

“Top Ten” Lessons Learned After 10 Years

This approach continues to draw large numbers of couples to the beginner’s class, but the round dance groups that they are supposed to feed are not growing as fast as one would expect.

Every year we change our approach slightly to try to transition more dancers into round dancing. **Here is our “Top Ten” list of observations based on 10 years of trial and error teaching:**

1. As square dancing has found out, it is difficult to find couples who are willing to make the **longterm commitment** that it takes to make round dancing your hobby.
2. Ballroom and social dancing is enjoying good popularity now, but many people who come out for lessons want **fast results** - they just want to learn enough to go dancing occasionally without embarrassing themselves.
3. First and foremost, you must **teach them what they sign up for** – ballroom dancing. You can’t advertising a ballroom dance class and then just teach them round dancing. The round dancing is best accepted if it comes later and in small doses. You have to “Hook Em” gently.
4. One of the biggest factors in keeping people coming back is to make them feel part of a closeknit social group. Many keep coming longer for the **sociability** than for the dancing.
5. We need to provide the students with opportunities for “**dance time**” to practice what they learn.
6. We, as teachers, need to **get to know the dancers better** on a personal level.
7. This approach to **teaching is a challenging** one that requires lots of preparation, judgment and flexibility.
8. We need to develop a better approach for transitioning dancers from one round dance level to the next. **Transition** and **Retention** are both key issues.
9. Because our beginner’s class is aimed at social ballroom dancing with a follow-up into intermediate round dancing, **we do not teach the Phase II Two Step and Waltz** figures and dances that many club square dancers need. We teach this in separate classes.
10. While the large numbers of beginners does not always result in large numbers in round dance clubs, the income from the first year dancers **financially** helps the round dance teacher to maintain dancing groups at all levels.

Summary

After 10 years, we still feel this is an excellent way to bring in new dancers, but the approach does have limitations and needs to be adjusted by each teacher to their unique situation. Getting large numbers of new dancers is important, but it is only the first step. It must be followed up by good Retention and Transition plans if the round dance community is to benefit.