



Karen Walker
kwalker@insightbb.com

The 12 Habits of Highly Effective Bidders

7. They strive to be sensible, not brilliant. (continued)

It's halftime in a knockout match, and your team is down by 35 IMPs. With just 12 boards to go, what's your strategy?

Do you continue to play "good bridge" and hope your decisions are 36 IMPs better than your opponents'? Or do you aim for the fences and pray for luck?

These are circumstances where even the most disciplined players will sometimes depart from their "be normal" rule and invoke desperate measures. The typical strategy relies on optimism and overbidding — opening light, competing hyper-aggressively and pushing to any game or slam that has a wisp of a chance.

Everyone who tries this approach knows the odds are against them, but since there's no penalty for losing by 70 IMPs instead of 35, it's easy to justify taking chances. If Jupiter aligns with Mars and your gambits work, you're a hero. If not, you had nothing to lose anyway.

Or so it may seem, until your teammates arrive with a gleeful, "We have a winner!" They did everything right,

Bidding Matters

their opponents made costly mistakes, and all your pair had to do was "stay in the boat" to win the match. That development may seem as implausible as the 25-percent slams you tried at your table, but if it's ever happened to you, you'll never want to repeat it.

Comeback strategies at IMPs

There are some sensible compromises between the "nothing to lose" and "trust our teammates" styles. All require some luck, starting with the shuffle. If too many of the remaining boards are routine 1NT–3NT auctions, there won't be enough IMPs available. You need "swingly" deals that offer opportunities to use your judgment and reach different contracts than your opponents.

In some situations, a strategic underbid rates to pick up more IMPs than an overbid. Both vulnerable, partner opens 1♣, you respond 1♥ and he rebids 1NT. If you're trying to stage a miracle comeback, what's your call holding:

♠Q94 ♥K754 ♦KQJ ♣652?

Consider the pair holding your cards at the other table. With their big lead, they want as many tie boards as possible, so they'll be trying, within reason, to duplicate your results. Since the trailing team usually bids aggressively, your opponents will expect you to be in all games and slams, especially vulnerable.

A desperado might try 3NT, but the "book" rebid with an 11-count is a raise to 2NT, and that will probably be your opponent's choice. If you make the same bid, you rate to land in the same contract for a tie board.

One way to engineer a favorable swing is to bid a heavy 1NT instead of 1♥ and hope the opponents get too high. If you're plus 120 and your teammates are plus 100 defending

3NT, you'll pick up 6 IMPs. It's true that 1NT is "anti-field," but it isn't really anti-percentage here. The flat distribution and soft honors give you good justification for devaluing this hand.

A conservative view can also be the most profitable for competitive decisions. White vs. red, you hold:

♠42 ♥AK654 ♦984 ♣QJ2.

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
		1♠	Pass
2♠	4♦	4♠	?

If there's a similar auction at the other table, your opponents will surely take the "cheap" save in 5♦. In a close match, you might, too, but when you're playing catch-up, you don't want to settle for a tie board (or even a small win) if you have a reasonable shot at a bigger swing.

Even though 5♦ doubled may be a "good" minus score, it's still a minus. To come from this far behind, you need plus scores at both tables. Look for yours by passing, catering to the layouts where 4♠ goes down.

Sacrifice bids tend to be made too often at IMPs, sometimes with a misguided view that they're "insurance," just in case the opponents' contract makes. Here, partner may have pushed RHO into a thin game, and you have fair prospects of defeating it (a possible two hearts and a ruff, a club and a diamond). If all goes well, you'll be plus 100 and your teammates will be plus 500 defending 5♦ doubled.

That's 12 IMPs on one board, without taking reckless chances. In fact, your odds were excellent, since you risked only 3 IMPs (your loss if 4♠ had made) for a chance to win 12. □

Next: Comeback strategies at matchpoints.