

TEN STRATEGIES FOR 2010

The Best Year Yet For Your Square Dance Club

Square dance clubs don't often think of themselves as businesses. A business management article on how to improve your business in 2010 set the wheels to turning on how the principles presented might apply to square dance clubs or councils. Here they are:

1. **Create a budget.** A budget is a necessary part of a successful business plan. Does your club have a business plan or is it doing things the way it has always been done? Develop your club's 2010 budget by looking at your club's 2009 expenses and revenue. Does your club need to save money? Is it possible to do more with less? Maybe fewer decorations at a dance? Maybe hire a local or newer caller instead of a national caller? Maybe share a dance with another club? How can you enhance your revenue? Do you need to charge more at the door? Do you need to raise club dues?
2. **Develop a marketing calendar.** This is part of your business plan. Marketing to many people means "selling" and we're not all cut out to do this. However, basic marketing means exposure. Square dancing is sold to a large percentage of people when we connect with them. Sometimes it is the idea of connecting with people that sells our activity. Put together a set of dates/events that has your club touching people, in other words public awareness opportunities. It doesn't have to be dancing. Volunteering at an event creates goodwill and exposure. Have activities listed that you do or could do every year with ideas on how to improve them. Focus on one function per month or one each quarter and **DO IT!**
3. **Encourage teamwork.** How well does everyone work together as a team off the dance floor? Some people can sell our activity. Other people excel at sweeping floors. Find out what skills exist in your club and give people a chance to use their talents. This may mean a radical departure from day's past. Be okay with that. Be prepared for it. If someone isn't good at a task but still has the energy and motivation, they should be allowed to try. The converse to this is that if there is someone that isn't doing a good job and won't change, that person needs to do something different. Even if it means they are going to be angry. Discuss leadership issues at club and council meetings. Encourage members to bring ideas to the table and allow them to be heard.
4. **Educate membership.** Do you know the latest and greatest ideas on how to hold lessons, how to keep new dancers or how to promote square dancing? Many dancers (and even callers/cuers) do things the way they were taught. Sometimes, the result is that bad habits and shortcuts become ingrained. Invite experts in to speak and educate your callers, cuers, and club membership. Be prepared to approach known issues in new ways. Attend a leadership seminar or convention. This might mean Callerlab or Roundalab or something totally different. Encourage participation by giving gift certificates to cover part of the

expenses. Doing things the same way all the time provides the same results. Right now, those results are not positive.

5. **Check the first impression.** The "Head and Shoulders" shampoo commercial from the 1990s had it right. "You only get one chance to make a first impression." How fresh do you and your club look? Walk into one of your dances like it is your first time. How does it look? Clean and well lit? Are you greeted with smiling faces? Are you welcomed to the dance with a positive expression? Is someone at the door to say good-bye at the end of the dance? Is your club talking to the new dancers? When a new dancer comes to class do you have information about your club ready to hand to them to make them feel like they are part of this experience right from the start? If you have a booth at a fair does it look fresh and updated?

In many regards, women today, have an advantage, there's a cultural thing about a woman changing her look on a fairly regular basis. New hair styles/colors, glasses, outfits, and accessories come and go. The the USA, we call it "fashion." However, in general, men create their look in about the 10th grade of high school and don't really change it until their spouses or teenage daughters tell them they have to. (Even then, it is a fight.) Men, the easiest way to update your look and be young and fresh is to find a pair of glasses (if you need them) that is popular today. No, it might not be "you," but that's not the point. The point is to create a positive first impression; one that says "I care about today!"

6. **Reward loyalty.** Do you reward loyalty? It doesn't take much. Sometimes it is as simple as a "thank you" and a handshake. For customer loyalty, have a "frequent flier" program. It doesn't take much, and while it may appear to impact the "bottom line", over time you'll get your money back. You could have an annual club potluck/dinner to honor your officers and committee chairs. You could give away ribbons as a thank you. You could give a small token of thanks to your officers or committee chairs of the council. You could even have a class potluck before graduation as a way to say thanks and welcome to your newest dancers.
7. **Analyze your product.** Square dancing tends to be done as it has "always been done." One way out of that is to survey your dancers and your students, to discover what works and what doesn't. The results may surprise you. Don't be afraid to do something different; even if it means that it has never been done before.

Have a new dancer survey to ask the dancers how they heard about us? Why not have another survey developed to hand them at graduation to ask how we can improve our product? If possible talk to people who don't commit to 20 or more weeks of lessons to find out why. Does our product need to be presented differently? A different time? A different place?

8. **Communicate** Talk to other club members. Talk to someone who is not your best friend, yet. Talk to your caller and cuer. Talk to your new dancers. What do

they do in their day job? What were their hobbies before square dancing? Where have they traveled? What was one outstanding life experience they would share? How did they get into square dancing or calling or cueing? "Either we are going to die together, or we are going to learn to live together. And if we are going to live together, we have to talk." --Eleanor Roosevelt

If you don't like how something is being done, or have feelings on how to make things better, then speak up. Don't wait for a board meeting or some other formal setting. Don't be afraid to hurt someone's feelings. Though, this is not license to be disrespectful. Have some tact. If you know two parties that aren't speaking, then find a way to get them together. Don't call it a meeting, call it a picnic. No agenda, just food. People will talk about those things that connect them.

9. **Focus on follow ups:** This comes back to a Business Plan. If you find new possibilities for dancers, how do you connect with them over time. Is there plan to welcome and integrate new dancers into your club culture? Do you have a way to keep the new dancers feeling welcome if they are not quite ready to commit to club membership? Do you have a team or committee to follow up on leads for potential new dancers? Do your club members share leads for possible new dancers? Even better, do you have a way to communicate with other clubs that might be a better geographical fit for new students? Yes, we're all hurting, but if someone lives 5 miles away from another club, perhaps that is the place they should go to start. Then, welcome them into your club as a visitor.
10. **Be Original – Try something new:** This is where you try to think of something that has never been done before, or, take something that might have been tried for six weeks before it was called a failure, and bring it to the table. Implement it and then tweak it to make it better. It is easy to say, "We tried that before in 1978, and it didn't work for us." What didn't work in 1978 or even 1993 might turn out to be one of your best promotional ideas of 2010. The important thing is to get active and be active.

The year 2010 is here with great opportunities! Yes, January is over but there is still time to make some changes and get your square dance club rolling in a new direction!

"Don't tell people how to do things, tell them what to do and let them surprise you with their results." – George S. Patton

We need YOU to lead us!

Get ready...Get set...Go!!!!!!

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