

Planning for Successful Retention of New Ringers: Keeping Everybody Happy

The previous articles in this series have guided us through planning for successful recruitment, focusing on what we can be doing while access to towers is restricted. Many activities can be undertaken *now*, despite bell handling tuition being off-limits. But successful recruitment requires more than initial induction. Unless you *retain* a new recruit, your effort has been wasted. So how will you embed the interest and commitment of new ringers, alongside enhancing that of existing band members? It's worth considering strategies for this from the outset.

Luckily there are some great resources available, enabling the advancement of ringing prowess while we are away from the tower. Simulator software, apps and online ringing platforms support developing skills for both new and existing ringers; CCCBR and ART YouTube channels and ART's online learning portal provide a wide range of training resources (see links at end of article). With small gatherings now permitted in domestic gardens, socially distanced hand-bell sessions can be arranged for existing ringers, or to engage new recruits. We have time and scope to return to ringing with improved theoretical understanding, and a strong training framework.

Structured training

Research clearly demonstrates that intensive training facilitates fast progress and high levels of retention between lessons. This promotes maintained enthusiasm and is highly appropriate for in-tower initial learning. Now-a-days, learners often expect 'courses' with a defined, structured delivery: think of music grades or karate belts for which regular, planned training is usually offered.



Dancing Plain Hunt (socially distanced)

Bell handling lessons, which benefit from initial intensive one-to-one training, are not currently possible. But there's still plenty we can do to create a structured teaching approach, optimising delivery in the current environment of increased virtual communication. Recruits who are happily immersed in the world of ringing are less likely to fall by the wayside. So employ the innovative ideas that have emerged during lockdown to design a structured training programme, targeting the specific needs of your ringers. You could:

- Create a tower in *Ringling Room* for training. Complete novices, across the globe, are getting to grips with call changes and plain hunt; some are now moving on to early method ringing. Arrange your own practices for new ringers. If they are confident enough to move outside your group you could also encourage participation in practices advertised through the *Ringling Room* Take-Hold Lounge Facebook page.

- Suggest that recruits supplement *Ringin' Room* training by using apps to develop rhythm and listening skills and to help re-affirm early method learning. Try Abel, Methodology, etc.
- Utilise the ever expanding library of training clips on the CCCBR and ART YouTube channels to support virtual teaching.
- Organise face-to-face theory sessions. Local parks or a ringer's garden work well, weather permitting!
- Incorporate hand bells into your non-virtual teaching...or numbered table tennis bats or hats! It's not only younger learners who enjoy jumping around following ringing rules. Ok, real bells can't actually move; but important concepts can be introduced in a memorable manner.

Small hand bells can be purchased online. They are relatively quiet and inexpensive, and facilitate outdoor practice with the added benefit of attracting attention - and so, perhaps, additional recruits!

Examples:

diatonic tinyurl.com/y8rkddsj

children's www.cheapdisabilityaids.co.uk/rainbow-hand-bells-347-p.asp

Keeping your new ringers interested

For optimum success, plan for the assimilation of new ringers into an existing band in advance. Utilise lockdown activities and incorporate these into ongoing training plans. Include hooks such as virtual service ringing or performances to celebrate a special occasion. Design a package of high quality teaching activities to support the retention of newer recruits...away from, and later in, the tower.



Horsham ringers' virtual pub night – each week had a different theme; this one was quarantines!

Use lockdown opportunities to integrate recruits into the ringing social scene. Try organising a virtual pub night, quiz or a socially distanced ramble. Promote a 'new ringers' support group that networks within your own band; extend this to other towers. Involve your new recruits in planning the next stage of your recruitment drive.

The transition from virtual ringing back into a tower may well be a challenge for many ringers.

New recruits and lower level learners will not immediately be able to transfer all of the skills developed in lockdown to tower bells. It is very important that we plan for this transition and manage expectations realistically. New learners will probably be quite impatient to achieve competent solo bell handling so that they can move on, putting into practice what they have learnt in *Ringin' Room* or on hand bells. ART courses support teachers by highlighting a variety of teaching strategies that promote productivity and successful outcomes. How to teach bell handling in a structured, accessible manner is covered in the ART Module 1 course; now is a good time to forward plan and organise attendance for a couple of your band.



Certificates are a great way to celebrate progress - and can be presented outdoors with social distancing

Making lock-down recruitment work for everyone in the band

For recruitment to be successful it must work for the entire band. But the addition of new recruits will inevitably affect previous dynamics. So how will you achieve a smooth integration of additional members?

Existing ringers who have been reluctant to engage in *Ringin' Room* or other virtual activities might not yet have met your newcomers across the computer screen. Introductions may require a tactful approach. Encourage more experienced ringers to take an active role in your recruitment and training plan so that they are more likely to welcome additional members and participate willingly in their development. Remember to provide something interesting for these more able ringers too. You could:

- Target some virtual practices according to level or theme, using helpers as support
- Include some virtual ringing events that are open to all

- Invite ringers to call something, or request something they would like to ring or practice
- Join in with virtual social events and ringing practices within your association or local area
- Attend ringing talks and presentations given by other associations
- Organise a socially distanced outdoor event - a walk, barbeque or picnic
- Run a distanced hand bell workshop in a garden or park
- Network using social media; this is also useful for keeping up-to-date with the wider ringing scene
- Use a buddy system – delegate paired teaching, technical support, pastoral enquiries...
- Be enthusiastic about future possibilities that will be available to all of us!



Socially distanced picnic – a good way for the whole band to have some face-to-face interactions

A really important point is that you should remember to look after your own wellbeing as well as that of your band. Even in lockdown teachers and leaders need to avoid 'burn-out'. Tips are much the same as for regular ringing:

- Collaborate with others to reduce workload; share problem solving
- Talk to a ringing friend in whom you can confide
- Team teach to distribute the load and keep the flow going
- Don't neglect your own ringing needs; find a ringing related activity that interests you

Next time we will take a look at the key 'take-home' messages that have emerged from this Recruitment and Retention walk through...

Resources:

CCCBR YouTube channel: www.youtube.com/channel/UCkr3TjEQSISCCSeI3F-uiNA

ART YouTube channel: www.youtube.com/user/ringingteachers

ART online learning portal: onlinelearning.bellringing.org/

Recruitment & Retention Facebook group:

www.facebook.com/groups/BellringingRecruitmentandRetention

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