

# THREE QUICK REHEARSAL TIPS

by Kevin McChesney

## *Be Specific*

When giving instructions, be sure to be as specific as possible. The most common reason a group does not meet an expectation is that the expectation or instruction was not as clearly stated as it needed to be. Whenever possible, refer to specific measure numbers, specific notes, and, yes, individual parts, calling on individual ringers by name. Even ringers who tend to feel “picked on” can understand the need for improving a passage by improving something they themselves ring. Handled sensitively, “singling out” ringers for the sake of the music is part and parcel of creating the finest music as a group.

## *Attendance*

Attendance in a handbell choir needs to be as consistent as possible. Ringers have individual parts; they are not part of a larger section as participants in a vocal choir or band are. It never hurts to reiterate the importance of consistent attendance, even with a group whose attendance is generally good.

Discuss the rules of attendance thoroughly with the whole group. It’s best if the group votes on and decides attendance policies so that they have the maximum ownership in those policies. And it’s a good idea to write these policies down and even have everyone sign them.

Obviously, in the modern world where the pace of life can be very busy and frantic and where unexpected considerations with children, health, and work can crop up at any time, compassion and flexibility are a vital part of any attendance policy. Still, a set of rules clearly spelled out is the best basis for consistent attendance. Be sure to discuss the number of acceptable absences and a complete set of guidelines concerning maintaining a substitute list and who is in charge of contacting substitutes.

## *Taking Care of the Director*

Directors, pace yourselves and take your own health and well-being seriously. We often behave as though the crazy, full schedule that our bell program centers around is the most important thing in life, but it pays to stop all the running around (all the “mindless gerbil activity” as I like to call it) and gain a little perspective now and then. During rehearsals, be sure to drink plenty of water because you are doing plenty of talking. Be sure to pace yourself physically – directing can be a surprisingly taxing activity and when you are deeply involved in the music you are paying attention to a lot of other things besides how your body is faring. And take conscious steps to stay healthy using common sense – eat sensibly, exercise regularly, be good to your throat and voice, etc. As obvious as these things may sound, they are the first things forgotten and left by the wayside when we as directors are in the throes of our programs.