

## *Communication is the*



to building relationships. We all know that good communication between husband and wife, parent and child, supervisor and employee makes stronger relationships. Why wouldn't this apply to square dancing?

In order to have a strong cohesive group, we need to stay "connected". For snowbirds, square dancers are their extended family when they are in our area. For others who have no family, square dancers are their family. When our dancers are ill and feel all alone, they need to know that their square dance family is there for them. When there is a death, they need to know their square dance family grieves too.

What kind of club do you belong to; one that you feel a part of or one that just gets together to dance once a week, twice a month, etc. with no other contact?

What can we do to have a club that feels like a family?

At the dances don't let anyone sit by themselves. If you see someone sitting alone, either join them or get them to move to a group of people. Introduce them to the people in the group; tell them a few facts about each person i.e. where they are from, where they work, how long they have belonged to the club, etc. Having commonality creates great friendships.

If you have a first time visitor, in addition to other dancers introducing themselves, the president should meet them and find out a little about them. When it's time to introduce the first time visitors, the president should introduce them and tell the group what you found out about them. Many people do not like to speak in front of a group so it's difficult for them to even get their name out. If the president does the introductions and gives a little information about them, there may be someone in the group who has something in common with the visitor and it will start a conversation between them. Just because you have greeters at the door when people arrive, doesn't make you the friendliest club. Greeting visitors is not just a job for the officers; all dancers should welcome visitors. Even if someone attends your dances on a regular basis but they haven't joined your club, they should be greeted like first time visitors. Perhaps with these efforts, they may decide to join your club.

Does your club have a newsletter? This is a great way to keep in touch with your members when they are traveling, sick or gone for the summer. This doesn't have to be anything fancy; it can just be an email but include news about the club, birthdays and anniversaries, illnesses and deaths, recognitions, etc. One club president sends an email

right after the dance to not only their members but anyone else interested in knowing what is happening in their club. Another club has a formal newsletter with a name that is distributed monthly and mailed to those who do not have email. Former members that want to keep in touch with the club, pay a small fee to cover postage.

How much visiting can people do at a dance, especially those that square and round dance? Why not plan some special events i.e. dinner theaters, lunch cruise, sightseeing etc. Form a committee for each event and make sure all members are assigned to at least one committee. Committee meetings with a meal included is a good time to get to know everyone and those that attend the special events also have opportunities to get to know each other better.

Get all your members involved with the work of putting on a dance. I find that when you let people volunteer to work in the kitchen, there are some who never volunteer and therefore don't take their turn and there are others who are always working the kitchen. Set up a schedule at the beginning of the year; pair members of long standing with new members. This is another opportunity to get to know each other. Also schedule greeters for each dance; make sure everyone takes a turn. If your club is large enough, it may be that each member will only have to take one turn in the kitchen and one turn at the door. Does your club have the treasurer sit at the door for every dance to collect the money? Why not schedule four people at the door; one to collect money, one to sell 50/50 tickets and two to greet? You just might get more volunteers for the treasurer position if they know they don't have to sit at the door every dance.

How do you communicate with your members between dances? Be sure to gather everyone's email address. This is great for quick messages regarding reminders about upcoming dances, notification of illnesses or deaths, etc. Of course, don't forget about the members who do not have email! Some clubs have a telephone committee or communications committee who call everyone when information needs to be distributed. The membership list can be divided up so that one person doesn't have to make all the calls. Have several people on the committee and each one has 5 – 7 people to call. Volunteers will be more willing to assist if they don't have too many calls to make!

What about a membership directory? All of your members should be listed on a membership list or in a "directory" with copies given to all of the members. This list should contain not only names and addresses, but phone numbers and email addresses, summer addresses, birthdays and anniversaries. I have to "toot my horn" here. Last year I created a photo directory for Buttons & Bows of Lakeland. There is a photo of each member along with their names, address, phone number and email address. In another section all of the birthdays are listed by month and another list of anniversaries by month. The first page lists all of the officers with their phone numbers and email addresses, as well as a list of all the committees and their chairman. There is a copy of the schedule for the year showing theme dances, callers and cuers. The second page

explains about club colors, membership responsibilities, and anything else a new member would need to know that isn't included in the Bylaws. Bylaws are also included, as well as a list of past presidents by year(s) and the year each member joined the club. Having a picture directory puts pictures with names so members can learn each other's names, and it puts all the important information into one document. The directory is updated once a year and if there are any changes during the year, they are communicated through the newsletter. Whenever someone joins the club, they are not only given a badge but they immediately receive a copy of the directory.

Banner raids and retrievals – invite all the members to go. Why not even include your class members? Perhaps you can meet for dinner before you go dancing or go out to dinner or for dessert after the dance; this is another way for people to get to know each other. Carpooling to the dances is another way to get to know each other.

I know of a club (in another association) that meets once a week for breakfast; another opportunity. This same club attends several conventions and they always travel together; nobody travels alone. They meet at a restaurant for breakfast to start their trip and then they head out. During the convention, they all eat meals together, go sightseeing and shopping together, etc. They all plan their vacations around these trips and they take one or two weeks for the trip and make stops along the way.

These are just a few suggestions; perhaps you have others.

I have a personal story to relate. It has to do with church but can easily be applied to square dancing. Last year I was homeless for five months and had to move to Lakeland to live with my sister and brother-in-law. My church is in Auburndale so while I was in Lakeland I attended a church near my sister's house. During those five months, I never heard from anyone from the church in Auburndale to ask why I wasn't attending church, was I ok, was there anything they could do to help, etc. Needless to say, I'm looking for another church. How many dancers have visited your dances and not come back for the same reasons? How many dancers visit your dances on a regular basis but they won't join your club? Why?

Penny Green