

RINGING WITH CONFIDENCE

by Kevin McChesney

According to my Webster's Encyclopedic Dictionary, the word "confidence" means "self-reliance, assurance, boldness."

One of the promises I made to my group, the Pikes Peak Ringers, when we first started out in 1991 was that I would do everything I could to be sure that they could ring their concerts with confidence. In other words, that we would practice efficiently and give ourselves enough time to polish our music so that when it came time to ring for people we were confident that we knew the music well and had something special to offer. We could then ring with "self-reliance, assurance," and yes, even "boldness." :) It's a promise that I've kept through all our years of ringing, and one I've remained true to in my work with other groups including The Atlanta Concert Ringers, and a goal that I'm sure every director has in mind for their handbell choir.

How is it done? What can we do to ensure that our group will ring the music confidently?

Here are 5 ideas:

- 1) **Give yourselves time.** Do less and do it well. I've NEVER heard a ringer or director say, "We have SO MUCH TIME for rehearsing." Usually, we are quite pressed for time, and considerations like absences, tardiness, and simply the encroachment on our programs of jobs, family time, trips, errands, and so on make effective rehearsal time short and severely limited. So it's important to take on only as much as the group can handle. If that means doing less music, that's fine! Do only as much music as you have time to polish, so that ringers will be truly confident in their presentations.
- 2) **There is nothing wrong with ringing simple music with confidence.** Of course, there's nothing wrong with challenges either – in fact, they should be an integral part of your program. But balance the challenges with music that is attainable in a shorter time and that allows the group to focus on musicianship, polish, and presentation. Nothing builds confidence in ringing like ringing well!
- 3) **Be encouraging.** It pays to remind yourself to cheer your group on often and give them a lot of positive energy in your work together.
- 4) **Take the work seriously but never take yourselves seriously.**
- 5) **Know that confidence isn't really a feeling, it's a decision.** Let me speak to that as I feel it is the most important idea here. Confidence isn't really a feeling; of course, we all know what it is like to feel confident, but the truth is we feel confident when we are **doing** something with assurance and boldness. Confidence, in my view, is more a **decision** than a feeling.

In rehearsals, we often teach that if you're going to make a mistake, make it a whopper – at least we'll know what to fix. :) Ring "loud and proud, strong and wrong." :) :) Silliness aside, it *is* good practice to play confidently as much as possible in rehearsal, even if you have made a mistake. After all, we perform what we rehearse, so it pays to practice making the **DECISION** to ring confidently.

It is natural to feel nervousness when performing; in fact, there are a host of feelings that come about in ringing for listeners and they are all very natural – joy, fear, nervousness, excitement, and so on. I believe that it is possible to **DECIDE** to play confidently, regardless of how you are feeling. Change your thoughts and you change your feelings. It is not only possible, I think it is necessary to **DECIDE** to ring with confidence. Try it! You'll be surprised at how much better it makes you feel!