

My Guidelines for Better Bridge

(And some observations and frivolities)

Not so long ago I suggested to a good friend that we ought to write down the important things we have learned about bridge based upon our years of experience. We'd call them our Bridge Guidelines. He thought that was a good idea but he didn't know for sure what they were. Lots of help there! So I decided to do it myself.....putting down my thoughts about what's become important to me over the years. These, then, are MY guidelines to better bridge.

(1) Above all the game of bridge requires that you concentrate. Focusing and thinking only about the hand in front of you at the time you're playing or defending it is all important. (Not later when you go to the bar and discuss it). Your mind should be clear so that you can think while "on your feet". This means leaving your problems and concerns elsewhere.

(2) Bridge is a serious card game for people who like to analyze situations and work out logical solutions. Every hand is different and the challenges never cease. Analyze or lose might well be your motto. So follow these suggestions. When declaring plan your play before you start, carefully thinking out the alternatives before choosing your action. When defending take the time to think about partner's hand and also about declarer's hand before playing to trick one. Think about why partner bid what he did or why a defender played the way he did. Experience does help you make reasonable moves automatically, but one must be cautious about letting that 'automatic pilot' kick in.

(3) The bridge basics or techniques are the stuff you learn in lessons, by reading books and by watching those who play better than you. Continuous work on technique will greatly improve your game. Some examples of good techniques would include (a) counting, counting, counting, (b) collecting information and using it, (c) developing the habit of mentally picturing the opponents' hands, (d) knowing the language of signaling and discarding...the information that can legally be exchanged by the cards that are played, (e) keeping your tempo steady and not giving away anything in your manner.

(4) While there are necessary strategies and tactics associated with bridge, they are usually developed along with the experience gained through playing, reading and discussing bridge. I have found that for me the simplest approach is often best. Fancy stuff often creates confusion. But I do try to stick to the following: (a) learn to accept all gifts from the opponents.... don't get in their way if they want to give

you a good board, (b) learn when to be passive and when to be aggressive, (c) take charge when you see a clear solution, (d) push the opponents beyond their comfort zone, (e) focus on getting the best result possible, not the best possible result. (f) learn to defend well, (g) don't get greedy when you already have a good thing going, (h) when in doubt whether partner's bid is forcing or not, BID, (i) don't bid unbalanced hands and balanced hands the same way, (j) try not to bid your values more than once, (k) learn to anticipate, and (l) MUD dirties the table!!!!

(5) Remember at all times that your partner is on YOUR side. In team games your teammates are on YOUR side. These are your friends and comrades...at least for the time being! The others are OPPONENTS and that fact should be kept in mind. Make things as easy as possible for your partners and teammates helping them to enjoy the game and do their best. Try to give partner accurate information thus being trustworthy; also be trusting of partner. If partner is under some pressure, allow him some leeway. Since bridge is a partnership game it is more important to build on partnership tactics and styles than on individual technical skills.

(6) The opponents are just that. They are the enemy but remember that it's a friendly battle. If the opponents overstep, double them; it's the only way to protect your own positive score. Let your opponents play their game, but don't get drawn into it. Help your opponents have a good time and feel respected, but whatever else you may do, stay out of their arguments. And be sure that you're not frequently saying "We have met the enemy and he is US".

(7) The final but perhaps most important guideline to better bridge is to have a positive attitude. You must believe in yourself. If you don't believe you can do the right thing and/or win, you will probably lose! Keep EMOTIONS out of the game except to enjoy what you're doing. When a hand is over, forget it and go on to the next. Sometimes the going will be really rough; don't give up, try harder.

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