

The Bridge Player's Vocabulary: "Talking Less And Enjoying It More"

Back in the 70's George Carlin had a famous routine about the seven words you couldn't say on TV, most of which we now hear all the time on the tube. They were all obscene, but he had a funny way of saying the list very quickly that made it seem more amusing than dirty.

Bridge players also have an odd vocabulary, one of words they *can* legally say during the bidding: Pass, Double, Redouble, No Trump, Club(s), Diamond(s), Heart(s), Spade(s), Alert, Transfer, and the numbers 1-7. As well, they may choose to use the "Skip Bid—Please wait" warning, and they must announce their point count for a no trump opening (e.g., "15 to 17"). That's it, unless their opponents ask for an explanation of a bid, convention, lead, or discard. Laws 73 ("Communication Between Partners") and 16 ("Unauthorized Information") deal with this subject and provide the foundation for the discussion of this topic.

These days, bidding boxes are supposed to make table talk even more rare, since all of the calls and bids are now silent. However, as an oldies song by Joe Jones (covered by Frankie Ford) put it, we still "talk too much." In many clubs, not just ours, attrition has shrunk table numbers to the point that it seems more a "home style" game of bridge than duplicate, and we have relaxed our standards on ethical behavior at the table. We're all at fault at one time or another, so let's all resolve this year to reduce or avoid altogether talking during the bidding and play of a hand other than for the legal occasions mentioned above. Especially, let's try to avoid saying and/or doing things like the following:

- ♣ While pondering whether to bid again in a competitive auction, saying, "Are we vulnerable?"
- ♣ Sighing, moaning, groaning and general showing of indecision or displeasure about a bid or play (my face is turning red as I write this one)
- ♣ By word or gesture (putting up our bidding cards or folding up our hand), indicating we think the bidding is over before partner's *final* pass.
- ♣ "I don't know what to do/lead."
- ♣ "Well, I *guess* I just have to bid..."
- ♣ "I'll *start* by bidding a spade."

Finally, please don't loudly discuss the specifics of a hand until everyone has had a chance to play it unless it's your sit out and you aren't in earshot of the playing area. When people hear point count and/or distribution announced, they can't help being influenced, consciously or subconsciously. If there is a general principle of play, defense or bidding you need to clarify with your partner, and it can be done quickly and quietly, that's fine. Otherwise, you may find your table is holding up the rest of the room, and that you have alerted others to a problem hand, putting yourself and your partner at a disadvantage.

Please don't view all of this as self-righteous. I can cast that first stone right at myself—at times I would be better off if I Super Glued my mouth shut! And I'm not accusing myself or anyone else of dishonesty. After all, we play duplicate because we like to compete—and win. Therefore, we want to talk about why we did what we did or what the partnership could have done

differently in order to become better players and more consistent winners. Add to that the relaxed atmosphere of a small club, and it is easy for us all to get into the habit of saying more than we should because we feel we're among friends who won't take things the wrong way.

As excusable as all of this might be, it still isn't playing strictly by the rules, so let's all take more care with how much we say during bidding and play—and afterward—not just because we might play in a tournament where the director would be called, but also to make our club games more enjoyable for everyone.

If you have questions about, responses to, or additional comments on this subject, please communicate them! Talk to me (Fred) or to our director (Laurel), write something up to share at the club or on line (I'll post a copy on our site), or Email me using the mail link provided on the home page. Until next time, have a good week of bridge.