

“People support what they helped create”

by Susan Peterson

The following are notes compiled last summer by Susan Peterson for her home community, about the Dance Organizers’ class taught in 2014 by Gaye Fifer, at CDSS’s English and American Dance Week at Pinewoods. The class met for two periods per day and covered the following topics: Qualities of Good Leadership, Vision, Structure, Finding Practical Solutions to Problems, Volunteers, What to Do when People in Leadership Positions are Not Effective, and Encouraging Youth Participation at Dances. Following are some highlights of the discussions. Gaye teaches a marvelous course, and we thought Susan’s notes would be helpful to organizers in starting a discussion in their local groups.

Among the *Qualities of Good Leadership* that seemed most notable was the ability to empower others to delegate responsibility and to value diversity. It was noted that a major benefit of intergenerational dancing is that, while interacting with younger people, older people can “show...models of what the younger people can become.” At this point an idea for building attendance was brought up: the first time a new person comes to a dance, he or she pays, but will receive a voucher for attendance at a subsequent dance. This method was said to be more effective in the encouragement of future visits than the practice of making the first visit free.

Vision, it was said, can be unstated—but the nature of it will be seen in the shape that the dance takes. So, to prevent “slippage” (possibly unwanted changes in the vision), it is wise to have it articulated and written down. Two sample visions were presented:

1) Long-term sustainability of the dance:

Dissemination of public information regarding the dance and bringing together people of all ages to a place where they can participate together in the joy of dance.

2) Bolster spirit of the community through:

fun and simple dances, zesty contras, more challenging dances, tasty treat potluck suppers which aim to allow people to share¹

To help clarify their vision, a group could fill in the blanks in the following: When we are successful, this dance will be _____.

To clarify a group’s mission, the group could come up with an answer to this question: What do we do, for whom and why?² Clarification of goals involves filling in the blanks in this sentence: In order to fulfill our mission, we will _____. Then, to determine objectives, for each goal, specific actions to be taken, within specific time-frames, or “steps to take to achieve the goal.” The final step is evaluation.

During the discussion of *Structure*, fairly standard points were made. For example, among reasons for having meetings are the need to engage everyone, to assist in accountability and to get ideas evaluated and decisions made. There were, however, some new ideas that may be of use in many dance groups. Among these: generating ideas at a meeting by having each person make a list, by going around the group so that each person will say something, by brainstorming, using post-it notes (wherein the notes are put on the wall and organized into groups—all with no talking among the participants).

The discussion of *Practical Solutions to Problems* dealt with problems such as bullying, booking dances ahead, inept callers who have somehow gotten into the rotation, predators, and dancers who dance badly but who think they are terrific. Solutions included setting up an “intervention” wherein two or three people have a talk with the offender, creating handouts and wall posters listing “Tips for Good Dancing,” and having within the dance group a written protocol for handling problem dancers. Useful sources for further information included YouTube’s “Crucial Conversations” (for the intervention), the CDSS website, and the website stopitnow.org.

During the discussion of *Volunteers* a number of useful ideas were mentioned. For example, the discussion of how to train volunteers yielded the advice to have a written protocol explaining the job, having new volunteers “shadow” their predecessors, and sending a person to a course. Retaining good volunteers, it was said, is best done by showing appreciation for what they do. Here it was noted that “people support what they helped create.”

A very interesting discussion was while dealing with the topic, *People in Leadership Positions Who are Not Effective*. Very important, it was said, is to deal with the situation in a straightforward way. For example, one could have a “Feedback-giving Conversation.” The technique involves starting with something positive and then getting to the problem at hand. (“You are a valuable resource and we

(Dance Musicians Resources, cont. from p.14)

Sound

It's good to know how a sound system works, especially if you get stuck doing your own sound. So you'd better read...

- All Mixed Up by Bob Mills. A remarkably enduring overview of sound for dances; online for free. (www.bobmills.org/amu)

Tunes

There are many places to look for tunes, but it's still hard to beat the standard tune books, among them:

- *The Portland Collection* (I, II, and just out III) by Sue Songer.
- *New England Fiddler's Repertoire* by Randy Miller et al.
- *English Country Dance Tunes* (I and II) by Peter Barnes.
- *The Waltz Book* (I-IV) by Bill Matthiesen.

All are available from the CDSS Store, of course, <https://store.cdss.org/>.

And, of course, there are plenty of other resources out there not specifically for dance musicians, from Kickstarter to arts grants. And videos online (e.g., YouTube) are an amazing way to see what your fellow musicians out there are doing. If there are resources you find particularly useful, or wish existed, let us know on Shared Weight or Facebook.

Happy music-making.
Jill, Max and Susie

Jill Allen has been a CDSS board member since 2010 from Lawrence, Kansas, where she organizes, calls, and plays piano for local and regional dances. Max Newman is a dance musician, dancer, and organizer living in Somerville, Massachusetts. Susie Lorand is a dance musician, editor, and librarian living in Ann Arbor, Michigan.



Denise Smith

(“People support...,” cont. from p.15)

appreciate all the work that you have been doing for the group. It seems, though, that here you are having trouble getting _____ done. Is there some help that I can provide, to help you with this?”)

Finally, we dealt with the challenge of *Encouraging Youth Participation in Dances*. To cope with this challenge, tactics included: having young people serve as greeters, providing rides to people without cars, providing good food and snacks (with no negative feedback for those who bring nothing), providing brief dance-skills workshops both before the dance starts and during the break, asking parents to bring their teens, asking all dancers to recruit among their friends (and friends' children), charging young people a reduced admission fee, flash mob dancing at malls and colleges, and sponsoring a happy hour before or an ice cream social after a dance event. Very important, it was said, that dance organizers maintain a keen awareness of the effects of the cost, both in money and transportation efforts, to young people with little or no money. (Two good resources are “Putting on a Dance,” <http://www.puttinonthedance.org/post-conference/>, as well as “Advice and How-to” section under CDSS’s Resources, <http://www.cdss.org/advice-howto.html>).

¹ It was noted that, especially for new dancers, potluck suppers are very useful in drawing people in and making them feel part of the community (and more likely to come to future dances). Even those who do not or cannot bring homemade goods should be welcomed, it was said. Younger people especially (ex. college students) do not have fully-equipped kitchens and are unable to cook, yet they make excellent dance partners and to make them feel welcome can only help build up attendance.

² At this point, BIDA (Boston Intergenerational Dance Advocates) was mentioned as an example of an impetus that came from younger dancers to foster connections across generations via dancing and social events appealing to all

Susan Peterson has loved to dance since she started folk dancing at the age of five. She now lives near Philadelphia and dances with the Germantown Country Dancers.

