



# Adventures in Bridge

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## ***This Week in Bridge***

### **(4) Bridge Philosophy - “The Cardinal Sins of Bridge”**

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Level: 1

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#### **Philosophical Approach**

In bridge there are many things to learn and to remember. We are often taxed in keeping too many things straight in our heads. But even more important than remembering any specific piece of information about how to play bridge is to have the “correct perspective” on the game – to be able to play bridge with the correct philosophical approach. If you approach each situation with the same set of philosophies, both you and your partner will be far more successful.

Much of the philosophical approach that governs your play will depend on your partnership style – how you like to play the game of bridge! However, there are some core philosophies that are over-arching for all good bridge players and bridge partnerships. You will find that taking actions that are in line with these core philosophies will help keep you out of many difficult situations. Conversely, when you don’t follow these general ideas, you will cause both you and partner far greater difficulty. Actions that violate these core philosophies of the game are what we call “*The Cardinal Sins of Bridge.*”

There are two common sins that are committed by players at many different levels of play. These actions are Cardinal Sins because they violate so many of the philosophical concepts that should be a good player’s foundation for playing the game of bridge.

#### **Cardinal Sin #1: Preempting and then Bidding Again!**

When you open the bidding with a weak-2 (or 3-level preempt) you are declaring to your partner and the opponents that you have a weak hand that has playing strength based on suit length, not HCP. Simultaneously, you have eaten up a large amount of bidding room from your opponents – causing them difficulty in properly communicating their shape and values to each other. You have forced your opponents to guess at the right action to take. Sometimes your opponents will guess correctly and sometimes they will not – but the key is that you have made their lives difficult by making them guess.

If you open the bidding with a weak bid and later bid again (when you have not been invited to do so by your partner), then you have violated one of the major philosophies of playing bridge -- "make your opponents guess last." Additionally, you will have given the opponents an opportunity to survive (get a good board) when they might have been headed for disaster. If your hand is so good that you are not going to be happy passing after preempting, then don't preempt - either pass or open at the 1-level.

### *Example*

You hold a hand with 8 HCP and 6-1-4-2 distribution. You open the bidding with 2♠ and the auction progresses from there:

2♠    3♥    3♠    4♥

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Your only option is to PASS! You were not invited to bid! Your partner is the captain - he may want to double 4♥ for all you know. That might have been his only reason for bidding 3♠ in the first place!

*Note: In the vernacular of bridge we call the player on our right "right hand opponent" (or RHO), and the player on our left "left hand opponent" (or LHO.) When your partner does something like preempting and bidding again, then he has become your "Center Hand Opponent!" Try to be a good partner, not another opponent!*

Some *Philosophical Approaches* to playing bridge that are important here - and the violations of which make this a cardinal sin are:

- Get into and out of the auction as quickly as possible with weak hands;
- If you can, try to describe your hand in one bid;
- Make the opponents guess last;
- Help partner make good decisions (don't be his opponent);
- Give partner a chance to make a winning decision.

### **Rebidding 1NT with a Singleton in Partner's Suit**

When you open the bidding at the 1-level and rebid 1NT, you show 12-14 pts and a balanced (or semi-balanced) hand. It is important for your partner to be able to count on you to have a hand that falls within these guidelines. Your partner may have to make a difficult decision and you want to make sure to give him good information to do so. Here are some decisions that your partner might face where correct information may be very important:

- Your partner may choose to rebid his 5c suit (expecting that you have 2- or 3-card support) in an effort to be in the correct part score;
- Your partner may be deciding which game to play - and may make the wrong decision;
- Your partner may be too aggressive in inviting or bidding game if he has a long suit and expects to have a large fit.

### *Example*

With 12 HCP and 1-3-4-5 distribution, if you open 1♣ (your longest suit) and partner responds 1♠, you cannot rebid 1NT. 1♣-1♠-1NT shows a balanced (or semi-balanced) hand with 12-14 pts. Thus, you must either rebid 2♣ (not great), or better yet, open 1♦ and rebid 2♣ (1♦-1♠-2♣), showing an unbalanced hand with 12-17 pts.

Some *Philosophical Approaches* to playing bridge that are important here - and the violations of which make this a cardinal sin are:

- Try to communicate general information (Hand Type) before specific information;
- Give partner what he expects or more (keep expectations clear);
- Help partner make good decisions (don't be his opponent).

### **Other “Major Sins”**

Of course, there are other major sins - here are a few of them and brief summaries of some of the problems they can cause for both you and partner:

#### **Suppressing Support for Partner's Suit in a Competitive Auction**

If you have support for your partner's suit but fail to show it in favor of bidding your own suit, you run the risk of the opponents preempting the bidding and leaving your side to guess what to do at a high level - and that is not good bridge.

#### **Off-shape or Bad Takeout Doubles**

In a competitive auction, partner must be able to count on your takeout double to have support for ALL the unbid suits (at least 3-card.) If we start making bad or off-shape takeout doubles, partner will often compete too high in our short suit - and the doubled contract that will likely ensue will be very expensive for our side!

#### **Taking a Second Bid as a Passed Hand**

When we are a passed hand, partner can make tactical bids. He can make light overcalls or take other “non-standard” actions. If we are a passed hand, we should strive to describe our hand in one call and not hang partner for being creative.

### **Not Getting Your Hand Off Your Chest Early in the Auction**

When you don't bid enough early in the auction you often are faced with having to make difficult decisions later in the auction - that never leads to winning bridge! Bid early, bid often, then get out of the way!

### **Conclusion**

We discuss bridge philosophy and use certain types of reasoning and principles to help govern our decision-making processes. Starting your decision-making process off with the right foundation or approach to the game is vital to making good choices in some of the difficult situations in bridge. It is hoped that you find the philosophical approach discussions useful - and that they help you craft a new way to view the game!