

## Talking Up Square Dancing

### **When talking to friends or colleagues:**

First of all, if anyone asks you why you square dance so much, your first response should be *“because it’s fun and I enjoy it. I get some exercise and I get together with friends without having to set up an event. I can just show up at a dance.”*

Stop talking about the “Good Old Days”, when there were 40 clubs and attendance was typically 6-10 squares, with some clubs having 15 to 20 squares. Nobody wants to hear how good it used to be, they want to be involved with something that is good right now. When talking about your club, don’t say, *“Oh, we get 2 to 3 squares.”* Instead, enthusiastically say, *“We usually get 20 to 30 dancers and sometimes as many as 40 or 45 with guests.”* It’s the same thing, but with a positive spin.

When talking about square dancing, ask what type of music they like. Whatever their answer, be prepared to say that callers these days use some of that, in fact on any given night you might hear country, oldies, modern pop & hip-hop, standards, or even classical.

Talk about how it is a great way to meet and interact with people from all walks of life in an inclusive, non-threatening atmosphere.

Here’s a question you can put to them. *Many people exercise, and many people socialize, but how many do both at the same time? Square dancers do it all the time.*

Sometimes you can get them asking questions. You mention that you are going square dancing tomorrow night. They say “Oh, I remember that from grade school.” You reply, *“You should drop in for a little while and see how it has evolved into an interactive dance form. You can have some refreshments while you are there.”* If they ask you to elaborate, you can then explain how modern square dancing works.

If they come to watch and express an interest in joining, don’t talk about weeks of “lessons” or “classes.” Instead, invite them to the next open house or introductory dance and explain that, after that, there will be a series of “introductory dances” that will teach them the vocabulary that will allow them to square dance all over the world. If they say “all over the world?” you can answer with *“the vocabulary is universal and you can dance in Japan, Europe, and even Saudi Arabia.”*

**Elevator Pitch** (This section is taken, with permission, from the CALLERLAB Square Dance Marketing Manual)

An elevator pitch is a brief and succinct statement that is used to spark interest in square dancing. It should be short, taking approximately 20 to 30 seconds to state. When someone asks you about square dancing, what do you say? Here are a few examples:

*"I love square dancing! I've met so many of my friends at square dances. It's a lively, fun hobby. It's easy to learn, and we dance to all kinds of music today. I love that I get to dance with so many different people, have fun, and get some great exercise while I'm doing it. You should try it."*

*"Square dancing is an art and a sport combined into one. We know all the calls, but don't know what will be called next, so we have to pay attention. It's fun working with the other dancers in the square to get through all the calls successfully. So, it's good exercise both mentally and physically. Mostly though, it's just a lot of fun. You should try it."*

This tactic is a one-to-one tactic that you would usually use in a conversation with someone individually. Ending the statement with "You should try it" almost always generates a response. If the response is a follow up question like "Where or when do you dance?" you can talk more about the activity. Be sure to answer their question. It could be a positive statement like "Maybe I should" giving you the opportunity to provide them with more information. It could also be an objection like "I can't dance", giving you the opportunity to explain more about how easy it is. Regardless of the response, you've now engaged the individual in a conversation about the activity and had the chance to invite them to participate.

#### **What to say if you are interviewed for a piece in a local publication:**

Most important, always be positive and upbeat. Here are a few things you should try to get included.

Talk about the interaction of people from all walks of life. Mention that your club and surrounding clubs have had doctors, engineers, truck drivers, factory workers, teachers, students, and others working together towards a common goal; having their square succeed.

If the reporter is interviewing multiple people, make sure they include the dancers occupation and the town they live in. This often makes a connection with the reader.

Never talk about how many clubs there used to be, or how big your club used to be. Instead, say something like *"We've been going strong for 15 years, and some clubs have been dancing for over 50 years. There have been many forms of dance come and go, like disco for instance, but square dancing has kept going."*

If the interviewer makes a comment about it seems to be more of a senior activity, put a positive spin on that. You can say things like *"That's true, but part of the reason is that many of the current dancers have been dancing for 20 or 30 years. They say it keeps them young. Another reason is that we attract many empty nesters looking for something they can do on a regular basis, now that the kids are gone. That's not to say we don't have our share of younger people. Part of the beauty of square dancing is that there are no age boundaries."*

If the interviewer questions whether it's a couple's activity, you can reply with *"Traditionally it was a couple's activity, but over the years clubs have evolved to the point of welcoming singles and finding ways to accommodate them. Single dancers find it a way to meet people in a non-threatening, non-dating, atmosphere. You get to dance with a number of people, get to know them, and sometimes meet one that leads to a new relationship."*

Be sure to mention the exercise element to square dancing. At an average square dance, depending on how many sets you participate in, you will walk 2 to 3 miles, and it's a lot more fun than a treadmill at a gym.

Try to mention the various conventions, weekends and special events like fundraisers. When talking about the National Square Dance Convention. Don't say things like *"We used to get 15 to 20 thousand dancers at the national."* Instead, say, *"It's held in a different city each year and about 4 to 6 thousand dancers from all over the world."* To the general public, that's a really big number of people at a dance.

#### **How and when to speak up:**

With friends and acquaintances, you can sometimes initiate the conversation, but don't constantly hammer them. That's a total turn off. Personal conversations usually center around what each other has been doing or is planning on doing. When you mention your activity in the square dance world, you can use a line such as *"You guys ought to try it. Give it a shot. You might find that you like it. If not, hey you gave it a shot."*

With strangers, they need to initiate the conversation. For example, in an elevator at a weekend event a stranger asks if you are with the square dancers, don't go right into the elevator pitch. Answer with something like *"Yes, there's about 200 of us here for the weekend. You're welcome to come in and watch."* If they continue the conversation, then you are prepared with some of the lines from above. If you are at an out of town event, and someone asks you what you're in town for, you answer; *"I'm here for a weekend of square dancing over at the Crowne Plaza. You're welcome to stop in and take a look."* Depending on their response, or lack thereof, you can go into your elevator pitch, or not.

All of the above suggestions/guidelines are just that, suggestions/guidelines. You need to be genuine and sincere with your comments. I know that I would not use either of the "elevator pitches" exactly as written, but I am now prepared with how to frame my answer. So go back and read the suggestions and ask yourself how you would respond. The key is to be prepared, be genuine, and be sincere.

Thanks for listening,  
Roy Gotta