

Let's talk Patter. The words in between

Patter calling is ART

Patter calling is a “style” and an art that is unique to each caller as brush strokes are to each artist.

Just as it is possible to copy and replicate the brushstrokes of an artist, and duplicate his or her paintings, it is equally possible to replicate and mimic the calling and patter style of an individual caller.

How to approach patter calling

The best way to approach this idea is to think of yourself and your patter calling as a work of art. For instance, Van Gogh's *Starry Night*. Van Gogh's technical limitations were canvas, paint brushes and colour. The canvas was fixed and not influenceable, paint was limited by the availability of material, the brushes were a choice of size and shape and colour was his own taste of using what was available or mixing and matching to find the hues he desired. His style however was influenced by those that he admired such as the Dutch painter Millet, Rembrandt, and even Toulouse-Latrec but also likely the most influential was Paul Gauguin's impressionist style, but really comes out is Millet's style of landscaping and people.

You can see the influence of all of this in Van Gogh's development of his own style but when you compare his works to others, you can see he is also unique, taking the strength and techniques from the others and developing his own unique flair.

Why is this important

You are probably asking yourself at the moment, why would I be talking about artwork rather than square dance patter calling. Bear with me a few more moments and I will clarify.

Consider the following three photographs below. This is of Van Gogh's painting “*Starry Night*”



Can you really see any differences in them?

- In the first painting you have swirls and light above a flame or a grass tower or something in the foreground that is unidentified. It is dark and the lights are on over a small village at the foot of the mountains.
- In the second painting you have an identical painting in hue and colour but it is a little more vivid and your eyes are drawn more to the centre of the painting and the village than the sky.
- In the third painting you have clear and clean lines which brings the entirety of work into focus where you can clearly see the village, the hamlet ledges, the lights and darks of the town. The sky is clarified and better defined, and you can see and admire the painting subject components in clear detail.

IN all of these paintings you can clearly see the influence of Gauguin, and Millet but it is nothing like any of their works. The subject is unique, and you can be drawn in by any of the paintings.

What is an original worth

This is what your patter calling needs to be. Like that painting. A Gauguin will sell for about \$300 million at auction and a Millet maybe between \$17,000 and 60,000 whereas the starry night by Van Gogh is estimated at \$100 million.

Millet had a bigger influence on painting and market values of painting and was influential to both but Gauguin influenced only one aspect of van Goghs painting. Somehow Gauguin's paintings are worth more – and Van Gogh is way up there too. Both of them took the best from others and made it their own unique style and put themselves into each and every painting.

Callers need to develop their own style as well.

The paintings that we looked at, Van Gogh's starry night above, are worth

- The original \$100 Million
- The Print \$60.00
- The Mel Wilkerson Duplication - \$0.50 and only because that is about the cost of the paper and paint to do it.

However, what would an original painting by Mel Wilkerson eventually be worth to someone if I became famous?

This applies to your Patter

This is what your patter needs to be. Influenced, styled but truly unique. While Millet may be a better landscaper and van Goghs abstracts look like they were painted by a five year old in day care or play school the value is in the uniqueness of the artist and the memorability of the presentation. The same applies to patter calling.

It is true, that most dancers will not remember what you called in your patter, they will not remember the flow, the choreography, the rhyme or any of that because they will be focused leaving the floor, (hopefully) singing or humming the last

phrase of that singing call which drew it all together. I can guarantee you however, that if you do not have the style and memorability of the patter to make it work, (and easily forgotten), it will likely be remembered for all the wrong reasons.

Patter Limitations

Just like any artist, whose limitations are canvas, paint, and the need to get the message understood by those that see the work, there are limitations to your creation as a square dance caller. Patter Limitations include:

- Choreography – defined actions with specific timings. Use them wrong, push to hard or change the timings and it wont work
- Music – Beat, structure and rhythm is fixed and needs to be followed by both the callers and the dancers.
- Program restrictions limiting the number of movements useable
- Judgement – you need to ensure your creation is understood and accepted by the target audience

These are things that you cannot change. You can select your music but it is fixed once chosen. Your choreography is specifically defined but you can choose where to apply it. The number of movements you chose apply are dictated by the program and the message you want to deliver. And your patter creation is limited by the ability of the target audience to understand your message. It is up to you to make the message clear first and then paint in the enhancements.

Context helps

Like all great works of art however, the audience doesn't really appreciate it until it is put into a context after the fact. That is usually the singing call which ties it all together and makes the patter itself forgettable.

Unlike painting however, Consider however, how unfortunately memorable your patter would be if you fail at one or all of those four fixed limitation items. Skills are needed to overcome these immutable limitations to patter calling. Even the best singing in the world will not make the dancers forget that bad patter – so lets look at patter calling and what it is all about.

What is patter – the words and use

Patter calling is so named because it is a type of square dance calling in which the caller “speaks the words” or “chants the words” on a musical pitch, hopefully in harmony with the tune.

Historically this was a combination of the movement declaration being inclusive of a rhyming couplets. The historical “chant” format is still carried through in today's modern square dance calling. A way to better understand this is to think of two parts:

- the dance direction,

- the supplementary “filler” (so named because it fills in the four or 8 beat musical phrase to which the dance direction applies).

We have all heard of the couple rhymes from time to time and they make the dancing more enjoyable and memorable without interfering with the dance itself. One typical example is “Do the Right and left Grand – every other girl with every other hand”.

Don't be afraid

It is quite normal that callers supplement dance actions with extra words. These will fall into two categories.

1. Helper words and flow filler
2. Whimsy filler to fill the musical phrase – usually for timing purposes (for both the caller and the dancers)

There is an old adage that filler words are killer words. This is both true and false. Like anything else if you use a tool incorrectly, they will make achieving the desired result very difficult to achieve. Simply put, if all you ever use is a hammer, then everything else becomes a nail to be hit. Patter is not a hammer, it is a tool, and when used effectively will significantly enhance your dance, and your presentation of self.

We are going to start backwards and look at these two categories of filler. We will start by looking back at the origins and reasons behind this use. It is more than just the need to fill in dead air. Phil Jamieson wrote a lot about traditional dancing and even more can be read from Tony Parkes if you want to log onto the square dance history project site. What I am going to talk about is only an overview to get a basic understanding. What you do with the material and where you take it to develop your own uniqueness is up to you.

Typically, most callers today will augment the choreographic commands with either flow directions or with extra words to make the call lines fit the four-beat musical phrases.

Traditional Patter Calling

Traditionally these words would seem to border on absolute nonsense as far as a particular meaning went individually, but that is not the case. Although what was specifically said may have been nonsense, the theme of the filler words or phrases used were often a “theme” to convey either the reason for the dance, an event or even just a tie into a lifestyle such as spring dance, a harvest ball, a wedding, or even generally something to match the life and times of the area where the dance was being called, such as farm life, or a mining town, or timber logging socials etc.

Those fillers would be geared to draw the audience into the activity and make them feel that they were part of the dance. Much of this disappeared with the

onset of singing calls in the late 40s and 50s but the tradition is still kept alive by brand new callers, even though they may not know why they say what they say.

Consider a spring dance with all the calves now thrown and the colts out on the farm the community gets together for a spring dance and you hear phrases such as:

Join your hands and make a big ring
Circle to the left like anything

"got fields to plow and wheat in the sack,
half way round and the boys turn back."

Swing her high and swing her low
Take her hand and promenade home

"Sheep are sheered and the wools real fine,
You swing yours and I'll swing mine."

"The Old cow calls and the yearling bawls,
Heads swing the one across the hall."

These are older and more traditional style rhyming couplets but they were there for the simple reason phrase timing to meet the phrasing of doing the movements and to tie the actions together with the directions given. Each had an action followed by a seemingly nonsense filler phrase but when you look at those phrases, the caller was tying in all the things that happen

Winter is over, spring is here, the fields have been ploughed, you have seed ready to sew, she sheep are sheered and the wool is ready for carding and making into yard, the calves have been thrown and you are now ready to take that little break before all the hard work of summer comes to bear. Callers that did this effectively were story tellers that drew on the audience and made them feel like part of life around them and were able to bring the community together. It was a social commonality that tied the shop keeper to the farmer and the cloth makers to the shepherds and the ranchers to town folks. It was so much more than just a nonsense rhyme.

Themed was the thing

Humour was also used in these couplets that associated the activities. For instance at a wedding a rhyming couplet that is still used to day (and one I use a fair bit) is :

Allemande Left with your left hand
Back to the Partner Right and left grand

Like a knock kneed groom and a bow legged bride
Promenade home go side by side

His heels kicked up but her foots down

Now stay at home and swing her round

As you can see the humour of the “patter” is reflective to the nuance of the “roast” of the groom and the “she is now your boss” of the bride so that all can celebrate and be part of the event.

Modern Patter Calling

In Modern square dance calling, The “patter calling” evolved away from more fixed and expected routines into “what comes next” is unexpected. This was essentially the creation of what is now known as “hash calling”. It basically means that the dancers don't know what is coming next, and the rhyme filler and is usually missing thus the dancers have to keep the rhythms and timings with the music and beat and know and understand a lot more than they used to. It is also one of the reasons why the Patter Story has disappeared as part of the “dance theme” and why it is common for today’s callers to follow a patter call with a singing call that reflects the theme of the dance. Those fixed songs do all the work for the caller and there is less requirement to fill in the “hash” as it were. The singing calls are rigidly structured to fit the choreographic phrasing with the musical

Here is where we get into the second type of “patter filler” – the helper words and filler words.

These are subsequently broken down into two categories

1. Flow helper directions – this is for the dancers
2. Filler words to help the caller with his or her delivery timing

Flow filler as helpful directions.

One of the most important things in calling is to ensure that the dancers can clearly understand what you want them to do. As a caller must strive to give them the best chance of success, while at the same time giving them variety, a little bit of challenge, and a clear understanding of what they are supposed to do. The trick of doing this successfully is to convey the message when needed to give the dancers the clues they need to solve the puzzle, then wean them off the clues so that they solve the puzzles themselves.

This is most often done by prompting.

Consider this.

- Bow to the partner. Bow to the corner. Do Paso. 4 ladies chain. 4 ladies chain. Promenade.

Imagine the chaos if I went to any club above basic today and called that cold exactly as written.

Now consider this:

- Bow to the partner, turn and bow to the corner to, face your partner do Paso – her by the left, turn corner by the right, back to the partner with a courtesy

turn, and all four ladies chain across, chain her back to the partner and keep your girl and promenade home

This is what is known as flow filler or prompting filler and it serves two purposes. It assists the dancers to know what to do, and to help with the timing of the movements.

For instance, how often do you hear a Do Paso done as it is defined, that is ending with a courtesy turn unless otherwise directed. That simple prompting allows the dancers to understand exactly what is expected of them and allows them to succeed and “remember” (*Oh yeah, Do Paso ends with a courtesy turn – haven’t done that in a while*).

In the second purpose, the caller can also time the prompting to regulate the flow of the dancers letting them know where they should be at each phase of the sequence and let them know what is coming next so that the movements can blend smoothly from one to the next.

Once the dancers are used to this then the caller can wean them off the fillers and can expect that they will be ready to do what comes next.

Some common examples of prompting filler are:

- Dosado – go back to back
- Allemande left – with your left hand – back to partner....
- Swing thru – Go right and left
- Right and left thru – and turn that girl
- Spin the top, - half, centres 3, and the ends move up
- Spin Chain thru – right hand half, centres go left 3/4, new centres trade, go left $\frac{3}{4}$ back to the wave....

These types of flow fillers are helpful to dancers when learning and helpful to newer callers to ensure not only the dancer timing but the caller timing on the delivery of the movements. They are however, designed to be weaned off when no longer required by the dancers.

Filler words that help the caller with delivery.

This category of “patter” can include the helper words but also includes the more traditional rhyming and nonsense filler, or expression phrases that are designed and intended for use by callers to ensure that their timing, **delivery** (when to say it), **command** (How long to say the movement), and **execution** (how long to do the movements – and when to give the next command) are accurate.

This is the area that many new callers are taught to do, but it is never explained why they are being told to “fill in the blank spaces”, nor how to distinguish between flow filler needed, caller filler when learning, but more importantly when to use and when not to use.

It is in this area that callers develop the status of artist or forger. Are you going to be a Van Gogh, or just another cheap Mel Wilkerson imitation of an original? The decision here is all yours to make. But it is only fair to ask you to make a decision if you know what is being asked of you as a caller.

We have all heard the expression “**Filler Words Are Killer Words**”. I alluded to that earlier but intentionally did not expand on it. The reason is, in discussion with the last 11 new callers during one-on-one sessions each one of them told me nearly the same story. It is simply summed up as 4 sequential points:

1. I was taught to say it like this for the dancers.
2. I was told to “use these words” to make sure my timing was right.
3. I was told to fix my timing, but it was never explained what was wrong or how to fix it. I was given filler to do it with
4. I was criticised for using what I was taught, and it was ruining my timing.

This is one of the reasons why I dislike the expression “**filler words are killer words**”. – I am going to go out on a limb here and say, “In my opinion, there is nothing wrong with filler words”.

Just another tool in the tool box

Filler words are a tool, and tools are extremely valuable if used properly, and can be extremely harmful if used incorrectly”. Remember what I said about, if all you use is a hammer, then everything else is a nail. Filler words are a tool like a hammer. A hammer is useful and sometimes you need a hammer, but sometimes you need a paintbrush and sometimes you need a tiny little finishing tool to make it perfect.

to carry this analogy through, if filler words are a hammer, a hammer is very useful when you want to attach things together with nails, but when I want to finish the job, I do not use the paintbrush like a hammer, and similarly I do not use the hammer like a paint brush.

When I teach and call, I use “flow filler” words when I feel they are necessary to help the dancers as part of the “patter rhythm. I wean off them when they are no longer necessary. I also use filler words to assist with the timing and rhyming (pun intended) while the dancers do the movements. (but never sacrifice good choreography for a good rhyme) I also use dead air and let the music fill in the gaps when the dancers do not need any prompting, nor do I need to regulate my speed in calling.

It is important to understand your tools and use them when you need them. You do not have to use each tool every time, especially when it is not required. Often doing so only makes things worse.

Using the tools correctly

When you listen to your favourite callers, you hear them. When I listen to callers like Don Beck, or Mike Sikorsky, Tony Oxendine, Ken Ritucci, Eric Henerlau and

many others whom I admire, I listen and dance as a dancer but I also think like a caller. I actually pay a lot of attention to the patter, and quite frankly, I analyse a lot of how the patter and the singing call go together.

The theming is often in the choreography, and most of the time I can figure out what the focus movement or sequence that will be reflected in the singing call will be. I also listen carefully to what is in-between the choreography.

Tony Oxendine uses the word honey a fair bit to tie in things like boys run right around your honey, and it is soon followed by a right and left thru and turn your honey....a common expression is Flutterwheel – followed by the rhyming scheme – the more you dance the better your feel....other than that, in his patter there is only specific directional prompts or indications to the dances like (boys in the middle make a wave) and no filler or even words until he does a right and left grand..."right and left and the right and left grand – right and left...meet a girl and promenade home and when you get there then..... Tony uses the music giving very little guidance to the dancers unless there is something different, to which he will prompt the flow for the dancers, once or twice and if not needed he doesn't do it any more but lets the strength of the music carry the patter.

Don Beck similarly uses very little directional flow prompts other than what is minimally necessary for success, for example from parallel waves on a spin the top he will call spin the top and then prompt meet somebody with a right and single hinge. Other than that there is strong point commands for the movements but has a lot more rhyming patter filler on long flow movements like the right and left grand. He also talks directly to the dancers while they are dancing either conversationally or turns the calling into a conversation phrase such as do the right and left thru and when you do can you send her back with a Flutterwheel, and when you get there why don't you pass thru.....There will be an occasional filler on good rhythm but non dominant music such as chain down the line why don't you turn that girl and then.....

Mike Sikorsky often uses no filler or frill in his patter with a straight up delivery of the command prompt where and when it needs to be there. Usually in a patter figure you will hear Right and left thru and turn that girl and that is about it, other than a directional prompt only where needed such as a half sashayed veer to the left, boys take hand boys in the middle hinge, new center boys take hands and trade and cast right $\frac{3}{4}$ while the girls circulate. Actually if you listen to Mike you will find that he uses more filler and rhyming patter in his singing calls than he ever does in his patter.

Ken Ritucci. Ken uses almost no filler or prompts with his calling unless in the role of giving an assisted direction to the dancers when necessary. This is flow patter prompting and only seems to be used when necessary. He does however use conversational filler on patter with a humorous directional prompt to indicate to the dancers. He is quite unique in this particular delivery and although I have

heard others try it, he is the only one that seems to pull it off effectively. One example is with the movement spin chain and exchange the gears. He doesn't prompt you through the movement but says "who is the lead lady – she has lots of money – follow her" which is just enough indication to say what to do and bring a smile.

Eric Henerlau – another excellent caller but by contrast is a user of an enormous amount of filler words. He however has developed a unique style that the filler does not interfere with movements, but rather he uses the multiple peaks and troughs of his vocal range to make the patter filler part of the rhythm of the movement. He also sharply contrasts from extremes using a lot of filler on the simple flow sequences to very little or none on the more complex movements but a completely different voice inflection – usually that deep base commanding voice that just makes you want to do it. An example is an opening sequence to introduce the dancers to him had the sequence.

- Bow to the partner and the corner too. Allemande left, Dosado, men star left, turn partner right, allemande left, right and left grand, promenade.

The delivery was:

- well, your gonna bow to the partner, and the corner to, do and allemande left with the corner you know, come back to a Dosado with partner, four men star by the left go once around that big old ring.....turn partner by the right fore arm, find the corner by the hall, do an allemande left with the corner man, you walk right in with a right and left grand..GRAND..grand right and left go round hand over hand some how, and then you promenade all, promenade go round that corner, take a little walk and settle on down you do.....

Now that sounds like an awful lot but Eric has the ability and vocal range to make his filler a back round rhythmic chant that is so far separated from the actual command prompt of the movement that it flows so beautifully and if the music were to disappear, the highs and lows of his voice would keep you on beat and you wouldn't even notice the music gone except for those seemingly infrequent pauses where he has to take a breath.

SIMILAR but different

Although there are many excellent callers out there, I chose these 5 specifically because although they all have similarities in how they deliver each has his own distinct and unique delivery style and like artists some are minimalists, some are landscape specialists, some are realists, and some are surrealists where you wonder how they can fit so much into such a small space. Each caller however adapts the style to best fit the audience so that the message is received, interpreted correctly and enjoyed by the dancers. Having met them at least once or listened to them present on numerous occasions, most have stated that they were influenced by people such as Al Brudage, Jim Mayo, Elmer Sheffield, Marshal Flippo and Bill Peters.

I can tell you honestly, I am not in the league of any of these people. I can also tell you right now, I have begged borrowed or blatantly stolen ideas from all of them when it comes to patter delivery and I believe that I have come develop my own style so that when dancers hire Mel Wilkerson to call, they will enjoy Mel Wilkerson.

I hope I am kind of like a Millet as the painter. I have influenced a lot of people to develop their own styles and although my paintings may not be the wonderful masterpieces of the great artists, (Yet), how I do it and what I have taught and shared has influenced some others to become true artists in their own making. That may sound boastful but it is not intended as such.

Each caller, new or very experienced will tell you that they are always trying to get better at their craft and learn how to use the tools better. One of the most crucial tools you have is Patter. If your patter works, and it is rhythmic and on point to deliver the message you want to deliver, clearly, accurately and it flows smoothly, it really doesn't matter if you are a minimalist, a realist, an expressionist, or a surrealist artist with your delivery. The dancers will enjoy your works and they will come back to see them often.

Let's address Filler words are killer words.

I really dislike this expression but I would do every new caller a disservice if I did not explain the why of this saying.

When we learn to call we are often taught "these expressions are there to help the timing of your delivery". We are unfortunately however not taught three specific warnings that go with these "filler words"

1. **Unfortunately**, we are not often taught what delivery timing is, only to use the words.
2. **Unfortunately**, we are often not taught what the words are specifically for, nor how to properly use them and why.
3. **Unfortunately**, many of these words become habit crutches to the point that we cannot call without them, and we become uncomfortable with "dead air"

The unfortunate reality

Delivery timing is the time you need to say the word before the completion of one move and the execution of the next move, It is normally two beats (sometimes more) filler words are often taught to fill in the blank to give you the rhythm to meet that delivery time when it supposed to be there. In other words they are words that usually take two to three beats less than needed to complete one movement to give you a point of reference as when to say the next command.

Examples,

- Heads square thru – (12 beats) and a get go four hands round you go - all the way to the corner Joe, do a (9 beats)
- Square thru (10 beats) – four hands round that ring you do, meet the sides (8) to the right and left thru (10)
 - right and left thru
- Swing thru (6) – come a two by two (2) boys run to the right you do (6)...
- Swing thru turn half by the right, centres half left (4) boys run(6)....
- Right and left thru (6), - and turn that girl (2) breath pause (2) Command (2)
- Circle to a line (8) halfway round, the head man break and the side man arch (6) command (8)

The list goes on.

Many new callers are given prompts like this as filler to assist them in developing their timing delays from one movement to the next but they are not informed that this type of directional flow filler, although sometimes helpful to the dancers, becomes a delivery crutch and if overused, you find yourself unable to call without it.

Remember the early example of Do Paso. It is one of those movements that should not need a filler or a prompt but I doubt many of us can raise our hands and claim we have never heard or never used prompts our selves calling it like...turn partner left, and corner by the right, back to the partner left.....to an allemande thar or to a courtesy turn. – sometimes it is right and sometimes it just feels right to the dancers.

But if the words are habits and you do not understand the delivery mechanism and how you are supposed to say the words then they just become a hinderance.

Think about dancing this. (poorly timed use of filler prompts)

- **Head two couples square thru.** Four hands round that ring you go. All the way to the outside two and when your there do a right and left thru.
- **Swing thru** – turn half by the right and centre two turn half by the left, boys run to the right around that girl and when your there bend the line.

Poor delivery of the filler words prevents good delivery of the command prompts needed for smooth dancing.

A prompting filler is dangerous

Alternatively, there is a the caller crutch of developing a habit where the command seemingly cannot be given without filler words. This is a real problem when the filler words are flow prompts and you ignore what you are commanding the dancers to do. The most common of these expressions is:

Bend the line (4) go up and back (4-8) and a right and left thru (6)

Generally, this should be danced as

- Bend the line 1,2,3,4 (lines are usually far apart at this point)
- Forward and back 5.6.7.touch, 9,10, 11, touch
- Right and left thru, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18.....

Because forward and back is used so frequently as a crutch it is disregarded by many callers and dancers alike which makes for awkward dancing when the dancers do what they are told, or worse when they do not and the caller gives them time to do what they are told. Pass thru, bend the line, go forward and back, and a right and left thru is often called given from bend the line 2 beats for the bend the line and 6 for the right and left thru (8 beats of music) when what you have called actually takes 18 beats of music or at least 14 beats if the lines are close together.

The final part of filler / killer is the problem when a caller is told to stop using filler words to prompt the dancers but is not taught how to use dead air. Nature abhors a vacuum and so do many square dance callers apparently. When a new caller is criticised rather than critiqued and coached, the propensity is to stop using filler prompts and that empty space just calls out to be filled. Unfortunately, unlike Eric Henerlau, Tony Oxendine, Ken Ritucci and others who have developed their own style to both fill and use the blank space appropriately, many new callers feel that this just has to be filled in, and they start falling back to the rhyming couplets which are often not metered to the square dance choreography of today.

It not only hampers the patter calling and the patter rhythm but prevents really being fair to music when you start doing singing calls. Because the crutch is gone an that big pot hole of nothingness is there, we seem to want to fill it in so we grab the nearest words that come to mind and fill the hole, regardless of whether they fit or not. This really hampers and hinders the delivery of the message and the often calls are lost in the attempt of witty repartee with ineffective filler.

Go back and think about the old time patter rhyming couplets. They were there, and they were practiced and they were themed for a specific reason.

If you are going to use filler in modern square dancing the principle must be the same to achieve success. Even your impromptu filler is practiced, themed and delivered appropriately to achieve a specific reason. That reason is not to fill dead air. It is to keep the rhythm and enhance the flavour of the dance.

Filler is not random

Many callers today still rhyming couplets, or variations of them to fill in the big empties like right and left grand, weave the ring, or even square thru but little filler is uses other than a directional prompt when necessary. Others use conversational filler or little indications as discussion filler which has no rhyme but fits the conversational theme without interfering with the movement. Some callers talk to their dancers between movements effectively and seem to just be rambling.

Believe me they are not. It is an occasional thing and you can believe it is something that has been carefully considered before it is “spontaneously used”.

Exceptional callers like Eric use their vocal capabilities to turn the filler phrases into the dance music and still keep it separate from the commands. You can bet that this is a well-practiced technique.

Each of these callers I have mentioned has developed their own style and technique, influenced by others perhaps, but still uniquely their own, and that is why they are so successful.

It is also why the dancers remember Don Beck talking about fishing in Martha’s Vineyard during the patter but can’t remember just what he called, only that it was fun and they did it.

It is why Ken Rittucci is able to say things like follow that rich lady, or give a worrisome inflection and words into his patter to make you think that someone is having trouble and he is really working hard to get you sorted and you feel so happy when you are suddenly home. Whew he was good to sort that out. – when in reality he knew where you were all the time.

It is why callers Tony Oxendine or Mike Sikorsky can seemingly walk you through the impossible with spoke directional prompts and get you where you are supposed to be through a difficult task and you feel exonerated and wonderfully successful when all they really did was add a few well practiced and chosen filler prompts to make the easy seem like it was difficult and really only said one little thing in there to help a few dancers out that may have needed the quick prompt. This is usually followed by the next time being called with the filler “you are on your own now” and you wonder why you had trouble with it before because it is so easy now.....success.

Each of these callers I consider a master at their craft. Each of these callers will tell you that they are still working every day to improve their craft. I also feel I can say that each of these callers will tell you to find your own way to do patter. They can give you the tools and show you how they work; but only you can finally determine what tools you are going to use, and how well you are going to use them. Patter words and filler are a tool, and like any tool they can be used properly for what they are intended, or they can be abused and used wrongly.

The choice is yours alone.