

The Perfect Caller

Anyone can call dances badly. To do it well takes experience, patience, a sense of humor and, most important, a desire to be a good caller. The perfect caller does not exist. If it did, it would not be human. For us ordinary mortals, who strive after perfection, there follows a description of what we are aiming for (plus a few words of encouragement). (Hilary Johnson – English Dance & Song, July 1988)

The Perfect Caller:

1. Always remembers when it has been asked to call. (This degenerates with experience.)
2. Knows every detail of all existing dances, their tunes, how the dance fits to the music, which figures most often go wrong and why. (This improves with experience.)
3. Knows the tastes and abilities of the dancers, plans a program that will please all of them (impossible!) with variety of shape, temperament, and difficulty. Has a few dances in reserve (see 16), then looks up and learns all of them, despite not needing to (see 2).
4. Can do all of 3 at a moment's notice in time of emergency. (This improves as 1 degenerates.)
5. Never suffers from stage fright (improves with experience) or memory loss, never repeats bad jokes, has no irritating mannerisms, and is never conceited or rude. (Frank friends needed.)
6. Knows every detail of how to operate its club's record player and/or tape recorder, can always find the right tape or record in a few seconds, and knows their quirks (e.g. which tracks have a 4-bar introduction). The Perfect Caller also understands how to operate a live band. (If in doubt, ask the band leader.)
7. Can be heard clearly in any room above any noise, and knows how to set up and adjust a P.A. system. When the Perfect Caller announces a dance, everyone hears its name and type of set. The Perfect Caller is so interesting that the dancers never chatter while it is talking (miraculous!) and so clear that they do not have to talk to explain the dance to each other.
8. Can rearrange the sets to make full use of all available space.
9. Explains everything briefly but clearly, can tell who has not understood and what they haven't understood, and can explain again, in different words, as many times as necessary, without boring or patronizing the expert dancers. The Perfect Caller has a crib-book handy, just in case, but does not need to refer to it, and never reads it out word for word. The Perfect Caller's dancers never say: "Oh, it's a waltz!" four bars after the music starts.
10. Gives a summarized explanation after a long walk-through, or as a reminder of a well-known dance.
11. Gives even briefer instructions during the dances, clearly, audibly and promptly, but never talks too much. (Square dance callers excepted.) The Perfect Caller can watch everyone at once, and never loses count of how many times through a figure has been danced.
12. Can do all of 11 while dancing as the wrong sex in an incomplete set. The Perfect Caller will never dance itself if that would force someone to sit out, nor force someone to dance who wants to sit out.
13. Can suggest that couples or partners swap around without making anyone feel inferior. Of course the Perfect Caller never has to stop the music and explain the dance again, but if a dance does "crash" the Perfect Caller stays calm and polite.
14. Can tell without asking who does, or doesn't want an encore, including those sitting out.
15. Leaves exactly the right length of time between dances.
16. Can alter the program, at a moment's notice, if faced with the wrong number of couples, an unexpected number of inexperienced dancers, or surplus/insufficient time.
17. Improves the standard of the dancers, even if they don't realize how much they are learning.
18. Always finishes exactly on time, and, dancers permitting, starts on time too.
19. Improves its calling by learning from its mistakes (despite never making any), learning new dances, watching other callers and copying/avoiding what they do, and occasionally inviting criticism from friends.
20. Runs faster than a speed train, clears buildings in a single bound, washes whiter than ordinary powders, contains no artificial flavorings or colorings ...