

# REHEARSAL CHECKLIST

9 Ideas (All Beginning with “P”) to Help You Make Rehearsals Efficient and Joyful

by Kevin McChesney

## 1. Are You A PLANNER?

I am a planner. I plan meticulously and I plan ahead. I time music, write down pages of notes before a business meeting, time my plan for rehearsals, practice my directing in front of a mirror, sometimes use a kitchen timer during rehearsals, and spend countless diligent hours working out assignments and choosing music. And music is often chosen a couple of years ahead.

You have a lot of things to balance – ministry, family, business, hobbies – and you need planning to keep you on track. Emphasis is on the **REMINDERS**.

Reminders are essential to your success in your work and indeed in all aspects of your life. And writing this article has been a good reminder for me about keeping the important things at the forefront when we are “in the trenches” in our rehearsals. Write the keywords discussed in this lesson on a sticky note and put them on your music stand as reminders. They are easy to remember – they all begin with “P!” :)

Getting into a rut is too simple to do and definitely dangerous. So here you have a checklist of important reminders to keep you focused and refreshed.

*Is your PLAN in place?*

## 2. Are You PASSIONATE?

Your passion for music, ministry, and/or performing is what brought you to music in the first place. And the enthusiasm and passion that ringers and directors have for the instrument of handbells is legendary. Handbell people are **PASSIONATE** people who have a strong desire to make music together and bring beauty into their own and other people’s lives through ringing.

The art of handbells is, in many ways, still in its infancy. It is an exciting time to be a part of the new music that is created and the ideas for musicianship and presentation that are constantly being developed. And the internet brings new music and information for developing our passion for this instrument.

*How about you? Are you PASSIONATE? Will your style of rehearsing show that passion and give it as a lasting gift to your ringers and listeners?*

3. **Are You PERSONABLE?** I hope that through these articles and my teaching and my music that you get to know me.

More than what I know as a handbell composer and clinician, you'll learn what I **BELIEVE** is possible for our instrument. Participants in my workshops and festivals, and of course the Pikes Peak Ringers who have worked with me on a weekly basis for many years, come to know a lot about me – probably more than they ever wanted to know. :) They know that I play classical guitar, live in Colorado Springs (it's a cushy place to live but someone's got to do it :)), am devoted to my friends and family, love nachos (nature's perfect food :)), love old movies and recordings of classic radio shows, am temperamental and work not to be, and have a disturbed – but quick! – sense of humor.

All of which **CONNECTS** us. I've been told that in conducting a festival of 900 participants, even a ringer way in the back feels like I'm talking just to him/her. Pikes Peak Ringers has developed not only into one of the premiere musical groups in the handbell world but through our work together developing principles of presentation and our connection in knowing one another over the years we have also been one of the closest-knit groups you'll ever meet.

I don't hide how I feel or pretend to be someone I'm not. I let everyone know my weaknesses as a director and a person as well as my strengths. I apologize when I go wrong, and I'm not shy about patting myself and my ringers on the back when we go right. I've become part of my ringers' lives and they are certainly a big part of mine. More than a musician, I'm a person. Each participant and PPR member I work with is a person and I strive to treat them respectfully and affirm them individually and as a group.

*Give your ringers someone they relate to, someone like themselves. Will you be that person?*

4. **Are You PUNCTUAL?**

This one seems self-explanatory, but a fairly common complaint in handbell choirs is how “we never get started on time.” In an ever-busier world, people's time is at a premium. It's disrespectful to waste time by not starting (and ending) on time.

First things first. Meet with the group and be sure that you have a rehearsal time that everyone agrees to and is committed to. If the problem is not having a rehearsal time that works for everybody, that's fixable.

Next, get started on time. Certainly some folks will be late from time to time. Life is what it is, and there are things like traffic, kids getting sick, work running late, etc., to be contended with. Start on time, or at most a few minutes late, each week. Sometimes that means starting with only a few ringers, but have someone fill in at the piano to fill in parts until a fuller group has arrived.

And it's very important for YOU to be on time! Actually, for the director, this usually means arriving early to get things organized. Have ringers regularly arrive early to help with set up, music, mallets, and so on.

*There are two primary reasons to be PUNCTUAL. One is this is leading by example – if you are on time and start on time every week, people will learn to be on time. Second, it shows respect for the most valuable thing anyone has – time.*

## 5. Are You Helping With The PROCESS?

Too often as directors we are focused on our own agenda for a rehearsal. But there's a team of people rehearsing, not just you. The **PROCESS** of putting handbell music together is highly cooperative and interdependent (these are some of the things that first attracted us to bells, that first made us **PASSIONATE** about them!).

You as director do have a number of valuable things that you contribute to this week's rehearsal. And there are some important goals that you need to accomplish.

The ringers have valuable things they need to do as well, and goals that they individually and collectively desire to accomplish. Are you taking those into account? Are you helping them to achieve those goals?

Take turns speaking and working out "ringer jobs" and "director jobs." This is one of the most valuable things to learn about the **PROCESS**. If everyone is talking at once in rehearsal, very little is getting done. And remember, if you're talking **OVER** them, you're contributing to the chaos! Take turns. First, it's a few minutes of "my time" to get my part of the instruction and directing work done; now it's "your time," a few minutes for the ringers to work things out like page turns and sharing bells and checking that marking they missed and so on. It takes **MUCH** less time to take turns than it does for everyone to try to get "their time" in at once. And everyone is happier, too. :)

Set goals and rules, talk openly at the beginning of rehearsal about what needs to be accomplished this week, communicate clearly – and **LISTEN** when ringers are communicating with you.

One of the weak points that my ringers know about me (being **PERSONABLE!**) is that I tend to be more goal-oriented than **PROCESS**-oriented. I tend to look at their presentation and listen to their playing in "future tense" – with an eye and an ear to where I hope we will end up in concert. Truth is, we live "present tense" and the **PROCESS** is every bit as rewarding as the end result. The **PROCESS** is where we become close as a group, where we learn about one another, grow as ringers and as people.

*You desire to be the most effective you can be at tonight's rehearsal. Are you helping with the **PROCESS**?*

## 6. Are You PREPARED?

Clearly related to being a PLANNER, the only way to have successful rehearsals is for you to be PREPARED both musically and as far as organization is concerned.

Your first “performance” as a director and leader is the first rehearsal. And you continue that “performance” in every rehearsal. And you can’t “perform” if you haven’t **PREPARED**.

For every rehearsal, you need to have done your homework:

- a) Have you got all of the assignments in place?
- b) Do you know the music thoroughly enough to teach it to your ringers?
- c) Have you timed the music and elements of your rehearsal so the clock doesn’t run out on you?
- d) Do you have a plan in place if a ringer or ringers are going to be late or will miss rehearsal?
- e) Have you practiced your directing in front of a mirror to be sure that you are communicating well?
- f) Do you have specific, manageable, one-small-step-at-a-time goals in mind for each piece?
- g) Have you allowed time to talk about logistics, calendars, etc.?

And you’ll have other things to add to your own list.

It’s important to understand that **PREPARATION** means not only planning and scheduling, but thoroughly knowing the music and how you are going to teach it to others, and also knowing the personalities and communication styles of your ringers so that you can work with them effectively.

So there are two ongoing considerations for being **PREPARED**.

One is to be sure you are always learning and growing yourself as a handbell teacher and director and as a musician. If you are growing and learning, your group can’t help but grow and learn as well.

The other is to learn to be **PREPARED** for the unpredictable. As much as that sounds like a contradiction :), it’s just plain true that things come up in rehearsal that are not a part of your plan. Needs of individual ringers, circumstances beyond anyone’s control, a huge variety of things cause the path of your rehearsal to swerve. It’s important to have a Plan B (and C and D and ...) in mind so that you are ready for anything. Be **PREPARED** to adjust and go on and be in the PRESENT moment.

***Are you willing to take the time to be truly PREPARED? Your ringers deserve it!***

## 7. Are You PROVOCATIVE?

Are you inspiring your ringers? Are you challenging them? Are you encouraging them? Are you helping them to think through how they can be more than they are right now?

Let's face it – one of the reasons we got into directing music is because we felt we had thoughts and ideas and energy to offer. You feel your opinions and ideas are valuable – and they are! – IF you have learned to effectively communicate them in a positive, enthusiastic, “hey, we’re a team and we can **DO** this!” manner.

Challenging your ringers to grow in their technique is just square one on the board that we are playing on. It's an important square, don't get me wrong! If your ringers aren't encouraged in a positive and safe atmosphere to develop more accurate and confident technique, you'll never move past where you are.

***But there's so much more - more layers, more spaces on the game board!***

The next square on the board is musicianship – phrasing, playing and listening as an ensemble, dynamics, balance, finding the heart of the music and working to communicate its message.

Then there's presentation. Or you might call it artistry. Handbells are a visual art form, but it isn't enough to say “make it look good” and then hope for the best. **HOW** are we going to move, create a picture with our ringing circles, create excitement, beauty, and emotion with our ringing? Be specific. Raise the bar to make the message of the music come through visually as well as musically. (For more on this vitally important subject, go to [www.pikespeakringer.com](http://www.pikespeakringer.com) and look at the “Music in Motion” DVD.)

And can you raise the bar even further? How about memorizing? Not a whole piece necessarily – though that would be wonderful! – but memorize a passage of music. Why? To get faces out of the music, to communicate the heart of the music even more effectively.

***Are you PROVOCATIVE? Can you be the one to inspire and encourage your ringers to greater heights?***

## 8. Are You In The PRESENT Moment?

In Pikes Peak Ringers and my other groups, we talk about “catch and release.” It's a term taken from fishing, obviously, but it's amazing how beautifully it applies to what we do in handbells.

The mistake that just got made - that's over now. The piece that didn't go so well in rehearsal this week, we're done with that – we're on **THIS** piece now.

Ever say something stupid in rehearsal? ;) I have so often that I became a teacher; it's not that I know more than you, it's that I've made a **LOT** more mistakes than you have! ;) Well, whatever you said that didn't make sense or get your idea across, that's done with now. We're on this piece and talking about what it communicates now.

Ringers learn a vital lesson from your being in the **PRESENT** moment. They learn that they, too, are working on and enjoying what we are doing **NOW**. Music as a whole teaches this lesson. It is a way of suspending those listening and watching in another mode of experiencing time – experiencing the **PRESENT** moment.

***Are you in the PRESENT moment? Will you encourage your ringers to be in the PRESENT with you?***

## 9. Are You A POSITIVE Person?

A positive attitude and a positive way of saying things go a long, long way!

There was a man who was very new to ringing who was part of one of my festivals – his first – and he came to me at the end and said, “you know, you can tell me I’m doing everything wrong and still make me feel so **GOOD** about trying it again!” I laughed, of course, but as time has gone on I’ve realized that this is important. That is the goal – can you be encouraging and positive and bring people along in that spirit of “we’re in this together and we’re **TERRIFIC**, so let’s keep going forward, you and me! We can do this!”

Correct mistakes, point out what needs improvement – these are the director’s **JOB**, after all. But challenge yourself to put it all in a positive light.

I find that the simplest way to do this is just to be honest! I tell my ringers in PPR and participants at festivals that I will be honest with them; when things aren’t going so well, I’ll let them know that and, more importantly, do my level best to instruct them on how to improve what they are ringing, and when things **ARE** going well, I’ll go out of my way to let them know that, too.

No one believes you if you are Pollyanna and say **NOTHING** but “everything’s great, that was terrific!” Our playing can’t be terrific **ALL** the time – that means there’s not enough challenging and growing going on! :)

Still, there’s bound to be things that are going well in most every situation. And at the foundation of it all, you **KNOW** that your ringers are terrific people – that’s true all the time!

Affirm, encourage, listen to their needs and what they have to say. Bring them along step by step. Instruct with a sincere desire to improve the music. Inspire with words from the heart. Be honest. Be a cheerleader (when it’s honest). Keep a sense of humor. Keep a sense of perspective. And be **POSITIVE!**

*There you have it! A simple 9-point checklist. Write the 9 words –*

❖ **PLANNER** ❖ **PASSIONATE** ❖ **PERSONABLE** ❖ **PUNCTUAL** ❖ **PROCESS** ❖  
❖ **PREPARED** ❖ **PROVOCATIVE** ❖ **PRESENT** ❖ **POSITIVE** ❖

*– on a sticky-note and stick it to the corner of your music stand! These simple but all-important reminders will help you to focus on the success of your ringers and the joy that you and they have in the music.*