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## The 12 habits of highly effective bidders

### 6. They make the bids partner wants to hear.

Think about the last time you were totally confused by partner's bids — or you knew what they meant, but you were at a loss for how to continue. The auction probably involved an artificial bid of some sort, and you may have found yourself wishing that partner would just make a decision instead of torturing you with arcane attempts to collect more information.

These “delicate” auctions are often necessary to find the best contract. In many cases, though, it can be better to sacrifice science for the sake of simplicity. When presented with two or more potentially winning actions, the most successful players strive to choose the one that will make it easier for partner to decide on his rebid or place the contract. The habit they share is this: They make the bids partner wants to hear.

That's an oversimplification, of course. If you *always* made the easiest bid for partner, you'd ignore your actual hand and support his suit — or bid 7NT — on every deal. This advice can, however, help you resolve close cases, streamline your auctions and

# Bidding Matters

conserve your partner's brain cells.

## Responder's decisions

When partner opens, your least ambiguous responses are “telling” bids rather than “asking” bids. Raises and notrump bids are telling because they limit your hand and put partner in charge. New suits, conventional doubles, cuebids and other artificial forces tend to be asking bids because partner has to continue describing his hand without knowing your exact strength.

Here are some opportunities to apply this principle:

Partner opens 1♣:

♠Q42 ♥1073 ♦KQ108 ♣J64

Bid 1NT to show your balanced pattern and point-count in one bid. A 1♦ response looks harmless enough, but at best, it adds an extra round to the auction, since it's likely your next bid will be 1NT. At worst, it and partner's rebid give the opponents extra information and extra room to compete.

Partner opens 1♥ and right-hand opponent overcalls 2♣:

♠J74 ♥103 ♦KJ982 ♣AQ8

Bid 2NT to limit your strength and show your hand's suitability for the most likely game. Partner will usually be more interested in your club stoppers than your diamond suit.

Partner opens 1♣ and RHO overcalls 1♦:

♠KJ974 ♥A1052 ♦43 ♣Q8

Bid 1♠. When in doubt, bid a long suit instead of making a negative double, especially if you're strong enough to take two bids. A double

risks losing a 5–3 spade fit if (more likely, when) the opponents bid more diamonds.

LHO opens 1♦, partner overcalls 1♠ and RHO bids 2♦:

♠64 ♥KJ1085 ♦52 ♣KQ104

Bid 2♥. Switch the clubs and hearts and this would be a good responsive double, but the natural freebid is better when you hold a good five-card major. If you have hopes of outbidding the opponents, it's important to find a fit in a higher-ranking suit than diamonds.

Partner opens 1♥:

♠AQ9643 ♥954 ♦32 ♣J6

Bid 2♥. “Support with support” is the old bridge mantra that applies here. It's tempting to show the spades, but this hand is worth only one bid, so send the message partner wants to hear. If you respond 1♠ and bid hearts later, you'll mislead partner about your strength or heart length. And if the opponents compete, the auction may be at the three-level before you can bid again.

Partner opens 1♥:

♠AJ103 ♥Q87643 ♦2 ♣63

Bid 4♥. This may be a bit heavy for a preemptive jump to game, but it's not right for any other raise. Optimists might try 1♠, hoping to manufacture an auction that pinpoints spade values and eventually shows a minimum with lots of hearts. Realists will accept that even if this auction exists, partner will have trouble reading it — and the opponents will have more room to interfere — so they'll settle for the imperfect-but-straightforward raise. □

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