36th CALLERLAB CONVENTION

Opening Session Speech

Ed Foote

Good Morning.

When I was asked last fall to speak to you this morning I was shocked. I mean, it is very humbling to be asked to make a presentation to the full Convention. So I asked the Board, "What do you want me to talk on?" And they said, "Anything you want." So, with that in mind, I thought we would look at how you have gotten to where you are in your calling career. What has gotten you to this point, and then also look at what can you possibly do next to take it to the next plateau that involves nothing that you would say on the mike.

And for those of you in the room who are not callers, I would say that after my first few sentences, everything I say will apply to whatever profession you are in.

Have you considered what a privilege it is to be a caller? How many people are in this country? We have 350 million people in this country. How many people are allowed in their everyday work to come in contact with the number of people that you come in contact with? There are some. There are doctors and nurses who come in contact with a lot of people. But, of course, the medical system is cranking them through and they don't have much time to spend with people. What about schoolteachers? They come in contact with a lot of people also. But, again, they don't have much time to spend with individual people. As callers, we have the opportunity to interact with a great number of people and we can interact with them on a one-to-one basis. I would venture to say that there are maybe only 15% of the people in the country that have the opportunity to interact with the number of people that you do. About 15% I would say at the most. So why have you been privileged to be a caller? Why you specifically? I submit that you have been set up for success; that things have happened in your life to set you up to where you are now. These are what are known as synchronistic events. I love the term "synchronicity". The definition of synchronicity is; 'the simultaneous occurrence of events that appear to be significantly related but you can't see why one event would ever cause the other event'.

How have things been set up for you in square dancing? First of all, when you became a square dancer you didn't say, "On a 'certain date' I will become a square dancer." No, it just kind of happened "out of the blue". That's the case with most people. Somebody invites you to a dance or a wife drags a husband to a dance or something, but you don't plan this ahead of time. Then how did you become a caller? You didn't say, "On November 1st, 1997 I will become a caller." No, it possibly happened by accident. You tried out a singing call at a picnic or somebody gave you a hoedown and said, "Try this." Nothing was planned on this. And once you became a caller, what about all the bookings

you received. Sure, you probably went out and requested some of those, but look at the bookings you received and the ones you didn't receive.

It is interesting if you step back and look at your life go by as though on a movie screen, and if you do that you will be able to see the synchronistic events that have happened; that each one individually just appears by itself and is unrelated. But, taken together, represent a grand slam for your life.

I know in my situation, that is my story. I applied for graduate school and I applied to a school in Philadelphia; but I didn't have the grades to get into there. I never figured I would get in there, and I figured I would be going to the University of Virginia Graduate School. And then all of a sudden I got accepted at Philadelphia, which is where I really wanted to go. So I went there, but I had to be there in order to be able to accept the summer job in New York City where I would then just happen to be able to find a place to stay at Columbia University. It just happened to have a student union and every Friday night it had a square dance. When I went back to school in Philadelphia in the fall, the person who ran the square dance had a list of all the clubs in Philadelphia to contact. When I started calling, I received the support of the dancers and callers. I mean, they could have easily said, "Who are you to want to be a caller?" And yet they all supported me right away. My parents supported me. They could have said, "Gee, we have spent this money to send you to college; forget this square dance stuff." But they didn't. They were very supportive. And my dad made only one key comment. He said, "Do what makes you happy". And then I went full-time. The synchronicity of me going full-time; I didn't plan that. My company left the state. It just moved away. Half of them went to Ohio and half of them went to West Virginia.

So, because I had no plans to go full-time, I submit that I was set up for success. I submit that you too were set up for success. But, you had to say, "Yes" along the way. Anytime you could have said, "No, I don't want to do this." But, thank goodness, that didn't happen. You did say, "Yes!"

I would like to pause for just thirty seconds and ask you to think of the synchronistic events that have occurred in your life to get you where you are now.

Next, I would like you to consider who gave you encouragement along the way. I am still amazed. I was dancing in Philadelphia. I was dancing to a caller named Larry Dee who had been calling for over twenty years. He is the author of "Acey Deucey" and he was a good caller, so I went out to dance to him every week. Then I became a caller by accident and right away he accepted this as though I had been a long-time caller for twelve years and I was equal with him. I was shocked. He could have easily said, "You shouldn't be a caller, just a dancer", and yet he equated one on one with me and totally accepted me. My home caller in Pittsburgh let me call for his dancers so that I could get a little practice and some other callers let me practice calling and gave me advice. All of these people encouraged me along the way.

How many people have encouraged you along the way? Who are those who, without their encouragement, you would not have gotten to where you are today. I would like you to take another thirty seconds and think of these people that have helped you along the way.

So why were you set up to be a caller? Why did things break right for you? Why did people encourage you at just the right time? Do you think it was luck? Do you think it was coincidence? I submit that it wasn't luck or coincidence but that this was part of a grand plan for your life. I think that we have been set up to be callers because there is one major thing that we can do for people along the way. And that is to make people happy. Actually, everybody should be doing this whatever their profession is. But, as callers, we have the opportunity to make large numbers of people happy.

For me, a successful caller is one who makes people happy. And we know we are making people happy if we are rebooked for the dance that we call. Now we know that we can make people happy by calling the dance. We know people love to dance. All we have to do is show up, call the dance and leave, and then we are very confident that we have made virtually everybody there happy. But this morning, I want to go beyond that and ask the question "What can you do with all of these people at the dance to make them happy far and above just calling a dance for them?"

We've all made the first level. We all make people happy by calling the dance, but is there something we can do beyond that? My feeling is that there is. We can make people individually feel good about themselves, and that is how we can take it to the next level. As callers, we have that opportunity because we have all the breaks at the dance and before and after the dance. So how do we do this? What can we do to make people feel good individually? We can affirm them. We can validate them. We can do things like say a sincere comment, "You always smile at the dance and I am impressed because I noticed that," Or, "You always dress well at the dances; I like the way you dress," Or, "You have good styling when you do the calls"; a sincere compliment.

Some of the things I do at the dance are; I'll compliment some people on whatever; say they have a nice outfit on and what I will do I will do it intentionally excessive and I will do it so excessively that they know it is a "put on". I know it is a "put on". I know that they know it is a "put on." They don't care because nobody ever compliments them at all, so they don't care if it is a "put on". They just want to sit there and wallow in it because it feels so good for about twenty seconds. These are things I do at the dance to make people feel good individually. I watch what's happening on the floor.

Gerald Gempolsky, the well known author said, "Be a good finder. A good finder tries to catch people red handed in the act of doing something right". So as I am calling along, I will call "Do Sa Do". I watch to see how the floor does "Do Sa Do". We know in a lot of places, they do the "swing thing", so if I look out and everyone is doing the swing "Do Sa Do" and a couple people are doing it correctly, after the tip I am down on the floor congratulating them one-on-one. I am a big believer in skirt work, so if I see a lady doing skirt work I am always there after the tip congratulating her. Swing your partner. Very

few people know how to swing their partner these days. So, if I see someone swinging their partner I just gush all over them after the tip. If somebody does well round dancing, I always stop and congratulate them and say how good they look as I am going on stage for the next tip.

I forgot to mention one really good, sincere way you can confirm someone one-on-one is if they are doing a very significant job in our society that benefits a lot of people. If somebody has a profession such as a teacher, doctor, nurse, fireman or policeman you can affirm them and say, "Wow! It's wonderful what you do to help people".

Now, of course, you have to find your own way to make people happy. What do you think you can do? What can you do to lift peoples' spirits? I would like you to think of, in thirty seconds, three things that you could do that just might pop into your mind that you might be able to do at a dance, not on the mike, that you could do individually, one-on-one with someone, to make them feel happy. Now when you make someone feel happy it makes you feel happy too. It is a win/win situation.

There are two little quotes that I think say it all. Leo Buscallia, the well known author said, "Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word or the smallest act of caring. All of these have the potential to turn a life around." And, Mother Theresa said, "Kind words can be short and easy to speak but their echoes are endless."

Millions of people go to bed hungry every night without a kind word, a smile, or a pat on the back. That is where you can make the difference.

Well, some of you may be saying, "That's ok, but that isn't my thing. I'm content just going to call a dance and making people happy that way." And that is fine. That's wonderful because you are making people happy and if that's your thing, that's fine, no problem. Others of you are probably saying, "I'm already doing that at dances or on the job." And I applaud you for already doing that. Others of you may say, "Well that sounds kind of interesting, but I never thought about that and I don't see any opportunities at the dance to affirm people one-on-one. I'm not quite sure how to do that." Well, the solution is that you say to yourself, "I want to see these opportunities. I want to see these opportunities to help someone one-on-one." If at the start of each dance you say, "What can I do tonight to make people happy one-on-one individually?" If you do that, then I guarantee you those opportunities will present themselves and you will recognize them.

Ask yourself in the coming months," What can I do to help people feel good about themselves individually at the dance?" At the coffee break, say to someone, "What are you going to do to make someone feel good?" At the lunch table, the dinner table, ask somebody seated next to you, "What are you going to do along this line at the dance?" And don't forget to encourage the newer callers, as you were encouraged on your start.

If you continually ask this question and work on it, "What can I do to make specific people happy?"- If you do that, then you will be living the mission that has been offered to you.

Thank you for allowing me to share my thoughts with you.