

ETHICS AND ETIQUETTE

BRIDGE enjoys immense popularity partly because of the high standards of ethics and etiquette which are observed by the players who are expected to conduct themselves in a highly civilized manner. Violations of proper etiquette are quite common from inexperienced players, either through ignorance or inadvertence. A well-mannered opponent who is the victim of a violation by such a novice player will, if comment is considered necessary, be at pains to make it clear that the comment is intended to be helpful and will never make a newcomer feel ill-at-ease.

Bridge is an extremely ethical game. All good players strive to ensure that their bridge ethics are impeccable and no more serious charge (other than outright cheating) can be made than to accuse a player of bad ethics. Unlike poker in which all sorts of mannerisms, misleading statements and bluff tactics are part and parcel of the game, bridge is played with a 'pokerface'! Beginners are, of course, excused for their lapses and in social games nobody minds very much, but in serious competition your bridge demeanour must be beyond reproach.

When you are dummy, it is poor form to look at either opponent's hand or at declarer's. If you do, you lose your rights as dummy. Do not stand behind declarer to see how you would play. In tournament bridge, do not discuss the previous hand with your partner if another hand is still to be played.

After the play of a hand is over, do not take an opponent's cards and look at them without asking permission. As a kibitzer (onlooker) try to watch only one hand and above all, make no facial expressions during a hand. Do not comment or talk during or between hands. If the players want the benefit of your views, they will ask for them.

Conversation at the table in serious games is generally unwelcome. Postmortems after each hand, if limited, can be useful as long as they seek to be constructive. It is best to keep all postmortems until the session is over and you can go over the score-sheets with your partner at leisure. During the session, conserve your energies to do battle in the next hand. It is extremely poor taste to abuse or criticize partner or an opponent. Experienced players should go out of their way to make novice players feel at ease, so that they see bridge as a pleasant recreation, not a battleground. Never try to teach anyone at the table.

Never let a harsh word pass your lips and you will be a sought after rather than a shunned partner. Prefer to say too little than too much. If partner has bid or played the hand like an idiot, say 'bad luck' and leave it at that. Do not harp on the past errors.

Use only the proper language of bridge. The correct expression when not making a bid is 'No bid' or 'Pass'. Use one and stick to the same one. Do not switch back and forth between 'Pass' and 'No bid'. Do not say 'Content', 'Okay', 'By me'. Do not say 'I'll double one heart'. Just say 'Double'. Do not say 'Spade' when you mean 'One Spade'.

Never vary the intonation in your bidding (softly on weak hands, loudly on good ones). Never put a question mark at the end of your bid to make sure that partner understands that your 4NT is Blackwood or that your double is for takeout. That would be quite atrocious. You are required to convey messages to partner by what you bid, not by the way you bid it. Frowns, scowls, raised eyebrows, etc., are out. You are not to adopt the tongue-in-cheek remark made by the legendary Groucho Marx: 'Don't bother to signal:- If you like my leads, just smile. I'll understand'.

If your partner has a liberal sense of humour, you may be able to make clever remarks such as: 'When did you learn? I know this afternoon, but what time?', or in reply to 'How should I have played that hand?', 'Under an assumed name', or in reply to 'How did I play that hand?', 'Like a millionaire', or in reply to 'Did I do all right?', 'Well, you didn't knock the coffee over', but in general, bridge players are a proud lot with sensitive egos. Politeness and courtesy should be your watchword at the bridge table as in other areas of life.

Long pausing before bidding is also to be avoided, for example, the pause followed by 'Pass' tells everyone that you have 11-12 points, not quite good enough to open. Make all your bids at the same pace if you can. Sometimes you will have a serious problem which takes time to resolve, but where this happens the obligation falls on the partner of the 'trancer' who must never take advantage of the information received from the pause.

Play your cards as a defender always at the same speed if possible. Fumbling or hesitating *with the intention of deceiving* is cheating. You must not try to mislead opponents by your manner.

In tournament bridge, if unsure about the correct procedure, always call the Tournament Director. Do not let other players tell you what the correct laws are. They are wrong more often than not. Nobody familiar with the tournament scene should mind the Director being called. It is not considered a slight, an insult, or a rebuff to the opposition. This applies just as much at **CLUB** level even though opponents are known to you.

Above all, remember that bridge is primarily a game and is meant to be enjoyed as a game. Make sure it is also enjoyable for the other players at your table. Treat your partner and the opponents like royalty and you will be a sought after partner and a not a shunned one.