

# What do you offer your ringers?

In the previous note 'Aspects of ringing' I focused on what makes ringing interesting as an activity – something that non-ringers would like to know more about, to support, and possibly to be involved in. Its relevance to our remit was thus mainly on recruitment, though obviously a new ringer should continue to be attracted by the same attributes, so it would contribute to retention as well.

In this note, I address the question of what a band of ringers (and those who lead it) should offer to its members. This narrower question is not about ringing itself, but about groups of ringers and their leaders. It thus relates more to retention rather than recruitment.

I have framed the question in terms of a 'band' of ringers, which by default is tower-based band. The idea could be extended to any functional group of ringers, for example a ringing society or an ad-hoc group that regularly rings together, but for simplicity I focus on the traditional, tower-based, band.

There seem to be two levels of 'offer'. The 'inner level' is about what the leader or other members of the band, actually do for their members. The 'outer level' is about the extent to which the leader (or others) form an effective conduit for what the wider Exercise can offer to the group's members. Both levels are important. Personal offerings that ignore the wider context are likely to lead to an insular culture, and in any case will be limited by the personal skills, knowledge and interest of the person in question. Reference to the Exercise's wider resources is likely to be less effective without local commitment and inspiration as well,

A band (and in particular its leaders) should offer:

- Friendship
- Encouragement
- Support
- Opportunity
- Involvement

**Friendship** – A band is a social as well as a functional group. It should aim to be a group of friends, not just a group of acquaintances. Small, friendly words and gestures, from those in charge and from those with influence, all help to make members to feel welcome and a part of the group. At the outer level, the band should encourage its members to feel part of the wider family of ringers, and to understand the almost universal welcome of other ringers.

**Encouragement** – Learning to ring, and going on to succeed, takes a lot of personal effort and commitment. The band should actively encourage and motivate its members to achieve their potential.

**Support** – Most ringers will achieve more with the help of appropriate support. The band should support all its members as they develop, through all stages not just as novices. At the outer level, those leading the band should recognise the limitations of what the band can offer unaided, and help its members to exploit more comprehensive or appropriate support from the wider ringing community

**Opportunity** – Ringing is a collective activity, where individual achievement and satisfaction is strongly influenced by the context in which it takes place. The band should be managed in a way that provides appropriate opportunities for all its members. At the outer level, those leading the band should ensure that its members are aware of, and able to take advantage of, opportunities in the wider ringing community.

**Involvement** – 'Giving' as well as 'receiving' can bring satisfaction and fulfilment. The band should encourage all of its members to contribute to the life and work of the band in whatever way is appropriate, whether in a formal role or through informal activities. At the outer level, those leading the band should ensure that its members are aware of how they can be involved in the wider ringing community, and are willing to participate where appropriate.