



The Checkpoint System for Modern Western Square Dancing

Supporting Newer Dancers

by Kurt Gollhardt

Introduction

This presentation describes a proposal for an experimental new system for coordinating classes and newer dancer dancers.

Combined with aggressive recruitment efforts, this system is designed to increase class retention by providing newer dancer dances early and often.

MWSD participation has been on a downward trend for decades.

The only hope of slowing or even reversing that trend is to try new things.

We Always Need New Dancers In Order To Keep Square Dancing Alive and Fun

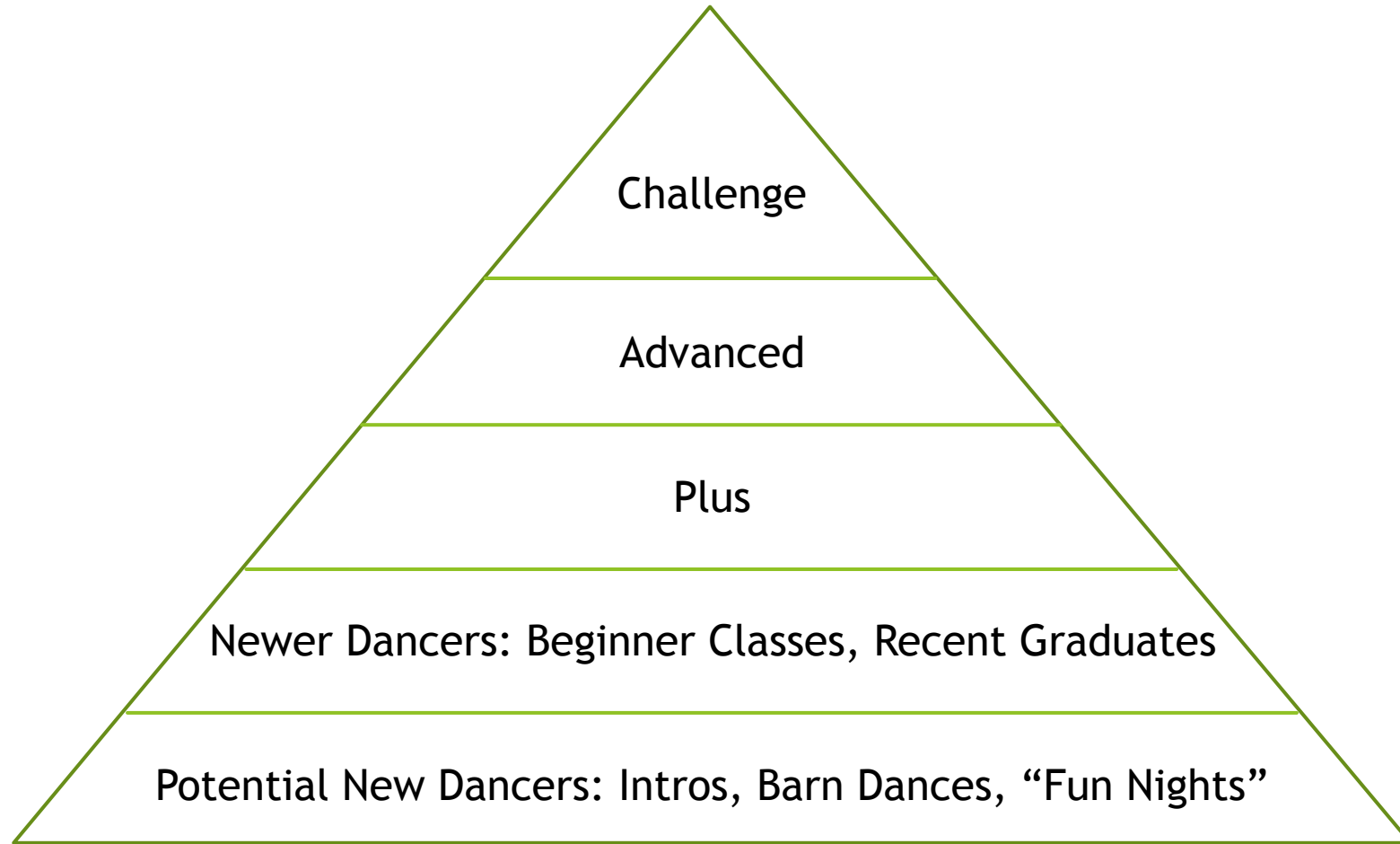
- ▶ The #1 Problem We Face Is: NOT ENOUGH NEW DANCERS
 - ▶ Recruiting Is Hard Work But We've Got To Do It
- ▶ Most of Our Clubs and Associations are now Too Small
 - ▶ Too Small To Sustain Themselves Financially (as halls get more expensive)
 - ▶ Too Small To Have Enough Volunteers To Run Effectively
 - ▶ Too Small To Reliably Have Enough Squares
- ▶ We Will Always Lose Dancers:
 - ▶ To Health Issues (age-related or otherwise)
 - ▶ To Work Demands, Family Changes, and Relocation
 - ▶ To Other Activities
- ▶ We **MUST** Constantly Bring In More New Dancers Than We Lose



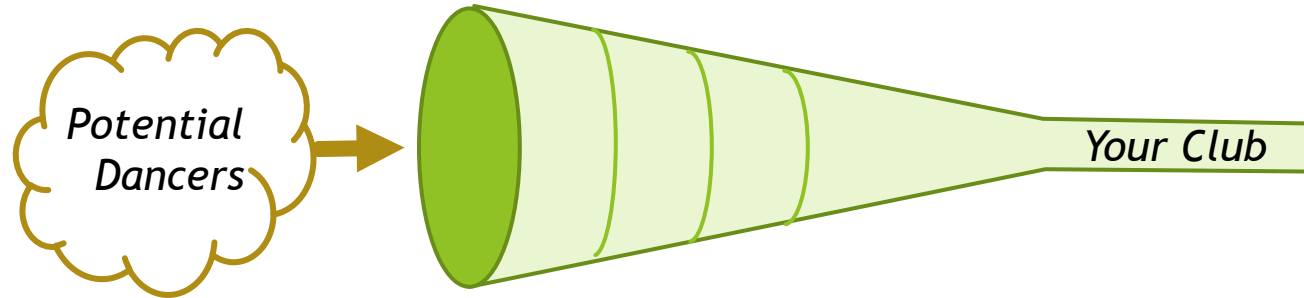
The Pyramid

The Base of our Pyramid, our Foundation, is made up of New Beginner Dancers. Each level must have more new dancers than the one above it, since only some will eventually move up. Without a Strong Foundation, the Entire Pyramid will Collapse.

Plus Is Not The Base



The Funnel



- ▶ There Are Many Steps On The Way Toward Club Membership
- ▶ Only A Fraction Of People Reach Each Step And Go On To The Next
 - ▶ Only A Tiny Percentage Of Those You Reach With Advertisement Respond
 - ▶ Only About 10% Who Attend Intros Take A Class
 - ▶ Some Of Those Drop Out Early, Once They See What It's Like
 - ▶ More Will Drop Out Along The Way, Especially If Not Enough Fun
 - ▶ Only Some Who Graduate Will Go On To Dance Regularly
- ▶ We Need To Open The Funnel As Wide As Possible, On BOTH Ends
 - ▶ Increase *INPUT* Of Prospects, Increase *OUTPUT* Of New Club Members & Dancers

Goals

- ▶ Increase Class Recruitment By “Widening The Mouth Of The Funnel”
 - ▶ Encourage Aggressive Promotion, Intros, “Fun Nights”, And Other Ways To Get Students INTO Classes
- ▶ Increase Class Retention By Reducing Losses During (Long) Classes
 - ▶ Support New Dancers With Frequent Dances At Their Level
- ▶ Support Classes Starting At Different Times Of Year
 - ▶ Support Current September & January Starts Now
 - ▶ Facilitate Transition To Year-Round Multi-Starts Later
- ▶ Bring Students From Different Classes Together
 - ▶ Both From Different Clubs & (Where Feasible) From Different Start Dates
 - ▶ Enthusiasm Is Contagious
- ▶ Reinforce Dance Skills & Build A Strong Dancer Base

Dances for Newer Dancers (“Newer Dancer Hoedowns”)

- ▶ We Can’t Just Teach Students The Calls, We Need To Let Them Dance Them
- ▶ Dances for Students (and Recent Graduates) Have Many Benefits:
 - ▶ Gives Them Extra Practice (“Floor Time”)
 - ▶ Exposes Them To Multiple Callers
 - ▶ Lets Them Experience the Fun of Just Dancing
 - ▶ Gives Them A Glimpse of the Wider Community Outside Their Own Club/Class
 - ▶ May Help To Get Them “Hooked”, Increasing Class Retention
- ▶ Should Start As Early As Two Months Into Class
- ▶ These Dances Should be Ongoing Through Completion of Class
- ▶ Even After Graduation, Build Skill & Confidence With A “New Graduate” Dance

The Challenge:

What To Call At “Newer Dancer” Dances?

- ▶ Different Classes Go At Different Rates
- ▶ Classes Start On Different Weeks, Even Different Times Of Year
- ▶ Every Teacher Uses A Different Teaching Order
 - ▶ Even The Same Teacher Might Modify Their Order Each Time They Teach A Course Or Use Different Orders For Different Clubs
 - ▶ Most Do NOT Use Strict CALLERLAB Order
 - ▶ There Are, HOWEVER, Some General Patterns And Dependencies
- ▶ Newer Dancer Dances Should Welcome Students From The Whole Area
- ▶ Callers And Teachers Must Today Closely Coordinate To Find “Common” List
 - ▶ Different At Every Dance, And Usually Changing Until The Last Minute
 - ▶ A Service Like The SCVSDA “Calls Taught” List by Joe Dehn Helps Immensely, But...

The Checkpoint System

Serving The Needs of Students from Multiple Classes

- ▶ Rather Than Requiring Detailed Coordination of Teaching Orders, Establish a Set of Milestones, or “**Checkpoints**”, On The Way To Plus
 - ▶ We Could, For Example, Divide Plus Into **Eight (8) Checkpoints**, In Order
 - ▶ **Checkpoint 8** is Full Plus (But With A Difficulty Level Appropriate For Recent Graduates)
 - ▶ At An Average Class Speed, This Would Be About One Checkpoint A Month
 - ▶ Classes Can Go At Different Speeds
 - ▶ Some Classes May Stop At Earlier Checkpoints And NOT Go All The Way To Plus
- ▶ Dances Would Be Planned & Published To Be At A Certain **Checkpoint** Number
 - ▶ Dancers Will Not Be Expected To Know Any Calls Beyond That Checkpoint
- ▶ Each Teacher Can Still Teach Individual Calls In Any Order
- ▶ Each Class Aims To Reach An Appropriate **Checkpoint** In Time For Each Dance
 - ▶ Teachers Can Teach *Additional* Calls (From Future Checkpoints); They Just Won’t Get Used At The Dance
- ▶ Instead Of Planning Dances Around A Set Of Classes, You Can Plan Each Class (Independently) Around A Target Dance Schedule

Checkpoint Dance Series For Newer Dancers

- ▶ Dance Flyers Indicate Which Checkpoint Number(s) Will Be Used
 - ▶ Dance Callers Can Prepare Ahead Of Time With Known Call List
 - ▶ Teachers & Class Coordinators Can Tell Students Which Dances They Can Attend
- ▶ Schedule An Ongoing Series Of Dances With Different Checkpoints
 - ▶ Recommend At Least Monthly Checkpoint Dances, Preferably More
- ▶ Each Dance Can Be Single-Level (One Checkpoint) Or Multi-Level (2 Checkpoints)
 - ▶ Recommended Multi-Level Format (To Bring Different Classes Together):
 - ▶ 1/3 of Tips at Higher Checkpoint; 2/3 at Lower Checkpoint (“All-Skate”)
 - ▶ No One Sits Out For More Than One In Three Tips
 - ▶ **Whole Dance Is Still For Newer Dancers With No Full Club-Level Tips**
 - ▶ Reduce Time Out By Having Shorter Breaks Around The 1/3 Tips
 - ▶ Pick Checkpoints Based On Expected Class Progress (e.g. 1 & 5, 2 & 6, 3 & 7, 4 & 8)
- ▶ Focus On Standard Applications

“Main Series” Dances

Monthly Dances Coordinated With Class Schedules

- ▶ One Dance A Month Should Use Recommended **“Main Series”** Checkpoints
 - ▶ These Checkpoints Are Chosen To Match Expected Class Schedules (see next slide)
- ▶ Other Newer Dancer Dances In Same Month Can Use Any Checkpoint(s)
- ▶ The “Main Series” Schedule Can Be Adapted To Best Fit The Needs Of An Area
- ▶ The Recommended Schedule Provides For Any Combination Of:
 - ▶ Two Zero-To-Plus Class Starts, in September and January
 - ▶ (Partial Support For An Additional Start in May)
 - ▶ Three “Short” Class Starts (For Example, A 12-Week **Checkpoint 3** Class):
 - ▶ January, May, September
- ▶ The Schedule Allows For Some Flexibility In Class Speeds

Recommended “Main Series” Dance Schedule

Multi-Level Dances With 2/3 of Tips at Lower Checkpoint
(Brings Together Students From Different Classes)

Checkpoint Levels For “Main” Dances	Multi-Start CP 3 (SSD) Classes	January Plus Classes	September Plus Classes	Possible May Plus Class
Jan: CP 3 & 4	3	<i>Class Starts</i>	3 or 4	(7)
Feb: CP 1 & 4	1	1	4	(8)
Mar: CP 2 & 5	2	2	5	
Apr: CP 3 & 6	3	3	6	
May: CP 3 & 7	3	3	7	<i>Class Starts</i>
Jun: CP 1 & 4	1	4	(8)	1
Jul: CP 2 & 5	2	5		2
Aug: CP 3 & 6	3	6		3
Sep: CP 3 & 7	3	7	<i>Class Starts</i>	3
Oct: CP 1 & 8	1	8	1	(4)
Nov: CP 2 & 3*	2		2	(5)
Dec: CP 3 & 6	3		3	6

* November offers an extra bit of CP 3 dancing for those who chose to stay at CP 3 (SSD) for a while.

Checkpoint 3 = SSD (Club 50)

- ▶ CALLERLAB Has Recognized An Experimental System For “Sustainable Square Dancing” (aka “SSD 50”)
 - ▶ Based on Jerry Story’s “Club 50”
 - ▶ Jerry Story is Chair of the new Ad Hoc Committee
 - ▶ NOT An Official CALLERLAB “Program” (Like Basic, MS, Plus, etc.)
- ▶ SSD Is Aimed At 12 Weeks of Instruction So We’ll Use It As Checkpoint 3
- ▶ Checkpoint 3 (SSD) has Half of the Calls in Plus (~50 of 100 calls)
 - ▶ (The 2nd Half Has Many Longer More-Complex Calls, So Needs 5 Checkpoints vs 3)
- ▶ Checkpoint 3 Dancers Can Dance At EVERY Dance In The Main Series
 - ▶ At Least 2/3 of Tips at Every “Main Series” Dance will be at Checkpoint 3 or Less
 - ▶ Could Be Supplemented With Additional Checkpoint 3 Dances
- ▶ With Growing Support For SSD 50, National Callers Will Increasingly Be Willing To Call Dances At The Checkpoint 3 (SSD) Level

Checkpoint Targets

- ▶ Checkpoint 3 = CALLERLAB's 12-Week "SSD 50" (Formerly "Club 50")
 - ▶ Checkpoints 1 & 2 Roughly Correspond To SSD Lessons 1-4 & 5-8
- ▶ MAINSTREAM Dancers Can Dance At Checkpoints 1 Through 3
 - ▶ (But SSD & Checkpoint 3 Dancers Do Not Yet Know All Of Mainstream)
 - ▶ MS Dancers Can Dance at Every "Main Series" Dance for At Least 2/3 of Tips
- ▶ Checkpoints 4 & 5 Introduce Some Plus Calls & Complete Basic & MS
 - ▶ Checkpoint 5 Dancers Can Now Dance Mainstream
- ▶ Checkpoint 8 Completes The "Plus" Program
 - ▶ "Checkpoint 8" Dances/Tips Are Aimed At Recent Plus Graduates
- ▶ Note that we DON'T expect visiting national callers to call intermediate checkpoints (other than CP 3 & 8) any more than we now expect them to call class-level dances.

Checkpoint Dance Guidelines For Newer Dancer Success

- ▶ Anyone Can Host Checkpoint Dances According To These Guidelines
 - ▶ Clubs, Callers, Callers Association, Dancers Association
 - ▶ We ALL Have An Interest In Supporting New Dancers
- ▶ Checkpoint Level(s) of Each Newer Dancer Dance Should Be Published In Advance
- ▶ Checkpoint Dances Should Include Only Checkpoint-Level Tips
 - ▶ Focus of Dance is on Newer Dancers, So Full Club-Level Plus or MS Tips Don't Make Sense
 - ▶ Checkpoint 8 is OK Because It's "Gentle" Plus Specifically For Recent Graduates
 - ▶ Both Single-Level and Multi-Level (Multiple Checkpoints) are OK
- ▶ At Least One Dance A Month Should Use "Main Series" Checkpoints
 - ▶ Coordinate With Other Checkpoint Dance Hosts To Decide Which One Will Use Main Series
- ▶ Coordinate With Other Checkpoint Dance Hosts To Avoid Conflicts
- ▶ All Dances Aimed At Newer Dancers Should Follow These Checkpoint Guidelines
- ▶ Club Nights & Dances Not Specifically Aimed At Newer Dancers CAN Include Checkpoint TIPS

What Does This Mean For GDP? (The SCVSDA General Dance Program)

- ▶ The Main Goals Of GDP Are Now Met By Checkpoints 3 & 4
 - ▶ Checkpoint 3: Half The Size Of Plus (50 Calls), Dance Opportunities Year Round
 - ▶ Checkpoint 4: A Short List (Less Than MS) With Some Of The Feel Of Plus
- ▶ The Checkpoint System Can **Replace** GDP & The General Dance Program
 - ▶ Members of the GDP Committee Have Expressed Their Support for This ***IF*** The Checkpoint System Receives Sufficient Support from Clubs & Callers To Sustain The Recommended Main Dance Series
- ▶ The Checkpoint Approach Goes Beyond The Goals Of GDP
 - ▶ Also Supports Dancers Who Are Either **Before Or Beyond** The Halfway Point

Checkpoints: A Passport To Fun



- ▶ Help Students Track Their Progress
- ▶ Celebrate Each Milestone With:
 - ▶ Checkpoint # Stamp In Passport
 - ▶ Initialed By Teacher
 - ▶ Cake! 😊
- ▶ Helps Students Feel Included
- ▶ Also Helps Them Understand Which Dances They Can Attend (by comparing Checkpoint numbers)
- ▶ Should Link To Website Explaining The Checkpoint System
- ▶ Similar To Milestones In Other Activities:
 - ▶ For Example, Karate Belt Colors

Additional Materials

- ▶ Checkpoint Call Lists (Basic/MS/Plus Calls Grouped Into Checkpoints)
- ▶ Sample Teaching Orders
 - ▶ CALLERLAB SSD 50 Lesson Plan For Checkpoints 1 to 3
 - ▶ Alternative Teaching Order For Checkpoints 1 to 8
- ▶ Sample Choreography For Each Checkpoint
 - ▶ Patter Sequences & Singing Calls
 - ▶ For Checkpoints 1 to 3 Use Material From CALLERLAB SSD 50 Lesson Plan
 - ▶ Additional Material For Checkpoints 4 to 8 Will Be Collected & Published
- ▶ Template For Passport Books
- ▶ FAQ & Informational Pamphlets

Other Recommendations

- ▶ Use A Partner Rotation System At Classes & Dances
 - ▶ Pair Students With Angels If Possible
- ▶ Introduce Extended Applications Gradually, At Club Nights & Later Classes
- ▶ Supplement Classes With Occasional Review/Workshop Sessions (No New Calls)
- ▶ Work Together On Promotional Activities, Joint Advertising, etc.
- ▶ Collect Data To Measure How Well We're Doing
 - ▶ (Anonymous) Class Enrollment & Graduation Numbers Should Be Collected
 - ▶ Look For Trends Over Time, Including Historic Data, to See If We're "Widening The Funnel"
 - ▶ Also Measure Overall Success Of MWSD:
 - ▶ Total # of Dancer "Fun" Hours, Including Class, Club, Dances, Festivals

Appendix: History of “Short Lists”

- ▶ The Need For A Shorter Entry Level Has Been Known (By Some) For Some Time But Is Now Getting Increased Traction As More Clubs Struggle To Survive
- ▶ Mainstream Is Too Long. Plus Is Way Too Long.
- ▶ Efforts To Construct a Fun Subset With Variety That Covers Fundamentals:
 - ▶ Rio Grande Valley 50-Call List => “Club 50” => “SSD 50” (Sustainable Square Dance)
 - ▶ Recommended 12 Weeks for around 50 Calls (Aggressive)
 - ▶ SCVSDA GDP 50-Call List
 - ▶ Recommended 12-16 Weeks for around 50 Calls
 - ▶ CALLERLAB Condensed Teaching Order (Led by Tim Marriner)
 - ▶ Recommended 12 Weeks for around 30 Calls
 - ▶ ACA (American Callers Association) “One Floor List”