

Showmanship, Stage Presence and Rapport (SSR)

aka Brand

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The principles of *showmanship*, *stage presence* and *rapport* all seem to relate to the thought of how the dancers perceive us. It's how much they are enjoying our contributions to making the dance experience so pleasurable that they feel better about their own lives when they leave than when they arrived.

Other than *showmanship*, *stage presence* and *rapport*, there are many other factors involved in providing a pleasurable dance experience, like interesting smooth choreography, singing call choice, and the delivery of both. These and other factors also figure very much into providing a great dance experience.

So, I believe we should include all of the above under one word, and that word

BRAND

What do we see, feel, and taste, in our minds eye when we hear words like Tesla, Crest Toothpaste, Boot Barn, Domino's Pizza, or Wheaties?

What happens in the mind when a person hears the word, Hilton? Is it Paris Hilton? Hilton Hotels? Hilton Audio?

Now, what happens in the mind of the dancer when they hear YOUR name spoken?

Every time I call a dance or teach a workshop or class, I look at each dancer and think, among other things, "how is that dancer branding me."

So now I'm dancing around (pun intended) the question I want to ask:

Where is a brand created?

Corporations spend millions of dollars on TV and radio ads every year to try and get every potential customer's mind to brand them or their product the way they desire.

You are reading this document for the same reason. So here is where a brand is created:

A brand is created in the mind of each customer or client.

The very dangerous pitfall in all of this self-analysis and branding effort is this:

We individually tend to judge ourselves on our intentions, and everyone else judges us on our actions.

Where some people see *Showmanship* as being how you act on stage for everyone and *Stage Presence* is how you look to everyone while you are on stage, and *Rapport* deals with how you build an emotional connection with each individual, I see this as a continuum of Brand Building.

In my mind, there is only one way to avoid this pitfall and effectively brand yourself as you desire to be branded. We need to constantly look outside ourselves to see how

other people perceive us. We need to be listening to positive reinforcement comments and be grateful for them. We need to be listening to detracting comments or negative comments and be grateful for them. We also need to be listening to the silent majority and what each one of them is saying without speaking and be grateful for that also. Each one of these individuals is either a client or a potential client.

What does a dancer perceive when they look up and see you on stage? For some dancers, this is a large portion of their dance enjoyment parameter. Are you well-kept and color-coordinated? If you see these people every week or every other week, are you wearing the same shirt and/or pants and/or boots and/or belt or whatever? Did you show care in the choice of your attire options, or does it look like you dressed in the order your clothes came out of the dryer?

Are you making these judgments all yourself or are you asking the opinion occasionally of some of your clients, or your significant other?

Personally, I have over and over again for many years asked a client or significant other some attire questions, and I believe now I have a sense of what works for me and also works pleasurably in the minds of my clients. Still, I am always listening to the occasional comment I get, like how I'm currently wearing my eye patch very stylishly, and how much a gentleman liked the vest I was wearing and wondered where I obtained it. I also have received many positive comments on how my girlfriend, Janet, and I always wear the same-colored t-shirts every time we are in public. We've heard this comment from dancers, medical receptionists in doctors' offices, and grocery store checkout clerks. I've also had a few comments like "what did you do to your face?" Or, "have you joined the witness protection program?"

I also know I had the great fortune of being on an airplane one time sitting next to a lady who was a college professor and taught branding. We exchanged business cards, and at the time I had a square card which I thought was cool and unique, but she thought it was an incredibly great branding tool for a square dance caller! So, I guess that helped my branding effort in the mind of a non-square dancer. So, I suggest you might consider having a square card, if you do party dances for people who do not yet actively square dance.

A great way to begin the inquisitive process to learn how you are being perceived by dancers is to take every break you have available during a dance you are calling and look for a person who is not in a conversation at that time. Walk up to them and say thank you for coming and are you having a good time. Listen to what they say. The next words out of your mouth should be a question based on something they said. If their answer inspires another question by you, then ask it. If their answer inspires a story you can tell from your own personal experiences, and you can tell that story in 30 seconds or less, then tell it but make sure you include the information of how something they said reminded you of your story. At that time, it's probably time for you to go get your glass of water or a cup of coffee or whatever and begin calling the next tip. I am positive, if you do this a few times, you will then do it over and over and you will be perceived as being a very accessible and friendly and caring caller.

One microcosm that exists under the heading of **Brand** would be how you as a caller relate to the dancers while calling your tip, which could be either *Showmanship* or *Stage Presence*.

If you have a zillion flow modules in your toolbox and you link them together by sight calling, you have several opportunities to watch the dancers, since you should be watching everybody anyway by glancing around. If someone bobbles a little, all you have to do is smile and that will be a private moment between you and them and it makes them feel very important. It's also great to make people laugh occasionally, as long as it's where everyone can laugh together. One time during a discussion where the subject of a Luau dance was starting to get a little bit disorderly, the caller said, "okay let's not get our coconuts in a twist" and everybody laughed and the tension was relieved. Recently I was calling a dance and called the singing call *Steamroller*, which is an Elvis song. During the Heads Square Thru 4 I said, "I think Elvis should have worn an eye patch" and everyone laughed.

If you can do any or all of this without inflicting on your patter or singing call timing, you will have a winning combination.

Some callers also do it with their eyes. If you can remember to smile a little when you directly connect eyes with someone without screwing up your patter calling, this is a great connecting tool. Again, it's a shared special moment. If you need schooling on this, watch a bunch of George Strait live performance videos, or go to a George Strait concert.

Or attend a Mike Sikorsky square dance.

We've been talking about building *Rapport*.

Have someone video you while you are calling and watch it with a person you trust and listen to their comments.

I suppose it's worth a small discussion about *stage presence* and how it relates to projecting confidence and friendliness. Take the crap out of your pockets and set it on the table, stand up tall and straight with your shoulders relaxed back and down, breathe well so your voice is steady and solid as you speak the calls or sing. There are lots of individual subjects. In my opinion, none of this works very well unless you invoke your heart. Heart means love and love means feeling. If you can't get dancers to feel, they will only like you and would just as soon dance to someone else next time. You want each dancer to love you and that means involving your heart. The more you can love yourself and love what you do, the more you can love each dancer, and the more they can love you.

In my experience, it seems most people need some sort of professional help to really be able to love themselves so they can love others more greatly. At the end of the day, while it's very important you become as excellent as possible in your patter calling and singing call calling, it is most important that you be confident and love yourself so you can be the coolest person in the room to hang with.

Another method of increasing *rapport* with your dancer clients is to see a group that is having a conversation and simply walk up and stand close and listen. Sometimes conversation will stop, in which case you would say "I just came up to listen." If they turn and want to talk with you, that's great. If they turn and continue, listen for a while and if they're doing fine and it seems to exclude you, then walk to the next group. Do not make the mistake that a vast majority of callers make. They will walk up to a group like this and respond to a comment and literally take over the conversation. This actually alienates some of the people in the discussion group. Do not do this.

If you approach groups as I have described and you truly listen, you will learn. The most important thing you will learn is how to bring dancing experience pleasure to these people, and probably many more people.

Always remember, Modern Western Square Dancing, the activity we know and love, is the most pristine form of dance in the world, and now statistically proven over and over again it is the only dance form that builds brains. I personally strongly contend that it is the best heart building and relationship-building tool in the world. It needs to be cherished.

Every dancer needs to be encouraged to bring their best self to the dances to offer it to the other dancers, and you and I and all of us callers have the awesome responsibility and privilege of being the facilitators of this creation of happiness and togetherness.

If you truly approach this with everything you have within you, as I have described in this document, you will be building a brand that, if dancers want to have the best time they can ever possibly have doing anything, it will be coming to one of your square dances. They will agonize over seeing your dance come to an end and they will crave the next time they can dance to your calling. They might even bring a few friends with them the next time.

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