

The Timberline Toppers' Plan Effective Recruiting & Growth

A step by step guideline – your Game Plan.

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This plan has been used several times by the Timberline Toppers of Frisco, Colorado to grow and strengthen the club. Today, we believe we can develop a class of 40 or more anytime we decide to put forth the effort.

Timberline Toppers Successes

- **2005** We struggled to get more than one square on the floor.
- **2006** Faced with a choice of grow or die, we hoped to get one square for lessons. We had a class of **43**. (**38** joined.) We tripled the size of the club.
- **2007** Was the first time luck? Challenged to prove we could do it again, we had a class of **61**. (**58** joined.) We doubled the size of the club. And we also had a second smaller class of **16**. (**16** joined.)
- **2008** We consolidated our gains with workshops and refreshers to retain our new members.
- **2009** Armed with a detailed plan, we stopped recruiting six weeks before the start of class because we had too many prospects. Our class size was **42**. (**35** joined)
- **2010** Using our same plan, we again stopped recruiting 4 weeks before the start of class. We had a class of **45**. (**42** joined.)
- **90%** of the dancers who started lessons became members.
- We have grown from a Most-Likely-to-Fail club to (one of) the largest club in the state, and have been able to maintain that status.

“We mention these statistics to point out that the Timberline Toppers Plan is not only effective, but that the results have been manageable and consistent.”

This plan emphasizes personal contact, interaction, and follow-up rather than marketing & advertising effort as many plans do. This plan separates the effort to create new members into three phases. Each part of each phase is required for success.

- I. Preparation. Create the structure that sets you up to succeed. Create a plan!
 - a. Evaluate your club's strengths and weaknesses.
 - b. The Lesson Chairman
 - c. The Database Administrator
 - d. The Kickoff Chairman
 - e. The Publicity Chairman
 - f. The Duration Time of the Campaign
- II. The Recruiting Campaign, starting with the Letter to Members and ending with the Kickoff Social.
- III. Retention; conversion of your new dancers to New Members.

I (Part A). PREPARATION OF THE CLUB

1. **A B C** **AnyBody Can ... recruit.** **Attitude – Belief – Commitment**

ATTITUDE. Your club must have an attitude that they want to be a strong club. If your club does not, your efforts to recruit a decent sized class will be wasted. Therefore, the first step may require an attitude adjustment (Ka-POW!) within your club. Attitude is critical!! Feedback from several clubs reveal reasons for being unable to create a class: political dissension, lethargy, why bother, closed minds, fiefdoms, it does not apply to us, etc.

Belief. Your club members must have confidence and believe they can recruit new prospective members. Once they have made the efforts required, and succeeded, they will find it easier to recruit new members the next time. Success breeds success.

Commitment. If the club members make a commitment to recruiting, they can succeed. If they do not, the recruiting campaign risks failure.

Getting the **buy-in** from club members is **crucial to strengthening** your club.

The **Reward** is your club becomes energized by the enthusiasm of new loyal members.

2. **Evaluate Club Strengths and Weaknesses.** What is the current condition of your club? Are membership, enthusiasm, leadership, recent class sizes, retention rates, finances, dance facility, club's determination and openness to change strengths or weaknesses? Do you have a local or club caller to teach? Is your club in crisis? A club in crisis can be good – it helps you focus. Recognize your problems and fix, eliminate or neutralize them.

3. **Paradigm Shift.** Some clubs have changed tradition expecting to gain greater acceptance.

- Dress code – relaxed.
- Music – more variety.
- Traditional Lesson Format evaluated against Alternative Lesson Format
- Extra ladies – partner each other or singles/dancer rotation.
- Dance program – change level or format to accept new dancers.
- New graduates are green – add workshops.

Every problem has a solution - and some work!

4. **Identify Goals, Create a Plan.**

- a. Put in writing what you are trying to accomplish – membership, class size, facility, retention.
- b. Educate yourself and club members – take advantage of ideas from other individuals, clubs, associations, conventions and the web.
- c. Remember, we do this because it is FUN. Ask for help. Provide written handouts.
- d. Sell your ideas at meetings, from problem to solution. Reserve the dance time for dancing.

“Most people do not set their goals too high, and miss them. Most people set their goals too low, and meet them. Do not be too timid. Reach a little higher.”

I (Part B). PREPARATION FOR THE RECRUITING CAMPAIGN

Creation of Lesson Committee and club meeting to Create Your Plan

5. **Lesson Chairman.** The lesson chairman has overall responsibility for everything related to developing the class, instructing the class, and retaining the class members as new members of the club. This person has way more responsibility than a class coordinator.
 - Possible Job Description: Should possess excellent social, organizational and administrative skills. Experienced live-wire member preferred. Bull dog OK.
6. **The Committee and the Committee Plan.** The Lesson Chairman will gather a committee together. If you can get the whole club together at this meeting, great. At the first meeting the objective will be to create a plan from the day of the meeting through the Kickoff Social. At this meeting, some people will be selected to do specific jobs. The next five items should be determined at this first meeting.
7. **Database Administrator.** The database administrator will keep a list of all prospects given to him/her by club members and from advertising or other sources. Information must include name and contact info: prospect's name, address, phone number, email address, and name of referring member or source. The database administrator will be involved in Recruiting Campaign steps one through four, either solely or with the help of other members. Gentle reminders are needed; the database administrator or lesson chairman should make ten second progress reports at dances, reminding everyone to find guests for the Kickoff Social.
8. **Publicity Person; Choosing Prospecting Ideas.** Choose someone to be in charge of overall publicity. Create a publicity plan! ... Frequently, publicity and recruiting sources receive a great emphasis when discussions about recruiting occur. This can be a trap. Publicity/Marketing is just one portion of this plan's success. Marketing & Advertising efforts only work if you are prepared to use the results. Make the preparations outlined in this plan to maximize your efforts. ... I have a list of (over 160) recruiting ideas that can be useful in publicity and retention. No one club has the resources to do everything on the list, so it is necessary to pick and choose ideas that will work for your club. ... One to One! Have one club member responsible for each idea selected, and friends can be a committee. Responsibility will yield results. To get a copy of the list, contact us at mntndncr@att.net .
9. **Kickoff Social Chairman.** The Kickoff Social is any event that will draw prospects to an event you hold. We emphasize to our members and guests that the invitation will be to a social, not lessons. We include an introduction to square dancing as part of the recruiting event. The Kickoff Chairman could also be called a Social Chairman or Dinner Chairman. He/she is responsible for - a bunch; from initial planning to final planning, including menu and food amounts needed, program, place settings, tables, chairs, greeters, servers, etc. ... We have used a chili dinner as our Kickoff Social, but your club could hold a potluck, a breakfast, a barbeque or other social gathering to kickoff and introduce your guests to square dancing.
10. **Set Date Classes to Start, Location, Instructor.** At the first committee meeting, these items may already be set. If not, set a target date to start lessons, and assign someone to find a location for

lessons and an instructor for the class. We start our lessons two days after the Kickoff Social. Hook your prospects while they are still excited.

“Every job on the team is important. When you have established your Lesson Chairman, Database Administrator, Publicity Chairman, and Kickoff Social Chairman, you are ready to execute your game plan and start your recruiting campaign.”

II. The RECRUITING CAMPAIGN

11. **Recruiting Campaign - Minimum Time.** Allow a minimum of two months to develop your class. Three, four, or even six months is not too much time. Your time will start with Step One, the Letter to Club Members.
12. **Step One; Letter to Club Members.** The recruiting campaign should kickoff with a letter to all members, asking them to help keep the club growing and strong, and requesting them to give the lesson committee the names of two or more prospects. The database administrator will be receiving names forwarded from committee members, directly from members, and from marketing and advertising sources. The database administrator may have to prompt members if the contact information is incomplete. If you would like a sample ‘Letter to Members’ to adapt to your club, contact me at mntndncr@att.net .
13. **Step Two; 1st Letter to prospects.** Send a note to all prospects within ten days after putting them in the database. This is basically to acknowledge that you are looking forward to meeting them, who to contact if they have questions, and you will be in contact with them again as the Kickoff Social date gets closer. The format of notice can vary. Some people advocate newsletters to prospects, others use postcards. Reminder to Members, - you are inviting guests to a Social, not lessons.
14. **Step Three; Invitation to prospects.** About four weeks before the Kickoff Social, send all prospects an invitation to the “Chili Social and Introduction to Square Dancing.” Hand address envelopes, include a note and sign the invitation. Hand addressing the invitations impresses the prospects and separates it from junk mail. If you would like a sample invitation to adapt to your club, contact me at mntndncr@att.net .
15. **Step Four; Reminders to Members.** Shortly after sending out the guest invitations (two or three days), send a reminder to all members who submitted prospect names. We use email to members and cc the Kickoff Chairman. It is critical that your members contact their guests before the Kickoff Social and let the Kickoff Social Chairman know who is expected to attend. List their guest’s names and remind them you have contact info available in case they have misplaced it. If you would like a sample email to adapt to your club, contact me at mntndncr@att.net .
16. **Step Five; Preparation for the Kickoff Social.** Some preparations for the Kickoff Social can be made months in advance, but the last two weeks are very hectic for the Kickoff Chairman. The caller MC should already be set. A reliable estimate on the numbers of guests and members is needed to determine food requirements. The Kickoff Chairman should be copied on all ‘step four’ emails so he/she will know who to contact if members do not contact her/him. The Kickoff Chairman needs

some reliable assistants that she/he can delegate jobs to. Get a copy of the master prospect list from the Database Administrator, sorted in a manner that you can use it.

17. **Step Six; the Kickoff Social.** You have spent the past several months getting your prospects to this point. Do not lose them now! Greet the guests as they arrive, check them in, and give them name tags. (Members; Wear your club badge and mingle!) When it is time to eat, put the guests in the front of the chow line, and have members seated to eat with the guests. Clear the food and have guests and members up for dancing. Mingle! If you hold a demonstration, keep it brief. During breaks, make brief announcements on lesson details. Mingle! Have information cards or tri-fold flyers available. Have a sign up table for lessons; the treasurer should be prepared to accept money for lessons if the guests choose to pay that night. Thank the guests for coming as they depart. The evening should be fun and informative for the guests. The Guests are the reason for the evening.

III. RETENTION

18. **The Class.** Cheers! You have a class, but your job is not complete. The energy from one successful new dancer feeds to another, the angels help per the instructor's desires and everybody bonds during breaks. And still needed; a Class Coordinator and friends to set up the hall and assist the instructor as necessary.

19. **Retention.** Frankly, we recognize that a 90% retention rate is extraordinary and specific reasons are hard to pinpoint. However, we are sure that these are among the reasons that contribute to our retention rate.

- Members make an effort to welcome and become friends with new dancers from the get go. During the first night at the Kickoff Social, members mix with and welcome guests. They continue to build these friendships during lessons. Vice versa.
- The class is sponsored by only one club. Angels and new dancers mix freely. New dancers do not concern themselves with which club to join. Members help seal the choice to join the club giving lessons.
- During lessons, the instructor takes a real interest in the new dancers. Class is made to be FUN. It helps to have the instructor be a member of the club. New dancers identify with the club.
- Lessons taught twice a week for ten weeks fit our situation best. (Mainstream lessons)
- The new dancers are invited to regular club dances after they have had as few as three lessons, at no charge. The squares are mixed member and new dancer couples. The first half hour is limited to calls the new dancers have been taught. Guest callers have embraced this format; coordination is required.
- New dancers are invited to join the club before graduation.

20. **Flexibility.** Be prepared for the unexpected. You may need to make decisions on the fly, or modify plans.

PERTINENT MISCELANEOUS THOUGHTS

Feed Back. Yes, we'd love feedback regarding your efforts and successes. We'd also welcome any questions.

A Plan is a recipe. There could be variations in a recipe to bake a cake, and the results will be different types of cakes. We also know that if we leave out key ingredients, the final result is unsatisfactory. Milk, flour, eggs, baking powder, sugar, special spices and flavorings, timing and temperature are all needed to result in a great cake. *The twenty items (ingredients) above are your keys to a great class!*

Timberline Toppers is a Mainstream Club. This Plan should work for any club, including Plus and Round Dance Clubs.

Numbers.

How many prospects do we need to create a class?

How many of our prospects will start class?

It is an approximation, but we expect about **35%** of our list of prospects to start lessons.

About 70% of the prospect list may say they will come to the Kickoff Social.

About 80% who said they would come may show at the Kickoff Social.

About 60% of the guests at the Kickoff Social may start lessons.

One frequently asked question is, **“What is most important?”** Many answers are correct: Make it FUN; Shake their hand; Know their name; Ask; Make them feel important; etc.

But consider this as one possible most important thing –

It is not you.

It is not your club.

It is not the database list.

It is not the Kickoff Social.

It is the Guests!

It is making them feel welcome.

It is the excitement of the evening.

You are on a date with your Guests and you are going to seduce them, (into the square dance activity).

Parting Thoughts:

Nothing happens ... but first a dream. – *Carl Sandburg*

Even if you are on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there. – *Will Rogers*

Change your thought and change your world. – *Norman Vincent Peale*

It's choice – not chance – that determines your destiny. – *Jean Nidetch*

Timberline Toppers
Frisco, Colorado, USA
We Dance at 9100 Feet
Highest Club in the World
www.timberlinetoppers.org

Jim Langdon
mntndncr@att.net
303-816-1202

Marcia Langdon
MLangdon@myqci.com