

# *Tips for Your Tips*

*A series devoted to helping you become a more confident dancer*

*By Jan Thompson*

Whether we look to square dancing for an opportunity to socialize, exercise to music, or challenge our little gray cells, we all want to have FUN!

Squares sometimes break down; that is a fact of square dancing life. However, I believe that having one's square frequently break down detracts from the fun, and it is stressful to feel completely lost in the square. On the other hand, there is a feeling of shared accomplishment and exhilaration when your square successfully finishes a sequence. With this in mind, I will be offering tips in my column to help your confidence and increase your enjoyment on the square dance floor.

## **The Value of Hands**

As Neil Diamond sang: "Hands... touching hands... reaching out... touching me... touching you." Square dancing is a social activity, and the touching of hands constantly reminds us that our square is a team of eight people working together.

1. Take care when taking hands. Do not grab, squeeze, or pull. Sometimes a touch is all that is needed. Respect signs such as badges that indicate an injury is present.
2. Take hands to establish formation. That will help to keep your lines and waves straight. Clear and neat formations make for easier dancing.
3. Touching hands momentarily at the end of all calls helps you to respond more confidently and quickly to the next call by identifying your partner at the moment (especially useful if the next call requires interaction with your partner); recognizing the square's formation and your position in it (in a line or wave, you know instantly where you are a center or end – ends touch one hand, centers touch two hands), and allowing dancers who are lost to more easily see the "open spot" an open palm can act as a signal to an unsure dancer and guide him/her to the correct spot). An outstretched arm and welcoming hand have saved many squares from a breakdown.
4. Another hand signal is the pointed finger ("go there"). Use this signal judiciously, when a dancer looks lost or you are certain he/she is headed in the wrong direction.
5. Touching hands help you as well as the dancers you touch. Many times a momentary touch helps another dancer feel confident that he/she has executed the call successfully and is in a correct position and among friends.
6. Sometimes, it is helpful to momentarily touch hands between the parts of a call. During Load The Boat (a Plus call), the centers touching hands after each of the four parts helps the dancers identify with whom they should do the next part.
7. Hand contacts during the execution of a call help to synchronize the dancers involved. During Spin The Top, momentarily forming a wave after the trade helps to synchronize

the foursome while helping the dancers identify whether they are now the “casters” or the “Move up-ers.” During Spin Chain Thru, the various hand contacts help to synchronize the two halves of the square.

8. Taking hands while moving together makes it easier to match your speeds and adjust if necessary, which makes for smoother dancing.
9. Know when to let go! For instance, during a Pull By, let go when you begin to pass another dancer so as not to injure him/her.

Happy dancing!

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