

OXFORD DIOCESAN GUILD OF CHURCH BELLRINGERS - NORTH BUCKS BRANCH

Hints and tips for a great tower practice

The following thoughts were collected from members during the 2016 Branch Autumn Meeting and are documented here to provide food for thought and assist new tower captains to run successful practices.

Members were asked to think about what makes a practice great - here are their thoughts:

- Providing a friendly, welcoming and inclusive atmosphere
- The practice should be well organised, enabling everyone present to develop in some way and should ideally enable individuals to work towards achieving their ringing goals.
- The practice should enable the band to reach the next level together e.g. learning a new method or variation, successfully ringing a new touch, completing a QP.
- Good preparation is essential, what should be rung in order to help ringers develop
- Members should aim to observe good time keeping skills so that the great preparations are put to good use during the practice.
- The practice should be run to a good steady pace allowing for some conversation while keeping the prolonged periods of no ringing to a minimum.
- An optimum number of ringers helps - as a general rule 1½ ringers per bell is suggested
- Know the abilities and limitations of the band and ring a variety of methods that enables some great ringing and some development opportunities too but don't push the band too far to fast
- Have a short tea break.
- Place your band - you will need strong ringers around someone learning a method for the first time.
- Acknowledge the achievements of your ringers.

Members considered how they could keep things fresh during a practice:

- Providing development opportunities for all, set goals at the beginning of each year with each band member and look to make progress towards those goals when developing your plan for the practice
- Revisit the goals with individual members to monitor progress and reset as required
- Consider using "learning the ropes" syllabus developed by the Association of Ringing Teachers.
- Keep a steady pace - there should be an even balance between ringing and non-ringing activities.
- Think about fun activities or simple exercises that you could introduce into the practice to help a learner develop a specific skill e.g. dodging practice have a look at Kaleidoscope ringing sheet on the central council website:
http://www.cccb.org.uk/education/practicetoolkit/pdfs/fs_kaleidoscope.pdf or
alternatively the advanced Kaleidoscope ringing page on the ART website:
<http://ringingteachers.org/resource-centre/teaching-tips/teaching-kaleidoscope-ringing-advanced>

- Introduce variations to the band which people can learn quickly and widen their repertoire.
- Have an aim for each month/quarter e.g. learning a new method or try the variations named after each month or theme for the season e.g. September, April day, Christmas Eve just google for other ideas
- Ring a touch of a method that doesn't impact the learner but gives a bit more a challenge to the more experienced
- Alternate types of similar methods e.g. St Simons, St Martins, Winchendon Place etc.

Best practice examples were asked for with an explanation of what was so good about them, the answers varied:

- Linslade practice works well, it's welcoming, lots of enthusiastic ringers, youngsters are as engaged as the adults. It a very popular practice which can mean there are sometimes too many ringers there.
- Woughton practice was also mentioned as being worthy of note - being a ground floor ring it is easily accessible to all, the ready supply of chairs just outside the ringing chamber are often used, the practice is friendly and supportive of learners and the pace is steady: ring, short chat, ring and so on.
- Reward and Recognition – look for opportunities to give some encouragement and compliment a nice bit of ringing - it does wonders for a learner's confidence in those early days.
- Have a list of methods/exercises in your plan for the practice which are collated to ensure everyone achieves something during the practice.
- A structured practice e.g. starting with easier ringing - rounds and call changes and end well with a touch of x from your more advanced ringers
- One group named Ted Fawcett from Shenley as a best practice example of someone who runs a great practice giving the following examples of what he does well, the reasons given were, if it's not working call a halt, discuss what went wrong and start again if it doesn't work then suggest everyone look it up and try again later in the evening. Introduce what you are going to ring next, and what will follow that, enabling those sitting to do some last minute revision if needed. Well done to Ted!

Finally, members thought about the one piece of advice they would give to a new tower captain starting out, each member had something different to give so the advice is quite a bit longer than anticipated:

- Develop a good relationship with the PCC and maintain communication with them.
- Don't feel isolated, there are lots out there that are more than willing to help out - just ask.
- Don't get disheartened and in the words of Winston Churchill never give up, not every practice goes as you've planned and you've got to remain flexible and have fun!
- Always have a spare rope available – just in case.
- Have a plan, write it down, and review it and adapt – it's easy to try to cram too much in to your early days.
- Lead you practice in a positive manner.
- Ensure you know what everyone wants to achieve.
- Congratulate success.

- Delegation is a wonderful tool for example you don't need to be the conductor of a method, there's bound to be someone who already knows how to call it.