

MEMORY FOR CALLERS

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As a caller, my greatest fear is that I may wake up some morning having forgotten everything that I have learned about calling square dances. The nightmare is; standing on stage, microphone in hand, music playing and myself saying "Bow to the Darn! I used to know what came next." To a caller memory is more than just a tool. It's almost everything. We owe it to ourselves to understand and be able to use our memory to its' fullest potential.

Memory is our brain taking a variety of very specific stimuli and effectively storing them for later recall. These stimuli would include such things as:

IMAGES: Recognizing and remembering visions of persons, places and things.

SOUNDS: Everything from rain on the roof to a baby's cry.

ODORS: The smell of something good like cookies baking or something bad in which we may have stepped.

FEELINGS: Emotions such as sadness or the physical touch of something hot).

POSITIONS: (locations): Where is home and how do I get there?

And, a few other stimuli with maybe less application to our calling such as **COLORS** and **TASTES**.

All were features necessary for our survival and advancement down the evolutionary chain and were made a part of this mental capacity we refer to as "Memory." Mother Nature was quite generous with man, allowing us to evolve with a better memory than other animals (well, some of us anyway).

Very few of us admit that we have a "good" memory and most of us have a desire to improve the memory we possess. From a calling standpoint there is a method that has been shown to work quite effectively. It's called "Mnemonics." Mnemonics is what helps you store information and recall it when desired. Mnemonics for callers would include the use of tools such as *RHYMING*, *MELODY*, *RHYTHM* and *ASSOCIATION*, These all seem familiar to us as callers and are used extensively in our recall of dance material.

RHYMING: Most songs have phrases that end with words that rhyme. The delivery of one word automatically triggers the next rhyming phrase, not only for us as callers but the dancers as well. For example; the phrase "Up

to the middle and back you reel, Pass Thru and ...” There’s not a dancer or caller around that won’t finish with Wheel & Deal. Or, “Swing Thru, Two by Two, Without a stop ...” Well, you’ve got the idea.

MUSIC: Melodies have phrases that are not only harmonically comfortable but utilize repetition to make them memorable. Songs (or singing calls) use a combination of Melody, Rhyme and Rhythm. All of which are memory aids.

RHYTHM: The rhythm of phrasing can also be a key to remembering the words that belong. Think of kids using the rhythm of “Patty-Cake” or the rhythm established by the patter (rap-rhyme) delivered while girls jump rope.

ASSOCIATION: This is the one I would target as being most important to callers for remembering or extemporaneously creating choreographic patterns. Experienced callers use this feature of memory without much conscious effort. Practically all parts of FASR (Formation, Arrangement, Sequence and Relationship) work to trigger “associations” with other useable material.

FORMATIONS: Seeing an Ocean Wave or visualizing a Wave at the end of a movement can possibly bring to mind SWING THRU. Or, maybe CIRCULATES, TRADES, RUNS or... whatever. Seeing or visualizing an Ocean Wave is not likely to prompt you to call a FLUTTER WHEEL. Flutter Wheel from waves is not a memorized “Association.” Therefore, while in waves Flutter wheel does not come to mind. In all like cases, it’s the associative memory at work.

ARRANGEMENT: The experienced caller will have not only have memorized setups for a HE-HE-SHE-SHE and the other four not *normal Arrangements* but will have memorized resolutions (get-outs) back to normal from each of them.

SEQUENCE: Even something as simple as Sequence is usually controlled or taken advantage of with one or more *memorized* modules.

RELATIONSHIP: It is certainly important that we as callers have a way to recognize and control Partner Relationships within the squares. That means we need a way to “remember” said relationships. Without remembering who belongs to whom, how would we ever be able to resolve?

All Methods of calling (even reading) require the use of memory. If you stop to think about it, even the act of reading requires the use of memory. It would be impossible to convert the written word to something

understandable without having *memorized* the corresponding sounds associated with those printed symbols (letters).

Unfortunately, reading is not conducive to remembering. Because none of the typical stimuli that are natural to memory (e.g. images, sounds, odors, etc.) are a part of reading, it is necessary to visualize and create *Mental Images* as an aid in recalling what we have read.

Memory as a METHOD OF CALLING implies that the caller will memorize entire dance routines (figures) from start to finish. This can be done but is limited to each person's mental storage capacity. It's much easier to memorize short combinations of moves and apply them to simple memorized traffic patterns. Of course we call these short memorized combinations MODULES.

Even EXTEMPORANEOUS or SIGHT RESOLUTION CALLING utilizes memory. Without memory a caller would have no idea of the names of the movements, which program list to which they belong or how they affect the FASR of the square. He wouldn't know which combinations Flow, how to match the delivery rhythmically and melodically to the music or any of the other very important abilities expected of a caller. And for the Sight Resolution caller, how would we ever resolve to the proper Allemande Left FASR without first memorizing Partner and Corner relationships within the square?

Memory is like a muscle. "Use it or lose it"! For the most part you have to discipline yourself to remember things. Did you ever have an occasion where you were introduced to someone and as quickly as they walked away you forgot their name? Everyone has. Let's face it, you probably didn't pay much attention to the name when you were first introduced. Solution: Make a conscious effort to listen to the name when introduced. Look at the person; repeat their name mentally two or three times. Chances are you'll remember it as long as needed.

Frequently I will be driven to a dance in a strange town by a host couple. It's a good thing that they drive me back after the dance because I wouldn't have the slightest idea of how to return without them. Usually if someone else is driving I pay little or no ATTENTION to where we are going. However, if I am driving or aware that I have to find my way back, I pay close attention and have no problem at all. The secret to remembering is "CONSCIOUS EFFORT." PAY ATTENTION!

I am convinced that just about everyone has a good memory. The problems lie in the fact that many people have no idea of how to use the memory potential they possess.

My recommendation: If you are a “reader,” Go through your dance material figure by figure. Visualize yourself as one of the active dancers. Take a mental note of each time that you are in a line, a wave, crossing the grid from one side to the other. Are you inside, outside, end or center? Don’t worry about who you have or where the Allemande Left is. Learn the actual traffic of what you are calling. Make it a personal trip around and through the square rather than a bunch of words that need to be remembered. There are a variety of ways to control the final Allemande Left. The beginning of it all is learning how to move the dancers. The best way to learn that is “MEMORY.”

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