

# Building Better Partnerships

(This article is based on "Love Thy Partner" by Larry Cohen.)

## Respect

Learning how to handle the relationship with your bridge partner will do more for your results than reading any technical book on the game. It will not matter if you know the name for every squeeze, and every form of Roman Keycard Blackwood,

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***--if your partnership is not good, you are at a big disadvantage.***

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When Jeff Meckstroth-Eric Rodwell get a bad result (and it happens more than you would think) there is no acrimony. It's always "on to the next board." No raised eyebrows, no "why didn't you do this," and absolutely no yelling, ranting, or raving. The time to discuss these things is always ***after the session.***

One must control their emotions at the table and never say a harsh word to partner. It may sound like an obvious and rudimentary lesson, but it cannot be stressed enough. Very few people who are reading these words are able to behave at the table. We all have emotions, and they can be tough to control. If you promise yourselves right now to try to change, you'll put your bridge career on the express train to success. Your partner(s) will appreciate you, and will consequently play better. When they can play without fear of criticism or retribution they'll give you their A-game. You in turn will be in good spirits to give your A-game. This makes a friendlier and more enjoyable atmosphere for you and everyone else playing.

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***Take a lesson from the world's best pairs --- keep quiet, stay calm***

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## Conventions

Try to choose a partner whose convention-scale rating is similar to yours, i.e. if you enjoy having lots of conventions, so does your partner.

### Adding New Conventions

Start your partnership out simply. Don't try to fill up your plate too fast--it's just not practical. Bridge players are not computers. It's best to Keep It Simple!

- Don't add "Here-and-there" methods.
- Don't add methods unless they are for handling useful recurring hand types.

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## Work and Learning

A good partnership takes work. Sorry, but there's no way around it, and no substitute for it. With any serious partner there are three chores that are considered a must:

- 1) Maintain Partnership Bidding/system notes.
- 2) Practice bidding hands before important events.
- 3) Go over the boards at the end of the day.

## 1st Time Partnerships

It seems that the first time people play together, things often go better than expected. Perhaps there's a lesson here and this anomaly to the fact that both players are on their very best behavior and trying really hard.

- They want to make a good impression on the other player.
- Neither makes any "questionable bids or plays."
- They don't play too many conventions.

## Practice Bidding Hands

Use the *Bridge Bulletin*; BBO; Larry Cohen's practice hands and other resources.

## Carding

Carding is probably the most overlooked and underemphasized area of partnership. It reminds me of golfers that spend 95% of their time practicing drivers and long-iron shots on the range, but never working on their putting or chipping. Defensive carding will come into play on fully half the deals. Any good partnership should spend time discussing as many aspects as possible. Here are the major areas, with some suggestions (from Larry Cohen) and ideas:

### 1) General Philosophy

You must decide if in general you are giving attitude or count or both, depending on whether Declarer is leading or your side is leading. The overall concept is to *indicate where your values are*. We've all heard defenders saying "I shifted to a diamond because you *asked* me." This is not the right outlook. Instead, the signal should be "showing diamond values." It is up to the person receiving the signal to decide whether or not to shift to diamonds.

### 2) Opening Leads.

This is pretty much covered by filling out the convention card, but notable areas are what to lead against notrump from big holdings such as AKJ10x, from KQT(x) and from insignificant holdings when trying to hit partner's suit.

### 3) Trick One.

Signaling at trick one is a topic that long-time partnerships are still working on. Make some specific agreements.

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## 4) Count

Are you giving count when Declarer leads or something else? What about at a suit contract when the dummy hits with Qxx(x) and you have led the Ace (Ace from AK)?

## 4) Suit Preference

Decide what specific situations will be Suit Preference. For example, at a suit contract, the dummy hits with a singleton in the suit when Partner leads the Ace; is this a Suit Preference situation?

## Post-Session Review

This is an exchange of ideas and solidifying your agreements. This exchange of ideas has got to be done maturely. It's a sensitive area, and you've got to set your ego aside. Try to adopt an attitude of "What could I have done to better help out my partner?" Don't try to explain to your partner what he should have done.

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*Ask not what your partner should do for you, but what you could do for your partner*

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Don't zig-zag. If you are on a different wavelength from your partner, that's okay. But after the session get it ironed out. Agree to do it one way or the other.

## Misunderstandings

*Lesson 1:* Don't ever show emotion when the dummy hits. Always act confident.

*Lesson 2:* Do not discuss bridge during the session. **Take notes.**

*Lesson 3:* Pick the bidding alternative which is easiest to remember, rather than the best theoretical choice. When adding a convention, make sure it is consistent with your existing conventions.

## Cherish Your Partner

It can't be over-stated: You've got to keep your partner happy, especially during the session. Do not accuse, yell at, frown at, complain to, criticize, castigate, disparage, abuse, ridicule, sneer at, or mock your partner. Try to be comforting, supportive, compassionate, encouraging, reassuring, sympathetic and understanding. Don't argue with your partner in front of other people. And, especially, don't talk negatively about your partner or teammates behind their backs.

Whatever it takes, remember to keep a smile on your face, a pleasant attitude and be the best partner you can be!

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## Partnership Agreements

Here are sample situations you might want to clarify with your partner. The other major or the other minor may be substituted for most of the natural bids in these auctions.

Legend: Bids in (..) are the opponent's bids; // = next round of bidding

- a. What is double?
  - i.  $1\spadesuit - (1NT) - X$
  - ii.  $(1\clubsuit) - 1\heartsuit - (3\clubsuit) - X$
  - iii.  $1\clubsuit - (P) - 1NT - (2\spadesuit) // X$
  - iv.  $1\heartsuit - (1\spadesuit) - 2\heartsuit - (2\spadesuit) // X$
  - v.  $1\clubsuit - (1\spadesuit) - P - (2\clubsuit) // X$
- b.  $1NT - (X)$ 
  - i. Are systems on or off?
  - ii. Does the answer to the previous question depend on whether the X is penalty-oriented or a conventional bid?
- c. What do you lead from these holdings against a suit contract? Against a NT contract?
  - i. T94 or T43
  - ii. 986 or 954
  - iii. 862
- d.  $(1\spadesuit) - 1NT - (X) - 2\clubsuit$ , What is  $2\clubsuit$ ?
- e.  $(1\clubsuit) - 1\spadesuit - (P) - 2\clubsuit // (X) - 2\spadesuit$ , What is  $2\spadesuit$ ?
- f.  $1\clubsuit - 1\heartsuit // 1NT - 3\heartsuit$ , Is  $3\heartsuit$  forcing?
- g. What is a new suit after Opener replies to Stayman? What is a new suit after Opener replies to Jacoby Transfer? E.g.  $1NT - 2\spadesuit // 2\heartsuit - 3\spadesuit$ ?
- h. What is the final  $\spadesuit$  bid in these auctions?
  - i.  $1\spadesuit - 1\heartsuit // 2\clubsuit - 2\spadesuit$
  - ii.  $1\clubsuit - 1\spadesuit // 1\heartsuit - 2\spadesuit$
- i.  $P - 1\spadesuit // 2\spadesuit$ , What is  $2\spadesuit$ ?
- j. How do you play advances? Is the last bid shown below Forcing or Non-Forcing?
  - i.  $(1\spadesuit) - 1\heartsuit - (P) - 1\spadesuit$
  - ii.  $(1\spadesuit) - 1\heartsuit - (P) - 2\clubsuit$
  - iii.  $(1\spadesuit) - 2\clubsuit - (P) - 2\spadesuit$
- k. How do you handle interference after you open  $2\clubsuit$ ?
- l. What is  $4\clubsuit$  or  $4\spadesuit$  after partner bids  $3NT$ ?
- m. What is your defense against a Michaels Cue-bid or Unusual  $2NT$ ?
- n. When is  $4NT$  quantitative?