

## FROM BEGINNER TO ADVANCED – How to keep everyone happy

### *Wendy Graham*

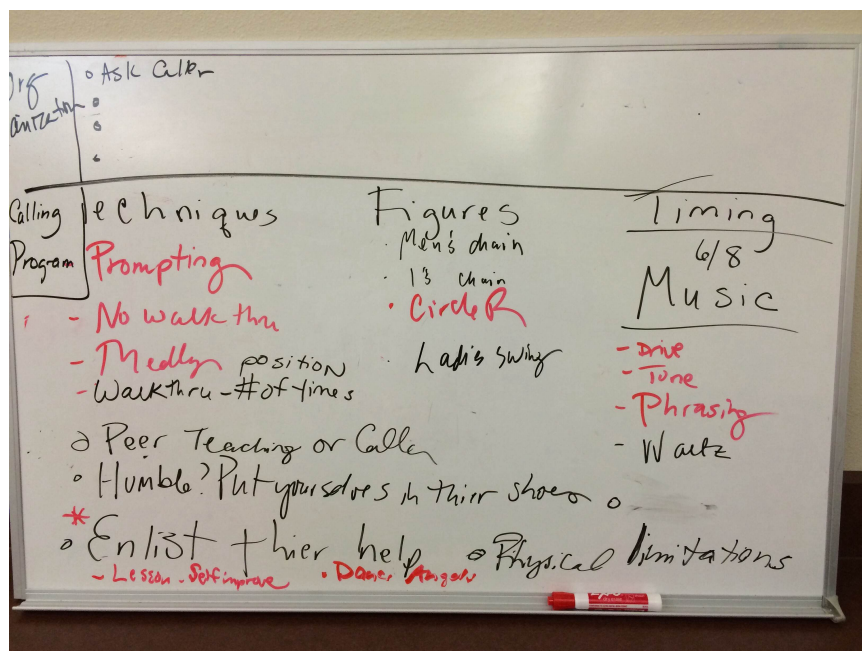
Beginner, intermediate and advanced dancers all have different needs on the dance floor. Experienced dancers want hot-shot material and beginners need easily accessible dances. What can you do as an organizer to enhance happy co-existence? Dance selection can be a big issue in keeping everyone happy and wanting to return to your dance. The difficulty is being able to create a coexisting community with all levels of dancers. We'll show you techniques you can use to increase the level of dance skill at your events quickly, all the while keeping the dancing fun for everyone.

#### **ATTENDEE NOTES:**

- have a wide variety of skills in Colorado groups: people who have emigrated from elsewhere with a lot of dance experience, newcomers
- Wendy calls BIA dances (Beginner, Intermediate, Advanced): dances that work for all levels
- what makes a dance a good BIA dance?
  - possible for beginners, interesting for people developing skills, catches interest of advanced dancers
- recap from session on building community on Saturday:
  - what community means to everyone
  - how you share community through the dancing: not just dancing with yourself + partner also with everyone in the room
  - what can you do to build your community through programming an evening of dance?
    - people who have never come to the dance before, or are just beginning, will not know that unusual figures are unusual
    - unusual figures will catch the attention of experienced dancers and be more difficult, but new dancers will just see them as another new figure
    - i.e. circle right, men's change, ladies swing
    - unusual figures can help remind experienced dancers what it's like to be a beginner
    - think about where in the programming dances like that go: later, once people know what's going on
- why are we having this conversation?
  - want the advanced people to stay, and the beginners to come back
  - sustain dance community
- need to be aware of your community, physical limitations (new under 16 dancers will make different mistakes than new over 70 dancers)
- put yourselves in the shoes of the beginning dancers
- enlist the help of experienced dancers
- 'rare opportunity for a men's chain'
- get experienced dance angels to dance with beginners
- awesome music: depends on kind of dance, and community
  - pick the best tune for a dance
  - same dance with two different tunes can seem completely different
  - phrasing in music is important
  - if the tune doesn't match the dance, then it is very difficult to follow even with a wonderful caller
  - callers need to balance calling/not calling, prompting just specific parts, when a few people get deer in the headlights

- sometimes beginners won't understand minimal prompts (i.e. "hey")
- responsibility of dancers is to look up, to take cues from other dancers as well as the caller
- remind experienced dancers to come to the lesson, remember the joy of dancing as beginners
  - start official dance time at the lesson
  - helps partner beginners with more advanced dancers
- be aware of who will need to walk through a dance (more important in dances with more than two different parts)
- have a worksheet for incoming callers with issues specific to their hall/community
  - please give demonstrations, we're trying to do style points
  - have one announcement after each dance vs. all at once
  - helps callers to know these things in advance (before the day of), or post on website
- balance between experienced dancers helping new people in a set vs. listening to caller
  - depends on the caller, who's doing the teaching
  - 'let the caller do the verbal part, the dancers do the physical cues'
  - beginners aren't going to hear either, if two people are trying to teach at once
- encourage new people to come to the front of the hall
  - can put unwanted spotlight on them
  - grand march type thing can mix people up
  - mix up squares
- try calling from the bottom of the hall, or the side (beginners tend to be at the bottom of the hall)
  - issues with communicating with the band
  - might work better for lesson
  - can confuse people who are used to calling coming from the front

(then we went and did some dances)



Notes taken by Lucy Frey