

The Joy of Angeling (Version 2.0)

By Allan Hurst - Last updated 3/18/2015

In square dance clubs all over the world, it's a familiar refrain:

"Where are all our angels?"

There have been excellent articles on how to angel, and on appropriate behavior for both angels and students in a square dance class. Rather than discuss *how* to angel, let's examine *why* it's important for dancers to angel.

I've heard a number of frequent complaints from experienced dancers who hate angeling.

"Students aren't worth my time, because they don't know anything yet."

This argument doesn't hold up logically; every experienced dancer started off as a student at some point. Students can't be expected to know how to square dance yet; that's why they're in the class!

A square containing experienced angels (especially if circumstances afford the luxury of a "balanced" square with a 50% angel, 50% student ratio) can dramatically enhance and speed up the learning experience.

It's a club investment and a personal investment.

Students in square dancing (or any activity) can be easily discouraged. If made to feel "shunned" by experienced dancers, students will probably leave a class because they won't feel welcome. If you want to build up your club's membership (and, therefore, the local pool of possible dance partners), it's your duty as an experienced dancer to make students feel welcome, so they'll stay not only through the end of the class series, but also join the club as ongoing, active members. And they'll be active members that you can dance with at full level.

"Class dancing doesn't give me floor time as good as dancing at full level."

This is another argument I've heard frequently, and one which also doesn't hold water.

Floor time is floor time.

Dancers who complain that they can't get enough floor time at a given level, but who won't angel for that level's current class, aren't working in their own best interest.

For example, let's say you want to improve your A2 dancing. You can practice A2 just as effectively in class as you can on a dance floor - only with better feedback and supervision in a class. It may not be the flowing, graceful extended patten tips you prefer, but it's still good practice which will help polish your technique.

Another advantage of dancing in class as an angel: if you're feeling weak on a particular call, there's no stigma attached in asking the caller "Could you review _____ again, please?" Learning and review is precisely what classes are designed for.

"Students are too rough."

Unfortunately, this is often true. Many new dancers use very rough and/or painful hand holds, or push/pull dancers very hard. Part of the responsibility lies with each club's caller/instructor, who should talk about handholds and body motion. But an even larger part of this responsibility lies with the class angels.

It's a feedback mechanism for the student.

If a specific student is too rough, it's perfectly OK for the angel to quietly and politely inform them that they're being too rough, and show them a gentler hand hold or more subtle body language. If an isolated student is having problems with a specific call, an angel (or group of angels) can tutor the student on the call between tips.

You can "train" students to dance the way YOU want.

Does your club have favorite "fluff" or sound effects? When it's appropriate for your class's students to learn such things, you can help them pick up those techniques faster by personal demonstration and tutorial. This is an opportunity to help create a new dance partner for yourself that you'll enjoy dancing with!

It's a feedback mechanism for the caller.

In most cases, callers/instructors don't dance during teaching tips. While bodies may be moving into the right positions, there's no way for the caller to know that a given student is using a bone crushing grip.

In such a situation, an angel can easily let a caller know that students are treating other dancers too roughly. This gives the caller a chance to correct the problem immediately, before it becomes an ingrained habit in the students.

"Dancing at [whatever] level is boring for me; I already know these calls."

There are many articles available on the web and in back issues of square dance magazines that illustrate, quite eloquently, the continuing need for higher level dancers to master and practice lower level calls. (More than one Advanced & Challenge caller I've met seems to specifically enjoy calling "Dive Thru" during A&C squares, just to see who can't remember their Basic calls.)

You might learn something new.

If you angel at different clubs with different callers, you'll pick up a different set of information about dancing the same level from each individual caller.

You might find yourself surprised (and delighted) to learn some background information or specific technique about a given call that's new to you. Even if you angel with the same club from year to year, most callers - as with any good teacher- will vary the "information filter" they use to teach the class from year to year, adding new information and dropping outdated information. This could be something as trivial as the history of a call -- but it could also be something as important as a new or different application of an existing call from a formation you're unfamiliar with.

More importantly, call lists change over time, and it's helpful to angel in order to "retrain" yourself to know what the current call list looks like, and to learn (or review) any new calls added to the list since you took your first class at that dance level.

It's a terrific way to meet new people.

Traveling to a strange city? Want to make new friends easily? Call ahead for schedules, and arrange to drop in on a local club during their class night, and offer to angel for them. "New face" phenomenon aside, angeling for another club is an easy and fun way to "break the ice" with local residents in a strange city. It's also possible that you'll pick up or pass on new dance techniques, sound effects, or call mnemonics. In all cases, you'll probably have more fun than you originally thought.

It strengthens our sense of community.

Interclub angeling fosters a sense of mutual support. It's not unusual for members of a given club to reciprocate during a trip to another area after receiving a visiting angel at their local club from that area.

Does your club host a regular fly-in? Your angeling at other clubs is a terrific long-term method to build fly-in attendance by increasing your club's visibility, and spreading the word about your event to new dancers, as well as building goodwill with that club's experienced dancers.

Even if you don't travel to other cities, angeling for other clubs in your local area helps build a sense of community, interclub cooperation and trust, and that helps all of square dancing.

Remember, "**today's student = tomorrow's dance partner.**" Choosing to participate in your club's classes as an angel means you're directly supporting your club and your community.

[end]