Partnership Communication

By Richard Katz
Gilbert, Arizona

Charlotte and I have been bridge partners for over 30 years. One day I told her that I had decided to write an article about improving partnership communication. I thought a few ideas along that line would be useful to bridge players. Instead, I found that I needed a key lesson when she suggested that such an article would lack credibility unless I actually practiced what I preached. Oops, good point. I then realized that my real message should be to warn the innocent to avoid my mistakes that have interfered with partnership communication.

Partnership communication is a process to assign and convey meaning in order to create shared understanding in every aspect of bridge. So of course, I graciously embarked on a campaign to teach Charlotte all of my favorite bridge nuances and treatments. Instead of lavish appreciation, she offered a few thoughts. First, she already knows how to play bridge very well.

Second, partnership communication is a two-way street that requires neither masterminding nor professorial bridge lectures.

Third, successful communication does not have a winner or a loser.

Improved partnership communication is a vital path to increased success at bridge. Some major ways to improve communication are support of partner, judicious use of conventions, preparation before and review after playing, plus the use of system notes.

I wish I could better remember that bridge partners deserve respect. Unfortunately, I often choose to point out my absolutely brilliant (and usually obscure) theories for improvements that partner may have missed. Charlotte reminded me that bridge is an intellectual pursuit, and unconstructive criticism is disrespect that directly attacks partner's ego. On the other hand, she is usually willing to accept constructive criticism while trying to understand my viewpoint (no matter how frequently misguided it appears). I suggested that we could better keep lines of communication open with feedback. She agreed with my intent to achieve win-win solutions when there is disagreement; however, my penchant for my being the winner somehow short circuits two-way communication.

Conventions are bidding methods of communication that are too easily adopted and subject to misinterpretation. Improving communication in this area requires thorough understanding, common agreement, and ease of remembering. Not too long ago we agreed (after my constructive bullying) to play new minor forcing. I explained the rudiments of the convention and wrongly omitted details of every possible situation and variation. Why is this convention useful? What happens when opponents intervene? Does the convention apply to a passed hand? Does vulnerability matter? What range of HCP applies? What do follow-up bids mean? Of course, our partnership encountered several disasters before Charlotte insisted that I provide complete clarity. She was particularly adamant that we forego any convention that did not make sense. Once, I suggested we incorporate a new convention that I invented in my sleep (where I definitely play my best bridge). She lovingly declined, rejecting anything that would only occur once in a lifetime. Actually, my idea probably could have come up two or three times in a lifetime, but I am flexible and willing to compromise (I don't know why Charlotte was scowling when she read this). *[There's a down side to trying to cover every possible contingency. Auctions that allow for absolutely anything that the enemy may do and every possible bid taken by our side can take up too many pages of notes; this adds both memory strain and complexity. So we like to have a number of general principles that apply to many auctions - Eds.]*

Warming up with a few hands before playing seems useful to enhance communication. However, my penchant for examining the most unlikely double dummy lines of play usually met with equal interest from both my partner and my dog (tail wagging notwithstanding). Subsequently, Charlotte preferred practice with Bridge Baron for a less confrontational method of preparation. Charlotte finds it particularly useful to review results after the game is over; I somehow doubt she will miss my apoplectic postmortems during the game. Deep Finesse hand records are particularly useful when we remember that double dummy results often represent lines of play that no human would choose.

I once read that the Meckstroth and Rodwell system notes run to 800 pages. Obviously, we needed a similar approach for good partnership communication. Then partner would know exactly what I know and vice versa. I assured Charlotte that system notes would help prevent misunderstandings and refresh common knowledge before games.

As a start, I developed a single page of system notes using the following outline:

1. **Constructive Auctions** (conventions, bids that show extras, etc.)
2. **Reverses** (why necessary, how to stop under game, etc.)
3. **Notrump Auctions** (conventions, when systems are on/off, etc.)
4. **Defensive Carding** (attitude, count, suit preference, etc.)
5. **Slam Tries** (conventions, cuebids, etc.)
6. **Defensive Bidding** (overcalls and response, etc.)
7. **Bidding over Interference** (negative doubles, redoubles, etc.)

While system notes are useful, they may not be for everyone. Charlotte recalls the first time we used our notes was to provide evidence in her bench trial on charges for one-time misuse of a convention. Somehow the notes fell short in enhancing communication.

To sum up the lessons I have learned for improving communication at bridge are better partnership support, well defined applications of conventions, and better discipline in practice before and after sessions.

I hope my shortcomings in partnership communication will suggest a better path for others (particularly for married partners who resume communication at home).

[Also useful is to practice bidding hands – many online sites provide the functionality to do this – and to read reports of high level matches, thinking especially about how you and your partner would have bid some of the difficult hands that the pros got right ... or perhaps wrong. Eds.]

Desert Empire Regional

A highlight on the D17 fall tournament calendar is certain to be the Oct. 17-23 Desert Empire Regional in Scottsdale, Ariz. scheduled at a spectacular new site – the five-star Talking Stick Resort & Casino. Phoenix is known for its friendly, laid-back Western-style hospitality, so, "Scottsdale in October," as the tournament is being branded, should be a treat.

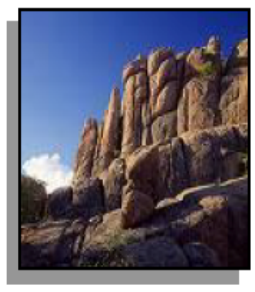
The fall weather in historic and renowned Scottsdale is ideal at that time of year with cool desert nights and sunny days; perfect for golfing, sight-seeing or sun bathing when not at the tables (bridge or casino).

Entry Fee:
$9.00 for Members per Session

$10.00 for Non & Unpaid Members per session

PRESCOTT FALL SECTIONAL
Bridge Tournament

September 9, 10 and 11, 2011
Adult Center of Prescott
Rowle P. Simmons Community Center
1280 E. Rosser Street
Prescott, AZ 86301
928-778-3000



Sanction #: S1109105
Unit: 355 District: 17

Friday, September 9, 2011

10:00 am & 3:00 pm	Stratified Open Pairs	Single Session
10:00 am & 3:00 pm	Stratified 199er Pairs	Single Session
3:00 pm	Bracketed KO Teams	Bracket 1 may be Handicapped

Saturday, September 10, 2011

10:00 am & 3:00 pm	Stratified Open Pairs	Single Session
10:00 am & 3:00 pm	Stratified 199er Pairs	Single Session
10:00 am & 3:00 pm	Bracketed KO Teams	

Sunday, September 11, 2011

10:00 am & TBA	Swiss Teams	Stratified by Team Average
10:00 am & TBA	Stratified 299er Swiss Teams	

Tournament Chairperson
Terry Rawlings
928-708-0029
trawlings92@msn.com

Partnership Chairperson
Fran Edmond
928-445-7716
franedmond@webtv.net

Director In Charge
Linda Mitchell

Stratified Events
A = 1,500 +
B = 500 – 1,500
C = 0 - 500

Stratified 199er Pairs
0/50
50/100
100/200
(Minimum of 3 Tables)

Hand Records will be used.

Smoking breaks, complimentary coffee & refreshments.
Zero Tolerance observed!
Use of cell phones prohibited during sessions.
No host lunch counter available Sunday only.

ACBL Unit 374

Albuquerque 299er Sectional

August 6 - 7, 2011
DUKE CITY BRIDGE CENTER
8616 Northeastern Blvd NE
Albuquerque, NM 87112
505-271-2877

Saturday, 6 August

10.00 am	Stratified Pairs	(one session)
2.15 – 2.45 pm	Guest Speaker	
3.00 pm	Stratified Pairs	(one session)

Sunday, 7 August

10.00 am & TBA	Stratified Swiss Teams

Pairs Events: A: 200-300, B: 100-200, C: 0-100
Swiss Teams: A: 200-300, B: 100-200, C: 0-100

All events stratified by average masterpoint holdings
Trophies for overall winners in each strat

Entry fees: $8.00 per person/session (ACBL members)
$9.00 per person/session (non/unpaid members)
$4.00 per person/session (Juniors U19)

Chairperson: Felicity Moore (f.moore@netscape.com) 505-344-5209
Partnerships: Bob Zipp (zipp_bridge@yahoo.com) 505-332-8502

Director-in-Charge: Bill Koehler **Sanction # SN1108034**

Information and results at www.abqbridge.com Results posted online after every session.
Pre-duplicated boards for all pairs events.
Complimentary coffee, tea, snacks and finger food at all sessions.
Non-smoking tournament with breaks.

Directions to DCBC: From I-40 take Wyoming Ave Exit North to Northeastern Blvd (approximately 1 mile) Turn right (E) on Northeastern Blvd (traffic light), DCBC is the second building on the right.