bring orange juice or something like it for the morning and then bottled water or something for the rest of the day. If you have the ability to provide this type of thing for the new dancers, then you will be better off.

We like to have something to eat for the morning time, but it needs to be light. Doughnuts and cinnamon rolls are heavy and will make people sluggish and tired. We will provide fruits and energy bars and other things that are not too heavy. Fruits especially work well. Fruit gives the body energy and increased metabolism. The new dancers will need all the energy they can get and you will be surprised that they will actually eat the fruit you provide.

We like to provide them lunch for one very important reason. We don't want them to leave. If you send your new dancers out for lunch, then some of them may not come back. The lunches do not need to be a headache to prepare. Easy things are in order here. Sandwiches, hot dogs, and the like is what you need. One of the best things that I have seen is Frito Pie. For those that aren't familiar with this, it is chili served over Fritos. The folks in charge of lunch bought cans of chili and the small individual packages of Fritos. They opened the packages and poured the chili inside. They also provide plastic forks and spoons. The clean up was easy. Everything was just thrown into the trash. No washing of dishes was needed. Try this sometime.

FINISHING PROGRAM

In order for this system to reach its full potential, you must have a finishing program. Let's face it, you only have time to show the dancers the calls they must know. Although you will be giving the dancers dance time on the Saturdays, they will still need a place to practice their craft. Set up some kind of weekly dance program so they can come and dance. You should charge for this. After all, something WORTH doing has a WORTH to it. You will probably find that if you are doing a good job, people don't have a problem with paying a price. After all, they don't really get to a restaurant expecting not to pay, do they? Do they go to the movies expecting to get in free? Charge for your services. You will be surprised.

Groups that realize that these new dancers need to be nurtured do a much better job of retention than do groups who literally throw their new dancers to the wolves. I have seen groups who take (not send) their new dancers to New Dancer Dances. Groups who set up some sort of weekly or bi-weekly dance program for these folks and then come to dance with them are creating a bond with the new dancers. They are showing them that they really want the new dancers to succeed.

On the other hand, I have seen groups that don't do these things and lose everything that they have gained. These groups will then blame the system process instead of focusing on the real problem. Of course these same groups are doing the same thing with the current lesson system.

I am currently the Chairman of the Lesson Systems Committee for CALLERLAB. We are working on all known lesson systems in order to let people know that these alternatives are available. This is best illustrated with the Multi-Cycle system which offers multiple starts for new dancers. This system was developed and information was given out and we thought we had done a good job and therefore stopped trying to spread information to the dancing community. We found that just because we knew about it didn't mean that everyone else knew about it. The information we are working on includes a tri-fold brochure that has all the high points about each known lesson system that would be easy to hand out to dancers and callers. We will then begin a longer, more-detailed explanation of the known lesson systems for folks who want an in-depth description. We will also be assembling a list of callers and dance groups who are using a specific lesson system along

with contact information. If anyone has any questions, I would be happy to answer them as best I can.

Thank you
Vernon Jones

Blast Classes

by Ruth Riegelhaupt-Herzig

In the Silicon Valley of California, the entry-level program is Plus. As with other areas, we have found that variance in schedules has caused traditional classes to fail, due to the time commitment involved. Folks miss two or three weeks and, despite review sessions, feel overwhelmed when returning to class. Eventually, many drop out. While we have adults in our classes, our club is geared toward youth and families. Many youth have seasonal activities that prevent attendance in traditional classes. Our club had one of the best retention rates in the area for traditional classes but still lost dancers due to scheduling issues.

Several years ago, our youth group began offering summer square dance camps which brought people most of the way through Plus in one week. We found that around mid-week, dancers became saturated and the number of calls learned in the latter half of the week was substantially fewer than in the first half. Thus, a couple years ago, we began offering Blast Classes. Because we are going to Plus, our classes are 3 weekend days and are structured as follows:

1. 3 Saturdays or 3 Sundays. They are generally in a row, but this may be modified due to hall or dancer availability.
2. Our previous classes have included lunch, but we are experimenting with our next class not including lunch and encouraging folks to bring their own in order to keep costs down. We will have an option for us to pick something up for them if they did not bring lunch.
3. Because we are going to Plus, we mix Plus calls throughout the 3 days so the "tough" calls are distributed. In other words, we are not using any standard order but rather being VERY careful about what calls are taught near each other to prevent confusion and balance the difficulty level.

4. We encourage class members to come to our club on the Friday nights between sessions to allow time to practice the calls learned in the previous session and have some fun with what they've learned. Also, this allows folks an opportunity to build relationships outside the stressful, crash-learning experience. Most dancers have come for some or all of these Friday nights. We do not teach on Fridays unless review is needed, which it rarely is due to how much dancing they did at the Blast. If it is, then we try to avoid doing too much and if a great deal of review is needed, we drop the call for the evening and review at the next Blast. The idea is to just dance, but the practice of the previous calls allows folks to be ready for the new set.

5. Classes were held 10-4 with a break for lunch.

6. We begin with teaching at every session. Basic teaching philosophy is that in an 8 hour training, the most information is retained in the first hour. So, why would we waste that time with review? We do a couple figures to get people dancing and then jump into teaching, even if we haven't used most of the calls from the week before. Review can wait! Teaching is done while the mind is the freshest.

The key to a successful Blast Class is that the dancers have a place to dance after the class is over, but it's even better if they can dance between sessions. Also, in our situation, we are getting many dancers who were not brought by friends. Thus, creating an environment of support and FUN is absolutely critical.

We try to have a singing call at the end of every tip (starting from the very first one) to keep the energy high and reinforce that which was learned in that tip or the previous tip (depending upon the confidence level of the dancers) which builds confidence that they really DO know the call. Dancer success during the singing calls is critical in making sure they maintain their confidence moving forward so if a call is not close to perfected in the patter, it is not used in the singing call.

Initially, we tend to have relatively long tips with long breaks to allow socializing and building of relationships with fellow class and club members. We found that the dancers did very well until lunch at around 1:00. After lunch, we slowed down a bit but continued to teach. Our tips become shorter with slightly shorter breaks. After 3:00, we introduce

calls with the caveat that they would have a review the following week and weren't expected to remember, but actually, with the pressure off, they do tend to remember.

Good teaching skills are absolutely critical in this environment. I have heard about a mediocre (not bad) teacher in our area that tried to do a Blast Class years ago and the class was a disaster. A part of good teaching is knowing what calls can be taught together in the same tip, hour, day, etc. and which cannot. Most, but not all, of the time, we demonstrate the call first. Always, we then walk it through until we see no faces that look lost. If we continue to see lost faces, we may demonstrate it again so they can see a picture of what they just heard. We may even decide to do something else for awhile and come back to the call. Once we have a successful (no one truly lost) walk through, we dance and dance the call. We do not necessarily wait for a call to be completely comfortable for everyone before teaching the next call because everyone has his/her calls that cause grief. We will, however, make sure that no one dancer is having too much trouble with more than one call in a tip before moving on. If one dancer is significantly holding the class back on most calls, we may need to decide that a Blast Class is not appropriate for him/her.

We have heard rumblings that dancers who participate in Blast Classes will not stay dancing. They will come, learn and then say "Ok, I've done that." I can only speak to our two Blast classes and every dancer who finished (and even two who had to leave before the final class and finish in a traditional class) is still dancing. One of these classes was held three years ago and contained only adults, so the Blast Class concept is not limited to younger dancers. Our camps attracted dancers who stayed for years after the initial accelerated learning program (as teens get older, they often get involved in other activities or move away). We plan to offer our second class of the "year" (based on the school year) this month, March. One significant advantage of a Blast Class is that it takes only 18 hours of the club's time, thus allowing us to offer more than one a year without a significant negative impact on the club.

In addition, I'd like to add that we have found Blast Classes to be an ideal add-on to our ABC classes. ABC dancers are accustomed to being able to come and go when their schedules allow. While attendance at all 3 Blast Classes is required and at the two club dances between is preferred, after the initial classes dancers can come and go as their schedules allow.

Certainly those who keep dancing regularly will be far better dancers than those that do not, but that is true of traditional classes as well. One advantage we've seen for ABC dancers coming into a Blast Class is that they have already overcome the issues with distinguishing left and right at the pace needed for dancing, so they are far ahead of others coming into a rapid-paced class. Thank you,

Ruth

FROM JERRY--

Once again, thank you to everyone for participating. We know there are more people out there trying something similar to Blast Classes. Help us rebuild our activity one square at a time!!

This is not about Callerlab or ACA. This is not about politics or who will be the next Chairman of the Board. This is about ALL of us working together for the first time in nearly a generation to REALLY do something to help Square Dancing thrive again in America. Your help and support of this new marketing plan is requested!

Happy Dancing!!!!

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