

Retention of Ringers

Recent Developments in Coaching

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Introduction

Within the ringing world we have a need to recruit and perhaps more importantly retain ringers.

How many times do we recruit ringers for them to be lost a few months later?

How many times do we see ringers who have progressed well, perhaps out-performing all other learners in their tower then suddenly lose interest?

Do we know why they leave and what we might be able to do to reduce this loss?

The “Principles of Coaching” are just that, they are a range of different aspects of teaching which affect the way people learn and their attitude to their learning. They apply to the teaching of any activity which involves physical skill, from sport to music, through team activities to individual pursuits. Bell ringing falls within this broad reach.

If you are a Tower Captain or Ringing Teacher:-

- Do you know what you can do to create the atmosphere in which enthusiasm is maintained and team spirit increased?
- Do you understand how your teaching style can be used to build the confidence of your learners?
- Do you have knowledge about why people give up an activity which they have been pursuing for sometime and how you can reduce the likelihood of this occurring?
- Do you know how to subtly change your teaching technique so as to get the best out of all your different types of learner?
- Do you understand why some people will always “have a go” while others are reluctant to attempt new things?

Traditionally, the knowledge and skills relevant to the retention and development of learners was the domain solely of top level sports coaches. However, over the last ten years or so, perhaps due to the influence of the internet, this wisdom has become more widely available.

Bell ringing is not the only activity suffering from problems of recruitment and retention. Other groups are reappraising the way they have been doing things. These principles are being introduced by tutors and coaches into a wide range of activities to help spur interest and ambition amongst participants.

Ten years ago British cycling was in severe decline, members were leaving the British Cycling Federation in droves. These are the coaching techniques put into place by the performance director of the British Cycling team Dave Brailsford. At the Beijing Olympic Games the results of this new approach were fully realized with our cyclists winning 14 medals including 8 gold.

These notes have been compiled with reference to:-

- Sport and Exercise Psychology. A Critical Introduction. Professor Aiden P.Moran. 2004. *Published by Routledge.*
- The Principle of Teaching Riding. The Official Manual of the Association of British Riding Schools. K Bush, J Marczak. 2005. *Published by David and Charles PLC.*
- Coaching Golf Successfully. Bill Madonna. 2001. *Published by Human Kinetics.*
- The Suzuki Approach to the teaching of musical instruments.
www.britishsuzuki.com 2008
- Special Olympics – Principles of Coaching - Coaching Guide.
www.sogb.org.uk/coaches.html 2005

By bringing awareness of these principles into the teaching of ringing we would make sure that we are applying up to date and proven coaching skills, which in turn may help us to retain more of our learners and more advanced ringers.

Team Cohesion

The team building aspect of retention of learners and participants is already highly developed in ringing with many of the following principles established as part of normal behaviour in the world of ringing.

“A team is a group of two or more people who come together exerting mutual influences on each other to achieve a common purpose.” Professor Aiden P Moran. 2004.

Every group, team (or in ringing terms **band**) has two important parts, the “task” component and the “social” component.

- The task component leads to team work.
- The social component leads on to the development of team spirit.

Both of these factors have been shown to be positively associated with participants’ attitude and frequency of attendance.

Practical Team Building Techniques for Coaches

Team spirit

- Facilitate team communication – provide regular opportunities for members of the group to meet together. In ringing this regular event is frequently provided for by going down the pub after practice.
- Increase team ‘togetherness’ – organize social events and outings. Visit spectacular places/venues. Have a separate social organizer within the group.

- Enhance the collective sense of team identity with the use of logos/badges/team clothing.

Team work

- Get to know the individual members of the group as much as possible.
- Recognise the importance of each individual within the group and in what way they can contribute to the group as a whole.
- Add an extra dimension; such as lectures, courses, demonstrations.
- Clarify goals and norms – set achievement targets in consultation with group members.

Maintaining Enthusiasm and Motivation

There are always “reasons and barriers” to people taking up a new activity. People take up new activities because they are “enjoyable, challenging and offer new social outlets and opportunities.” One of the barriers to taking something up – or continuing with it – is said to be “lack of time”. However, it has been shown that even where there are no restrictions in time, such as within the prison population, the uptake is similar to that in the general population.

- Remember the finer points of bell ringing may be of less importance to your pupils than to you. They may have other hobbies and interests.
- Enjoyment is important – practice should be fun.
- A desire to learn cannot be forced upon a pupil. It is something that first needs to be stimulated and then carefully nurtured.
- Learners have a need for achievement. Without achievement, enthusiasm will not be maintained.
- Motivation is all about having needs and having those needs met.

However, an individual's “*need to achieve*” is challenged by his “*fear of failure*”.

In a learner with “high achievement motivation” his need to succeed or achieve is greater than his fear of failure. This learner will need more challenging situations, will go for higher levels of achievement and will tend to be from higher ability groups.

In learners with “low achievement motivation” the fear of failure is greater than the need to succeed. This learner will tend to avoid challenging

situations. He may be unwilling to have a go at something. This does not mean that he does not want to be able to do it, just that he is scared to try, and so will decline the opportunity presented to him by the coach or tutor.

A coach can change the balance between these two things by raising self confidence in a learner to reduce the fear of failure. By developing the skills of the band so that a certain achievement level becomes a “norm” within the band he can use the peer pressure of the group to increase the need of an individual to achieve. This leads on to “expectation of achievement” in the learner.

It should be remembered that different individuals will have different perceptions of achievement. For some it might be to ring a peal or a quarter peal, to improve their striking or learn to call something. For others it might be to impress their tower captain, coach, another ringer or their family. It may be even to receive the positive reinforcement of a “well done” or “you did well tonight” from a respected and hard to please senior.

The Importance of Developing Empathy with your Learner

One of the most difficult things in coaching is maintaining the motivation of people week after week.

- A good teacher establishes excellent communication skills and is always approachable when learners have difficulties or need advice.
- It is important that the tutor can be sensitive to the needs and particular requirements of individual learners, ensuring that they enjoy themselves and gain benefit from each practice.
- A tutor should be able to see when something is not working and have sufficient imagination to try a different approach.

Sources of Motivation – What keeps people ringing?

(These topics are described in detail separately elsewhere in this document)

- Team cohesion.
- Coaching Philosophy.
- Teaching Style.
- Adequate foundations skills built by “incremental learning”.
- Setting personal targets and goals.

Sources of Burn out – Why do we lose people?

- Lack of variety in practice.
- Reaching goals and failing to set new ones (stagnation of talent).
- Too much practice with too little time to recharge or renew motivational source – this implies too much pressure.
- Not reaching expectations – it is therefore important that aims and targets will need to vary from learner to learner according to their skill levels and their potential.

Coaching Philosophy

- Simply, coaching is helping a learner to prepare, develop and improve performance.
- The teacher must be many things to many people. He must be prepared to act as coach, guide, advisor, mentor and lecturer. He needs to be something of a politician and psychologist. He may also find himself as a trusted confidant and friend.
- The coach's most difficult task is not so much in teaching the learner how to use his hands, arms, and body correctly, but in teaching him to think for himself and apply correctly what he has been taught.

Coaches set in place the environment in which learning takes place. The teaching should be programmed to develop competence and confidence. This is known as "*setting the motivational climate*", and is "*the perceived structure of the achievement environment as moderated by the coach's attitude and behaviour*". That is to say by adopting certain attitudes and by putting into place certain behaviours; a coach can alter the atmosphere within the tower to encourage a desire for achievement and to establish a higher level of commitment from individual learners. With no understanding of how to establish the right atmosphere a ringing teacher may, without realizing it, create a learning environment which will lead to stagnation of ambition, boredom and infrequent attendance.

A task orientated climate focuses on technical development. This is known as a **Mastery Climate**.

14 studies have shown that this "Mastery Climate" is correlated to learner satisfaction and intrinsic motivation.

With this approach the coach places importance on *personal effort* and *skill development*. The emphasis during teaching is placed on *striving to succeed*. In this environment mistakes are not regarded as failures. They provide the opportunity for feedback and are essential to the learning process.

By creating a good "Motivational Climate" a coach can enable a learner to become more optimistic and more confident. By placing learner development first in this manner it has been shown that better performance with greater consistency is likely to be achieved.

Teaching Style

Learner centred or a *co-operative teaching* style has been shown to improve motivation in learners. It is interactive and flexible. Good communications are developed. Decisions are not all made by the tutor. The tutor guides but also shares the decision making with the learner. In this way, learners become more involved with their learning program. However, a learner cannot have a vote in every decision that is made. The coach provides the overall direction

and instruction when it is needed, allowing the learner to make decisions where appropriate. This may be for instance; when the tutor has decided that the learner's skills are sufficiently developed that he is ready to start to plain hunt, the learner may have a preference to learn from a particular bell first. When learning to plain hunt the treble to methods, he may prefer to work on Bob Doubles before Grandsire Doubles or vice versa. After learning to ring Bob Doubles he may prefer to go on to Bob Minor or Grandsire Doubles next. In this way the coach is demonstrating to the learner that he empathises with him and is putting a certain amount of trust in his decision making. This helps to boost the learner's self-esteem and motivation.

"Coaches play the role of expert advisors rather than dictatorial father figures"
Steve Peters – British cycling team 2008.

The criteria for success are not only judged by the tutor, but by the learner and the tutor.

This flexible approach to the overall plan of teaching allows the tutor to adapt practice sessions as regards day to day considerations, and to the type of learner he is dealing with, such as adults, nervous learners or children.

- *"I want a no compromise service. In a lot of instances you need to change the sessions because someone is fatigued or even feeling extra good. I can encourage and motivate and as I plan their programs I want to see how they respond."* Mark Simpson - English Institute of Sport 2008.
- *"The laws of physics may not change: however the way the tutor presents the basic skills will change from minute to minute and learner to learner."* Special Olympics code of conduct 2005.

Rather than taking learners through a set path, a learner-centred approach adapts and modifies the tasks, appropriate to each learner. Some learners would go more quickly through the system and others more slowly. Certain learners would need a longer time to practise handling skills and bell control while others will need more work on listening skills and striking skills. With others more emphasis may need to be placed on cognitive skills such as method learning, calling and conducting. Ropesight will develop at a different pace, those with good ropesight will be able to go ahead more quickly at a certain point, while others may need lots of practice exercises to develop the skill.

Teaching considerations

Adults

- Tact and diplomacy are important. A tutor should respect his learner, treating him as an equal, never insulting his intelligence.
- Adults naturally want more complicated explanations and technical details but it must be remembered that the learner is there to develop a skill. The maximum amount of practical work should be included and lengthy unnecessary discussion avoided.
- Older adults are often more aware of the potential for injury. This may affect rate of progress and teaching style.

- If adults express reservations about the tutor's theoretical knowledge he should not treat this as a challenge to his authority or knowledge, rather congratulate himself on having succeeded in arousing the learner's interest and analytical abilities.

Nervous learners

Fears which may seem irrational, ridiculous or trivial to the tutor may seem very real to the learner and should be treated seriously and with understanding.

- Fear slows and inhibits the learning process.
- A tutor should place emphasis on what can be done and achieved - not on what cannot be or has not been done at each practice.
- A tutor should stay close to the learner.
- The learner should be allowed to master each stage before moving on. A nervous learner should not be rushed.
- At the end of the practice a tutor should briefly re-cap its positive aspects.

Children

Children should be encouraged to think problems through for themselves. Asking them to comment on what went right or wrong during each exercise and how they could improve it next time has the effect of making the lesson more interactive and enjoyable, whilst at a deeper level what they are learning is more likely to be thoroughly absorbed.

- A tutor should be inventive and enthusiastic to maintain interest and stimulation.
- A tutor should consider having shorter lessons if the child's concentration span is short.
- A tutor should finish the practice on a good note while they are still eager.
- "Fun" aspects should be emphasised. Ball control exercises and games may help to develop confidence. Quizzes may be used as an enjoyable way to improve theoretical knowledge.
- A tutor should always be positive. Use praise and encouragement particularly when a child is trying hard and his efforts are not meeting with success.

The Importance of Foundation Skills

- Without good foundation skills the tutor runs the risk of the learner becoming stuck at a level below his capacity.
- By building the whole action through incremental learning; that is by gradually building the necessary foundation skills, a teacher can help his learner become consistent at a higher level.

- There is no substitute for experience.
- *“The right environment can change a person with undeveloped ability into a talented one”*. Shinichi Suzuki

David Brailsford, Performance Director of the British Cycling Team at the 2008 Olympics stated “Each cyclist was put through his Foundation Stones, a list of individual items which affect overall performance”.

Good, accurate foundation skills are what a learner builds on later to fully develop his performance. In ringing these are bell handling / ringing style, bell control, listening skills, striking skills and an accurate understanding of theory.

These should be taught in a careful graded way so as to make each further level easier to achieve. Each learner will progress at his own pace.

It is the responsibility of the coach to ensure that the tuition given is not only stimulating, constructive and enjoyable but also based on sound, correct principles.

How can we apply these principles in ringing?

Difficulties of Building Adequate Foundation Skills within Traditional Ringing Training

As soon as a learner can handle a bell it is traditional for him to attend Ringing Practice where he will develop his bell control, listening skills and start to pick up an understanding of “ringing jargon”. Can we ensure that he is having a “stimulating, constructive and enjoyable experience”, and getting enough time handling the rope to develop his basic skills well, if he is sitting on a bench for one and a half hours with only 2 or 3 goes on the rope. Later, he can make use of this time to follow other ringers or learn new methods but initially there is a great risk that he will not be fully engaged and may lose interest. No one wishes to continue a new activity that he is finding boring. In most other activities the new learner would be engaged for the majority of the session. Think of everything from a tennis lesson, an orchestra rehearsal, a step class, football training, line dancing or going to the gym. In each of these the learner is occupied and kept active for the whole session. He does not have to sit around and wait for others to take their turn; his interest can be maintained throughout, and it is evident to the learner that the session is arranged for his benefit. If the teaching sessions are learner-centred and designed specifically to meet the training needs of the learner, maintaining a stimulating and enjoyable environment throughout this will help to ensure that ringing can compete for his interest against any other hobbies he may be pursuing.

The traditional approach to early training presents us with a major problem, it is difficult to apply the sound and correct principles of training in most normal ringing practices. When a learner joins a ringing practice in the traditional way his needs have to be accommodated around those of the more established ringers. This does not give the best environment in which to concentrate on

building his foundation skills or to make sure he is fully occupied. If we treat our learners in this way we run two risks.

1. We may lose them in the early stages as they may begin to get bored and consequently lose enthusiasm.
2. We may lose them later on when they fail to make progress due to having undeveloped foundation skills.

Putting the learner first, giving dedicated time and effort to his needs and requirements, demonstrates the respect of the tutor and helpers towards that learner. The learner will feel more valued and this will lead to a greater sense of involvement with his new pastime, and his commitment to it.

Practical ideas for Building Foundation Skills

How could we provide practices which engage early learners for the majority of the session?

(NB Tied bell practices alone do not provide an opportunity to develop all the foundation skills)

- Keep a separate tied bell session after the learner joins the main practice session.
- Have a tied bell session before Sunday service ringing.
- Have an early learners' session before the main practice. It may be easier to get helpers at this time.
- Have an additional separate early learners' practice. It may be possible to gather learners together from more than one tower. This could perhaps be done at Branch level, Association/Guild level or at a Ringing Centre.
- Arrange for practice sessions using a simulator, which means skills can be built with very few helpers. With two helpers and one tutor, skills can be built using 3 or 4 bells. With a group of 3 learners, one hour can provide good practice for them all. Ringing rounds on larger numbers of bells by ear with the rest of the bells being rung by the simulator will ensure that the learner still learns to hear the full compass of bells on 6 or 8.
- Run early learner courses weekly over 6 to 8 weeks. In this way it may be possible to meet the requirements of different types of learners. Retired learners may prefer a daytime session. Young ringers may benefit from an early evening session when they are not so tired. Saturday mornings might suit families better.

All about Using Goals

- Goals are literally progressions which coaches have been using for years but expressed in measurable performance terms rather than in vague generalized terms as in the past.
- A goal is a target or an objective which people strive to achieve.

- Goal setting is a way to channel motivational energy effectively; it is a procedure which is “a highly consistent and robust performance enhancing strategy”.
- The beneficial effects of goal setting on task performance are one of the most replicable findings in psychological literature. 90% of studies showed positive or partially positive effects.
- Goals can be used not only to improve performance but to build self confidence and to maintain enthusiasm.

Why should goals enhance performance?

1. Focus attention towards relevant actions.
2. Help to foster perseverance.
3. Help to elicit effort and commitment.
4. May help to breakdown large problems into smaller components to deal with sub-goals.
5. When achieved, goals boost self confidence. **“That felt great!”**

Factors that moderate the effectiveness of goal setting.

1. Goals will not improve performance in people already motivated to do their best. This is called “the ceiling effect”.
2. The quality of the teaching.
3. The extent to which the learner is committed to the goal.
4. The quality of feedback received from the tutor.

Practical considerations when setting goals

In ringing we already have an extremely good goal setting aid in the form of “**The Sherbourne Teaching Aids Award Scheme**” devised by Pam Copson. This takes a learner right from their first lesson through to Surprise Major. However, to make a scheme maximally effective, certain factors should be taken into account.

Goal setting:-

- Should be mutual between the tutor and the learner. If goals are imposed or established without significant input from the learner, they are unlikely to be effective.
- Goals should be regarded as stepping stones to achievement.
- Short term goals should be used to help maintain enthusiasm from week to week.
- Long term goals should be used to combine the short term goals bringing them to fruition.
- Goals need to vary in difficulty from easily attainable to challenging.
- Goals should be challenging but never threatening.
- Goals should be framed in a positive way. E.g. “I will try to do X”, rather than “I will try not to do Y.”.

10 Tips for Successful Coaching

- 1. Set your learners' needs first (not your own). People want to participate, have fun and demonstrate their skills.**
- 2. Build good accurate foundations skills (style, bell control, listening skills, striking skills and understanding of ringing theory).**
- 3. Hold up the idea that it is enjoyable. Practice time should be fun.**
- 4. Remember, learners who do not derive enjoyment as well as improvement from practices are unlikely to return for many more.**
- 5. Have infinite patience, especially with the slower learner.**
- 6. Discuss with your learner their ambitions and targets. Short term, more easily attainable goals set with your learner will help prevent him from becoming disheartened. When goals are achieved set new ones.**
- 7. Never criticise. Give honest realistic feedback in a positive and helpful manner.**
- 8. Do not show favouritism to any learner.**
- 9. Advise learners not to fear mistakes. Mistakes are not failures they are an essential part of the learning process.**
- 10. Add an extra dimension to maintain enthusiasm such as outings, courses, lectures, social events and even going down the pub.**