

We are having fun at these Monday Morning sessions. There is something entertaining about making mistakes and then reviewing them with everybody. Showing people how you messed up can be humbling. But, it pays off. It helps you develop your sense of humor. It improves your game, and I think it also adds to your confidence. After your confidence builds up, you can drop this humility thing and work on total domination. YES! Now we are getting somewhere.

Here are a few confidence builders we discussed recently.

Worthless Dummy (not your partner! ...the other dummy).

How does declarer play a hand when there are no entries to dummy. The bidding sequence **1NT – P – P – P** showed this problem a few times. Sometimes you might be able to manufacture an entry to dummy. Good! Now, you get to the board and you have one chance to be very clever. Don't screw it up. That is always good advice. That's what I am here for.

But, it is when you have **no entries** to dummy, that you really need to be clever. You get to lead every card from your hand. This is a good time for opponents to be patient. Taking winners too quickly can help declarer. Don't help him. Let declarer lead to you. As declarer, you need to get help from your opponents. Make them help. Your dummy isn't going to give you any help. Give the opponents the lead at the right time and they might give you a trick.

Suppose you have ♥Qxx and dummy has ♥Jxx. This is a suit you do not want to lead. Instead you might work on clearing out a longer/stronger suit that you have and then give up the lead. The opponents can now take their tricks but will have to lead back into you. They can't lead the suit you just cleared out- that would be a safe lead for them. They might help you with the ♥ suit (or another suit). You are not the only one that can screw up. Give them a chance. On a good day, anything they lead now helps you. You have the hand with the strength. You can probably make this a good day rather than hope it is going to be a good day.

Second hand Low (the default choice). I am wearing this warning out, but we are still playing 2nd hand high too often and usually to our detriment. If you have good reason, for example, you think that your partner can ruff a side suit, so you choose to go up and then give partner a ruff. Good – play high. But, if you don't have a clear reason for playing high, then DON'T.

Third hand High? Greg's advice from the Defense class he is conducting has shown us that 3rd hand play is much more difficult. There are many more places where **Third Hand High** is not the right play. Even so, if you don't have a clue, playing high is my suggestion. That said, **not having a clue** is not a recipe for high scores at the bridge table. Your opponents are finding clues regularly. You need to Get a clue!

Finding the Queen: As declarer you have: **AT83** and dummy has **KJ92**. Finessing for the Queen is typically right when you have 8 cards in the suit. Should you finesse LHO or RHO?

Before making this decision, delay playing this suit until later in the hand (if it is safe to do so). Play other suits first and gather information (clues) that might help you determine where the Queen is. Think about the bidding. How many points do the opponents have? How many points have shown up in the play. What discards have you seen? Any clues on suit length? You need a clue (or two).

You have done everything I said. Now the director is on your case for slow play. Your thinking time is over. Get off the dime. Time to put all this sleuth work into practice. You must choose whether LHO or RHO is more likely to have the Queen. If after all this work, you still (unbelievably) have no clue, you might consider Pinochle. That’s fun and there are no directors. Sorry, I am supposed to be encouraging. Try **Bentley’s Law** (August Bridge Bulletin):

“When faced with an each-way finesse, take it into the hand of the defender you like more”.

If the finesse fails, lose it to someone you like. It might ease the pain a bit. The law does not say that you must dislike the other opponent. But, it will still work if that happens to be the case. Don’t put this law on your convention card. Also important - your partner should NOT alert this. Be careful not to damage any relationships (especially with people you do not like).

On a more positive note, maybe you DID find a clue. Hallelujah! Now you simply lead the Ace or the King and finesse the opponent you “know” has the Queen. It doesn’t matter if you like him or her. You don’t have to depend on Bentley now. Your sleuthing has paid off. The finesse works, and you pick up the entire suit. Voila! Now, control yourself. Fist pumps are a bit tacky.

Opening Leads.

On occasion I have asked someone at the table “What was the opening lead?” I get a pause and then I get an answer that includes “I think”. Not a great answer. Still, I like that answer better than “We didn’t have one”.

You must remember what the opening lead was. It is full of **clues**. Was the lead likely to be 4th best? Does it show length or shortness? Why was partner’s bid suit not led? The King was led – does it show the Queen as well? The deuce was led – does the leader likely have 4 cards in the suit? maybe an honor as well? The information you can gather is amazing. Think about it before playing to trick one. Do this quickly. You do not want to see the director’s pained face about slow play again.

Basic Bidding. In the December 2017 Bridge Bulletin, Larry Cohen writes about “Bidding Basics” on pages 49-50. Good stuff! He hints at using the Jacoby 2NT convention, but says that will come in a future article. This article focuses on the basics.

Hope your holiday season was great!

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Helen Sobel story.

Many experts say that Helen Sobel was one of the greatest bridge players of all time. She played bridge for 20 years with Charles Goren, aka the “king of bridge”. Once, when a kibitzer, observing Goren, asked her how it felt to play with an expert, Sobel replied, “I don’t know. Why don’t you ask him?”