

Call of the Month: Recovering from mistakes by Barry Leiba

All dancers, new and experienced, make mistakes from time to time. Sometimes the dancer can correct the mistake immediately. At other times, someone else in the square (or even someone in another square!) can help, or the other dancers can leave a hole for the lost dancer to find and occupy. The jocular “call” GO OVER THERE AND TURN AROUND (abbreviated “GOTATA”) is often used in such situations. Nevertheless, despite all efforts to keep things going, squares occasionally break down.

Since our aim is to dance, the immediate goal of a broken square is to resume dancing as quickly as possible. This month, we'll look at some ways to do that. We'll use some concepts that we saw in earlier columns about formations and formation awareness. We'll also look at ways you can help keep your square from breaking down in the first place.

As an individual dancer, you must realize when you're lost or mistaken, and accept help when it's given. Always listen carefully to the caller, who will often give you hints or cue you through the difficult parts. For instance, a common mistake when doing the call EXTEND from a left-handed setup is to switch hands and make a right-handed setup as you go. The caller will often say “EXTEND to a left-hand wave” in order to avert that error; if you're listening, you'll have no problem.

Another individual thing to watch is body flow. Square *dancing* ought to have smooth body flow, and most of the time it does. If you don't know where to go, chances are you should keep moving **slowly** in the direction that you've been going. If you were turning to the right, keep turning to the right. By slowing down, you give someone else a chance to help. In general, if you're lost, don't turn around and wander off in another direction — abrupt changes of direction are occasionally right, but more often they're wrong and will get you even more lost.

If you know that you're lost and there's no one to help you, look for the square's symmetry. Unless the caller has done some asymmetric directional stuff (like having only one couple half-sashay, or having “the line nearest the caller” do something different) square dancing always retains symmetry even if the caller makes a mistake! If you're a head boy, **know who the other head boy is**. You will always be opposite him in the square; if he's on the end of one line looking in, you'll be on the other end of the other line looking in. If he's number one in a column, you'll be number one in the other side of the column. Um... unless, of course, he's made a mistake too. You will always be diagonally opposite from your symmetry, and you'll always be facing the opposite wall — if he's facing the caller, you'll be facing the back wall. So, if you're lost and everyone else is still going, look for the hole and get there. If you can, find your symmetry and you'll know where you need to be and which way you need to face.

Another thing that will help your square is to **avoid chatter**. This goes along with the advice to listen to the caller: if you (or someone else in your square) is talking, then you can't pay attention to the caller's cues and hints, nor indeed, even to the calls themselves. If you have to help someone verbally, do it with a brief word or two. “Over here.”, “Turn around.”, and “Follow Allison.” are usually better bets than something wordy. Don't analyze mistakes during the tip. As Kenny Rogers sings in *The Gambler*, there'll be time enough for countin' when the dealin's done.

Well, you've done all that and your square has broken down despite it all? The most obvious way to get back into the dance when your square breaks down is to “go home”, return to a static square, and wait for the caller to get the rest of the dancers home too. You can then start the next sequence fresh. The trouble with this is that the sequence might be long, and you might be standing for some time before you can start dancing

again. There are better ways than waiting it out.

The first rule of thumb to use when your square is broken is to **make lines**. The best thing, generally, is to make “normal” lines (couples with the “boys” on the left and the “girls” on the right) and to align them with a wall. It doesn't matter whether you're with your partner or whether the lines are parallel to the head or side walls. Then you can watch the rest of the floor and when they're in facing lines, you can continue.

Some callers don't get the formation back into facing lines very often either, though, especially at levels above Plus. You can get even better results by knowing the basic formations. When you hear FERRIS WHEEL, if you can immediately get into STARTING DOUBLE-PASS-THRU formation, then after everyone else has done the FERRIS WHEEL you can continue from there. Make normal couples and worry about the sexes later (at Mainstream and Plus you'll most likely be right anyway). Similarly, get to know other calls and formations. If you hear SWING THRU or SPIN CHAIN THRU or RELAY THE DEUCEY, make waves so you'll be ready for the **next** call — right-handed waves will be correct most of the time; if you're watching the floor you can make left-handed waves when necessary (and perhaps you can even get the sexes right if you know whether the boys are in the middle, for instance). The more aware you are of formations, the better the chances are that you can get your square dancing again.

Now, let's go back a little bit: one good way to **make** these formations is by going back home to a static square! Then if you need facing lines, the heads can bend to make lines with the couple to their right (who just slide over without turning). If you need DOUBLE-PASS-THRU, then heads can wheel into the center to face each other. For waves, the heads can lead right and make waves with the sides. Note that it's always the **heads** taking the action. That avoids the problem of having perpendicular lines because no one was in charge. If you get squared up,

someone who knows what formation is needed announces the formation, and the heads take the required action, you should be able to get back into things and keep dancing.

One more tip to keep the square going; I mentioned it a bit earlier: **Always align your formation with the walls**. When you get back in after a mistake, when you're promenading and the caller has one couple WHEEL AROUND or BACKTRACK, or any other time you're making some kind of line or column, be sure it's parallel to a wall. Formations that are angled are confusing, and it's easy to get lost, forget how far you've turned, and so on. Unless there's a good reason to do otherwise (and there seldom is), line up with the walls.

Finally, try to learn to continue dancing even when you know your square isn't right. That's easy when the only mistake is that two girls are switched. It's a bit harder if a boy and a girl are switched and they don't know it, or they aren't able to dance the other part. That's one reason that it's useful to be “bidansual” — if you get your sex switched in the middle of a tip, you can keep dancing and fix it later. Even if you're not bidansual, you can often continue dancing in the wrong role long enough for the caller to get you home.

So there are some things to think about: listen to the caller, accept help from others, look for the empty spot, understand symmetry, trust the body flow, be aware of formations, align your formation with the walls, and learn to be able to keep on dancing after a sex change. And isn't dancing what we're here for, after all?

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