

Principles of Bridge

(And some observations and frivolities)

Not so long ago I suggested to a good friend that we ought to write down our bridge principles. 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 put down my thoughts about what's become important to me in the many years of playing bridge. These, then, are MY principles of bridge.

(1) Focus and concentration. Above all the game of bridge requires that you focus, concentrate and think about the hand in front of you at the time you're playing or defending it. (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". (Leave your problems and concerns at home.)
- 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 and declarer's hands before playing to trick one.
- Experience does help you make reasonable moves automatically, but one must be cautious about letting the 'automatic pilot' kick in thus removing analytical thinking.
- If you have a bad board, get over it and move on. Prolonging the agony doesn't helpbelieve me I know.
- Stay out of "what if" discussions after a bad result (or even after a good result). You need your focus for the next hand.
- Take real breaks between rounds and talk about something else. Also relax when you're dummy.
- Listen to your opponents!! But keep quiet yourself. (I'm still working on this!)

(2) Technique. This is the stuff you learn in lessons, by reading books and by watching the experts play. Continuous work on technique will greatly improve your game.

- Count, count, count. Collect information and develop the habit of mentally picturing the opponents' hands.

- Know your bridge basics and review them periodically.
- Know the language of signaling and discarding...the information that can legally be exchanged by the cards that are played.
- Keep your tempo steady and try not to give away anything in your manner.
- Don't bid the same feature and/or values of your hand twice. Partner heard you the first time.
- You can often win by playing steady solid defense.
- If you have wasted high cards in the opponents' suit, consider doubling and defending.
- Often competitive bidding will alter your values, sometimes quite severely, so listen.
- It is often best to take your losses early in order to keep control. Be willing to give up an early trick in order to get more tricks in return.
- Play the card you are known to hold....but not at the cost of losing a trick.
- Every card matters and most carry some signal be it an important honest-to-goodness attitude signal or a negative inferential one.
- Anticipate, anticipate, anticipate!!!

(3) Tactics. These are the strategies that one develops with experience, both from playing and from reading books.

- The simplest approach is often best. Fancy stuff often creates confusion.
- If the opponents offer up a gift, keep it!
- Some situations call for you to be passive, other situations call for aggressive actions....try to learn the difference.
- Don't volunteer information unless it can help your side more than it helps opponents. (This does NOT apply to the Alert Procedures.)
- When you see a clear solution, take charge. When you don't, don't!
- When it's right to play defense, defend. When your side has no defense, at least try to push the opponents beyond their comfort zone.
- Negative inferences are just as important as the clues you do hear and see. They can reveal a remarkable amount of information so learn to listen to silence.
- If your hand and partner's hand don't fit, stop bidding. Let the opponents have this hand.
- If you have the opponents right where you want them, don't get greedy by doubling and thus warning them to escape.
- Keep your partner on balance and the opponents off balance.

- Don't double the opponents unless you can beat them!
- Focus on getting the best result possible, not the best possible result.
- "Pass" is more often the winning bid than one might expect. "If your hand doesn't look like a one-bid, two-bid or three-bid, maybe a pass is in order." (Edgar Kaplan)
- When in doubt whether partner's bid is forcing or not, BID.
- Don't bid unbalanced hands and balanced hands the same way.
- Bid lots with fits, and much less with misfits.
- Principles of bridge are more important than rote memorization of facts.
- MUD dirties the bridge table.

(4) Partners and Teammates. These are the people who are on your side of the contest. They are your friends and comrades....at least for the time being! The others are OPPONENTS and that fact should be kept in mind at all times.

- Let your partner do his/her job.
- Make things as easy as possible for your partner.
- Help your teammates/partner enjoy the game and do their best. Criticizing them seldom produces better results.
- In any close situation, lead partner's suit.
- Try to give your partner accurate information.
- If partner is under some pressure, allow leeway.
- If partner's play had good reasoning but it just didn't work out this time, don't criticize or blame.
- Be both trustworthy and trusting.
- If partner makes a final decision, it is usually best not to overrule it as it's bad for partnership trust.
- It is more important to build on partnership tactics and attitudes than to build individual technical skills.
- Practice and play good defense as it's one of the most fulfilling aspects of the game.
- Contrary to popular belief, bridge partners DO NOT exist to make your life difficult.
- When you want to consult another player about a disaster, ask about your hand, not partner's.

(5) Opponents. These are the enemy but always remember that it's a friendly battle. After all without them there is no game!

- Help your opponents have a good time and feel respected. Be courteous.

- Always try to anticipate the opponents' moves before they make them.
- Although it's not always going to be rewarded, trust your opponents to know what they are doing.
- Make your opponent have the last guess.
- Stay out of the opponents' arguments.
- 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. It is much easier to win on your own turf than on the opponents' turf.
- Do not be saying "We have met the enemy and he is US" when you leave their table!

(6) Attitude. A positive attitude is everything in bridge. You must believe in yourself and cast off negative thoughts. 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.
- On some days bad luck will stop even the best players.
- One learns most by playing against and with the best.
- Review both your good results and bad results after the game. Use these results to learn what aspects of your game need improvement.
- Let the directors do their jobs. Cooperate and don't take matters into your own hands.
- If things appear impossible, try harder; don't give up.
- Trust the game to deliver reasonable rewards and punishments.
- There is always room for self-improvement.

Marilyn Hemenway

©May 2005