

## **Polishing Techniques**

*By Mary Wendt and Donna Haas*

Memory mistakes, sloppy transitions and improper execution all contribute to less than perfect performances. After you've taught a routine, watch it all the way through for 'rough' spots and use these three polishing techniques to smooth it out. Your team will perform uniformly and more confidently.

### **The Freeze**

Use this technique when you can't get body alignment, arm or leg positions exactly right. You've demonstrated over and over, but each individual executes her own interpretation of what you are doing.

Isolate the count causing the trouble...let's say, count 5. Have your team execute the eight count and then freeze on count 5. Have the team hold that position until you make individual corrections. Repeat the process until everyone freezes count 5 in the proper place. Then have the team execute the entire eight count a few times so they remember to connect count 5 with counts 6, 7 and 8.

### **Last Eight, First Eight**

Most memory mistakes happen during a transition from the end of one phrase to the beginning of another. It often occurs when you stop teaching a routine one day and pick up teaching the next day. The brain hasn't connected the two thoughts together yet. The 'last eight, first eight' technique is the perfect cure.

Isolate the last eight count of the first step and the first eight count of the next. Have your team execute just those two eight counts until the transition is planted in their heads. If memory still isn't improving, isolate just the exact transition from count eight to count one. Repeat those two counts several times, and then add the full eight counts to complete the transition.

### **Warp Speed**

As you're watching a routine you'll sometimes see an eight count that team members just keep stumbling through. Or, as you're teaching, they can't quite pick it up. Isolate that eight count and have your team repeat it five or six times in a row, increasing speed each time. Don't give them time to think in between each repetition. Once they complete an eight count immediately give them a faster '5,6,7,8' to cue the repeat at the new tempo. By the last time through, you should be counting almost too quickly for them to dance. Then take the eight count back down to normal tempo. Now you should see dancing, not stumbling!

*Many of the techniques below were contributed by officer lines at MA Dance Camps over the past few years...our thanks to them!*

### **Memory**

\* The Memory Game – run dance until memory mistake, and then start over (can be used for projection, technique, precision errors too)

\* Mental Case – doing a mental run through before a performance to envision the show they

are about to perform (technique used by many Olympic athletes)

- \* Pounding – performing the routine over and over, speeding up the counts each time
- \* Third Time's a Charm – making the group do the routine (or specific parts of the routine that are difficult or fast) with no memory mistakes 3 times in a row
- \* Team Counting – team counts aloud so that the movements and their corresponding counts become ingrained in their muscle memory

### **Formations/Transitions/Spacing and Alignment**

- \* Slo-Mo – group moves 1 count at a time through a transition to detect traffic problems
- \* Fast-Mo – group moves through all transitions from beginning of routine to end to memorize order of position on floor
- \* Peripheral Vision – lines of 5-10 walk (or dance/move) down the floor staying in line; individuals learn to perfect their sense of spacing and alignment
- \* Sense & Sensibility – to get a 'sense' of your positioning, go through a particular movement or transition with eyes closed. Always use caution, and emphasize safety, not silly, for your dancers.

### **Articulation, Placement & Technique**

- \* Autopsy – the person cleaning focuses on one part of the body (i.e. only heads)
- \* Freeze Frame – stopping on every count to check positions
- \* Checkpoints – stop on specified count
- \* Vertical File – place team in vertical file to clean placement
- \* Cleaning Circle – place team in circle to clean
- \* Protractor – call out angle measure (like 45°) and have team hit to clean arm placement/body angles/kick placement

### **Precision and Timing**

- \* The Clapper – clapping the beats to improve timing
- \* Count & Shout – have the team call out certain 'important' counts while rehearsing a certain phrase

### **Projection**

- \* Imagery – each person creates an image to evoke the emotion desired (i.e. Brad Pitt watching to evoke look of excitement and anticipation)
- \* Smile Drill – line up in height line, play music, have them smile for the entire song
- \* Psych Up – right before performance, huddle and build the mood intended for the routine, psyching each other up
- \* On-Site Psych – while practicing, 'psych person' is building excitement by yelling encouraging and motivating remarks
- \* Sign Psych – make a 'SMILE' sign and post high for team to focus on during performance

### **Miscellaneous**

#### **Kicks**

- \* Hit (Height is There) – when kicking across the floor, say 'HIT' at the highest point of the kick; improves synchronization of kicks
- \* Floor Plan – lay on the floor in kick line and kick, yelling 'HIT' as above

- \* Fan Over the Chair – kick over the back of chairs to improve fan kicks
- \* Sidewatch – the cleaner watches kick line from side to detect posture, extension, and alignment problems

### **Pom**

- \* Chicken Noodle Poms – hold soup cans, rolls of coins or light hand weights instead of poms to practice, polish and build strength in arms and wrists
- \* Shake ‘n Bake – cleaner focuses on just the pom use throughout the routine, then corrects and enhances to ensure maximum effect and use of pom

### **Polishing As a Group**

- \* Add-On – one person (or group) does a movement, then repeat, adding next movement, etc.
- \* ‘Your Team Name’ Bloopers – record practice and critique from tapes
- \* The Backward Beat – cleaning from the end section of the routine, as it is last rehearsed

### **Polishing in Groups**

- \* Group Competition – split into small groups and clean then compete
- \* Rotation – small groups rotate among different coach or team member who cleans only a specific part of the routine; more consistent than different individuals cleaning the same parts
- \* Clocking – using polishing stations (one person cleans heads, one arms, etc.)
- \* Half ‘n Half – half of the team performs while the other half critiques
- \* Partner Critiques – break into partners and critique each other

### **Keeping It Positive**

- \* Incentives – hand out stickers, candy, bottle of ‘Mr. Clean’ to those team members who stand out (projection, effort, positive attitude)
- \* Thank You – each team member (leaders too!) says ‘thank you’ after he or she is critiqued, whether being commended or corrected, to instill in each member the reality that the cleaner is doing him or her a favor!

Selections from *The Team Book*®