

# 12 WAYS TO BE A BETTER BRIDGE PARTNER

Most bridge players value a reliable, happy partner above anything else. Working together as a team is important for the success of your partnership. You both want to win, so you can't gain anything from getting upset when play doesn't go exactly as planned. It seldom does! Here, you find some tips on keeping your partner happy.

## 1. TREAT YOUR PARTNER LIKE YOUR BEST FRIEND

Even if you don't know your partner well, treating her with respect improves her play. Treat your partner like your best friend, and you'll be repaid in "spades." (And if you're a pleasant, courteous opponent, you'll win everyone's "hearts.")

## 2. TOLERATE YOUR PARTNER'S ERRORS

Don't keep harping on your partner's errors; just forgive and try to forget (at least until after the game). After all, do you want to be reminded of all the mistakes you've made? (Everybody makes mistakes, including you.) If you have constructive criticism, save it for after the session, when you'll both be calmer. Expect (demand) that your partner show you the same respect.

When filling in the traveller and seeing how others have played a board, it's all too easy for a post mortem at the table to drift into criticism of your partner. She may know she has made an error but does not want to be embarrassed in front of the opponents. And your opponents will often find the conversation uncomfortable. Or even worse, they might join in the post mortem!

## 3. KEEP A POKER (WELL, BRIDGE) FACE

If partner fails to lead your suit, keep a straight face. Never make any facial or body movements or use mannerisms that indicate whether you're pleased or displeased with a bid or play. You'll lose the table's respect. Facial expressions and body gestures can be construed as illegal signals. When partner lays down dummy and it weaker than you expected, don't say "a bit light, partner", or "Hmmm, pity you didn't show me your spade stop". And when you say "Thank you, partner", say it like you mean it!

## 4. DEAL WELL WITH DISASTER

A truly good partnership handles the inevitable disaster with a touch of humour. If your partner doesn't have to worry that you'll have an apoplectic fit whenever something goes wrong, he'll play better.

## 5. PLAY CONVENTIONS YOU BOTH WANT TO PLAY

Don't force your partner to play your favourite conventions (such as artificial bids). "Let's play Transfers. It's great. Don't worry if you get it wrong – it's the best way to learn, and it's only a game, isn't it?" A partner worried about a convention inevitably makes more errors in the bidding, play, and defence, not to mention screwing up the convention if it comes up.

## **6. PICK UP THE SLACK FOR A WEAKER PLAYER**

The better player in a partnership should make the weaker player feel at ease. Make your bids, leads, and signals as simple and clear as possible, and don't give an inexperienced partner tough contracts to play. When you judge that partner is going to play the hand, bid somewhat conservatively.

## **7. OWN UP TO YOUR OWN ERRORS**

Avoid the human tendency to lay your own errors at your partner's doorstep. A weaker partner will feel good to know that you, the stronger player, make errors as well — and are a big enough person to admit them.

## **8. OFFER WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT**

Give your partner a few words of support after the hand is over, particularly if she doesn't make her contract. "Tough luck" and "Nice try" go over better than "You could have made your contract if you had taken the heart finesse", or "That last club in dummy was a master"

## **9. TREAT YOUR PARTNER THE SAME WHETHER YOU WIN OR LOSE**

When the session is over, win or lose, tell your partner how much you enjoyed playing with him (no matter how you feel). Kind words mean the world to a player who knows he hasn't played well. It also shows class.

## **10. DON'T BE A 'RESULTER'**

When you and two other pairs make 3NT+3 and two aggressive pairs bid and made the slam with just 30 points, don't ask "Could you have upgraded your hand with those lovely clubs?" Hindsight is a perfect science in which 'resulters' are experts. In the long run bridge is a percentages game.

## **11. REMEMBER – BRIDGE IS A PARTNERSHIP GAME**

There's no "I" in "partner". If you play that a 1NT overcall shows 16-18 HCP, don't bid it with a poor 15 count, perhaps because you are fed up with a run of poor hands. Partner will be doing her sums and responding based on your bid, and you will undermine her trust in you. And if your speculative bid results in a top, don't try to justify it or call it 'flair'. If anything, you should be a little sheepish.

## **12. KNOW WHEN TO HAVE FUN**

When all is said and done, you play bridge to have fun, and so does your partner. You've done your job if your partner leaves the table happy.