



Stephen Paul

# Constructive Bidding 401

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# INTRODUCTION

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*What gets us into trouble is not what we don't know. It's what we know for sure that just ain't so.*<sup>1</sup>

Constructive Bidding 401 is the first of two books with the following purpose:

- I. To focus is on *constructive* rather than *competitive* bidding.
- II. To provide advancing partnerships with a coordinated bidding system that facilitates competition at higher levels.
- III. Provide readers with a fully referenced basis for the methods used.

The first chapter of this book reflects the importance of working with your partner. Concepts of teamwork from the business world have been presented in a bridge context with a number of partnership development exercises.

Chapter 2 starts with hand evaluation and follows with a complete range of opening bids from 1♣ to 4♠ in all seat positions. This leaves Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 to deal with responses to an opening bid.

The follow up book, Constructive Bidding 402, provides the structure needed for a complete bidding system. It starts with opener rebids, progresses to slam bidding, and finishes with Matchpoint and IMP strategy.

Two Over One and Forcing 1NT bids are a small component of the system. Of greater importance is the need to define and manage a broad range bidding situations in a predictable fashion. The focus is on these bids and discussion on Two Over One is relatively brief.

These two books deliver a convention-rich system that can be simplified to suit the requirements of individual partnerships and the level they play at. More than fifty conventions with extensive continuations for both invoker and responder have been provided. It is not necessary to use them all. Developing partnerships can start with a basic system and then add to it with the understanding they will all work seamlessly together.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Twain

Patterned after a college text book, the presence of a knowledgeable teacher will certainly speed the learning process. Concepts are presented, explained and then detailed in a tabular format. A quiz following each major section is provided to develop the reader's understanding. The quizzes in both books contain more than 450 question and answers. Sections are also followed by a bullet point summary of the topic in addition to an overall summary at the end of each chapter.

The system's bidding philosophy is to aggressively locate and bid game contracts. Bidding structures derived from that approach depend upon shape and high-card points to differentiate between types of bids. This leads to the following:

- i. Three different hand evaluation techniques are presented to facilitate the development of bidding judgment: Point Count, Losing Trick Count and the LW formula.
- ii. Keystone concepts of the bidding structure are:
  - ~ A hand containing 12 HCP is *always* opened in first and second seat.
  - ~ A minimum rebid by opener is expected to be 11–14 HCP.
  - ~ A same suit rebid is expected to be 6+ cards long.
  - ~ The shape defined by notrump openings is expected to be balanced and variations are strongly discouraged. Singletons or multiple doubletons are not allowed.
- iii. A Two Over One response to a first- or second-seat opening is a game force.
- iv. A 1NT response to a first- or second-seat major suit opening is forcing.

In most cases references from published experts have been provided. These accomplished authors provide a presentation that is more detailed than space allows here. Any errors interpreting their work are mine.

In the foreword of Ron Klinger's "The Modern Losing Trick Count", Hugh Kelsey voices this sentiment:

*In my own writings I have tended to concentrate on the finer points of play and defence, aspects of the game that hold an endless fascination for me. But in my heart of hearts I have to acknowledge that the bidding is roughly three times as important as the play. In the upper reaches of the game standards are such that there is little to choose between the contestants in the matter of card play. At lower levels the picture is the same. It is accurate bidding that wins the matches, the tournaments and the rubbers. If you can consistently reach sensible contracts, you will have few problems in the play of the cards.*

There is no doubt bridge is a complex challenging activity requiring the ability to share and collect data, analyze, make a decision and execute. This process occurs in seconds, many times per hand, with your partner and against opponents. It is the ultimate sport for those who can work together as a thinking partnership.

Improving partnership results can be placed in two broad categories. Activities executed separately from your partner (such as play of the hand) and those requiring some form of interaction (such as bidding or defense). The first group can be improved by reading and study on an individual basis because they are personal skills.

Improving interactions with your partner is the second way to improve scores. This includes the technical aspects such as improving the partnership's bidding and defensive systems as well as the relationship components:

- Trusting your partner to use the bidding system as agreed
- Dealing with misunderstandings in a constructive fashion
- Establishing common goals, strategies and tactics.

In the business and sports world these interactions are recognized as teamwork. The fundamentals of teamwork as they apply to a competitive partnership are explored in this chapter.

Improving these fundamentals will translate to better scores at the table.

## THE DEFINITION

Repeated success in competitive bridge clearly requires a team effort. Place an accomplished player with a talented new partner of comparable technical skill and their early success will be limited. Without a concerted effort to make communication agreements their future success will be limited.

Talent and technical skill is an important component of success, regardless of the level you play at, but it is not the whole story. The pre-game preparation completed by stronger pairs at higher levels is largely invisible. In addition, top-ranked players will often have bidding and defensive notes numbering in the hundreds of pages. Professional teams have captains and coaches with the sole purpose of simplifying the effort required to play successfully.



Early on in **any** partnership there is a need to discuss, review and agree on a host of bidding and defensive situations. This preparation is an investment of time and energy with an understanding the payout will be “future success.” This is a development process and executing it more effectively will bring the partnership to full playing potential sooner. There are a host of other non-technical activities that are improvable and these are the realm of TEAMWORK.

*TEAMWORK is a group activity intended to achieve a common benefit.*

Teams that win frequently have some common traits:

- Work well together
- Have frequent positive interactions
- Understand related activities that are required to develop and maintain the partnership
- Understand that results are dependent on each other
- Develop rules for working together
- Respect and support each other
- Have the ability to create an atmosphere where both partners can perform well
- Have the skills to play the game

The business world has looked closely at teamwork and their efforts can be leveraged to improve your bridge game.

The following seven rules for a strong team were based on “*Tools for Team Excellence: Getting Your Team Into High Gear and Keeping It There*” by Gregory Huszco<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> (Huszco, 2010) page 16

## I. CLEAR SENSE OF DIRECTION

The objectives, direction and goals of both players are more likely to be achieved if they are aligned. This starts with goal development and becomes a common philosophy in game play and system development. Examples of goals are:

- a. Selecting and using conventions that meet a specific criterion. This may be to select conventions that have a specific probability of occurrence. Alternatively, there may be a desire to keep them simple.
- b. Documenting all agreements.
- c. Developing a complete bidding system. Some players prefer a simple open system.
- d. Agreeing to evaluate the bidding and play *after* each contest at a defined time.
- e. Playing and bidding in a consistent disciplined manner. Agreeing when to make risky plays.
- f. Having common goals in terms of what each player is looking for in their playing relationship. Is the partnership going to be full or part time, play in club events only or just in tournaments?

## II. SKILL

A partnership requires technical and soft skills to continuously improve. Technical skills such as bidding and defense are an ongoing individual effort for most partnerships. This may include courses, obtaining a mentor, reading, or engaging in higher level competitions to name a few. Partnership development will occur when these learnings are shared and incorporated.

Soft skills define the second dimension. A partnership wanting to improve needs to know more than bidding, defense and play of the hand. An effort expended on developing soft skills is sure to be worthwhile. Successful partnerships have the ability to:

- a. Resolve conflicts comfortably
- b. Solve problems
- c. Communicate well verbally
- d. Admit their own mistakes
- e. Gently and positively discuss partner's mistakes
- f. Have fun!

Soft skills will allow you to identify and discuss individual and partnership weaknesses in a constructive fashion. It is a prerequisite for improving your results.

### III. CLEAR ROLES

The activities occurring before, during and after a game need to be addressed in a mutually agreeable fashion. It may be worthwhile to examine “partnership chores” and evaluate how they are shared. These may include:

- a. *Documenting agreements.* Make a partnership decision on who manages, writes and prints the *System Description*. You may want to take turns editing it. Both partners need to accept responsibility for living up to these agreements and clarifying discrepancies.
- b. *Scoring.* Some pairs have one partner register hand scores and the other partner check. It may be advantageous to change those roles occasionally.
- c. *Convention development.* Continuations for many conventions differ from one partnership to another. Developing the continuations to fit partnership requirements is another task that can be shared.
- d. *Game evaluation.* Evaluating good and bad results after a game can locate flaws in the partnership’s approach. This is a significant effort and requires both partners to be fully involved in a positive way.
- e. Acting as captain at team events

An appropriate and comfortable level of shared responsibilities brings with it a “WE” attitude where both partners are moving forward together.

### IV. SOLID PROCEDURES

A bidding system is a collection of rules and guidelines developed by a partnership. Standard bidding systems such as Standard American Five-Card Majors and others are potent systems but they don’t always function as intended. Variations in the way conventions are used are common and misunderstandings with new partners can easily occur. Memory becomes an issue as well, and the time and effort spent developing a bidding sequence will be lost and misconstrued if it is not

adequately documented. The document used to record these agreements is known as a *system description*<sup>3</sup>. It will contain a brief description of all bidding and defensive conventions used by the partnership, as well as any special agreements. Clearly, changes require the full agreement of both partners.

Partnership agreements are not all about playing bridge and may include etiquette and other issues such as:

- a. Agreeing to no post-mortems at the table, instead make a note for later discussion
- b. Avoiding bridge discussions at lunch during tournaments
- c. No chatting once the cards have been dealt
- d. Arriving early for games promoting a calm sense of purpose.

These partnership agreements are known as “*Team Rules*” and are valuable for harmony. They can be initiated by mutual agreement and should be documented in the system description and reviewed on a regular basis.

Disagreements during the play of the game are not uncommon and how you resolve them has a huge impact on success. Dorothy Truscott<sup>4</sup>, recalls an anecdote while playing with a new partner in a national mixed pairs championship. Following a bidding misunderstanding, partner John Crawford provided her with an immediate and lengthy opinion. Rather than interrupting and defending herself, she quietly allows her partner to continue. When he slows down for a breath, she opens communications as follows:

*“Partner, I think you’ve got some more on your mind.”*

*“As a matter of fact I do,”* and he went on for another minute or two.

When he ran out of words this time I said:

*“You know I hate to start this next board until you’ve got it all off your chest.”*

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<sup>3</sup> These are also known as system notes.

<sup>4</sup> Truscott, D., *Bid Better, Play Better*, page 168

Finally, he smiled. Everyone breathed a sigh of relief. Partnership harmony restored, we managed to avoid any other disasters and went on to win the championship.

Truscott had a remarkably deft touch handling cards and her partner. Setting up team rules in the form of a system description before playing might have saved them some grief.

#### V. STRONG RELATIONSHIPS

The effort spent developing a positive relationship with your partner should probably be related to the level you are playing at. At the club level, partnerships are often casual and relaxed. Frequent tournament players require a more developed relationship due in part to the amount of time spent together and the intensity of the situation. The time and effort required to make a living as a professional player requires a serious effort at relationship management.

#### VI. ACTIVE REINFORCEMENT

It is important to value and encourage the productive gifts each partner brings to the team. At any level of play it is important to recognize your partner for their efforts. Whether it is a hand well played or a well-written convention, there is considerable value in thanking your partner.

On the other end of the scale, berating or punishing your partner will damage the trust relationship and make improvement and success impossible.

#### VII. STRONG EXTERNAL RELATIONSHIPS

The road to improvement can sometimes be hard to find. Establishing relationships with other players, mentors and teachers is another route to learning and improving your game. Becoming involved with the unit is another way to expand your circle of bridge friendships. It is this circle of friends that can provide support and direction to your game.

These seven rules provide framework for partnerships to develop their potential.

# PARTNERSHIP IMPROVEMENT ACTIVITIES

## EXERCISE 1 PARTNERSHIP SYSTEM EVALUATION

These questions are intended to locate differences in how you and your partner approach the game. Each partner should note an answer and then compare when the entire list is complete. The same answer by both partners is the best result. Differing answers can be used as the basis for discussion. Some questions may require a conventional approach for your partnership. If no option fits, write your answer down.

1. How many points would you expect West have to rebid spades in the following sequence?

West	North	East	South
1♥	Pass	1NT	Pass
2♠			

- a) 15+  
b) 16+  
c) 16+ including distribution  
d) 17+  
e) 18+ including distribution  
f) Other \_\_\_\_\_
2. What do you understand about East's point count?  
a) 6-9            b) 5-12            c) 10-12            d) Other \_\_\_\_\_

3. What distribution should North have with the following bidding?

West	North	East	South
	1♠	Pass	1NT
Pass	2♥	Pass	2NT
Pass	3♥		

- a) 5♠ & 5♥    b) 5♠ & 6♥    c) 6♠ & 6♥    d) Other \_\_\_\_\_

*PARTNERSHIP SYSTEM EVALUATION continued*

4. You open the bidding 1♣ and partner bids both hearts and diamonds?

West	North	East	South
	1♣	Pass	1♥
Pass	1NT	Pass	2♦
Pass	?		

What should you bid with the following hand?

♠K 10 2 ♥A Q 8 ♦J 10 5 ♣K J 5 2

- a) 2♥    b) 2NT    c) 3♦    d) Pass    e) Other \_\_\_\_\_
5. You play best when you arrive:
- a) 5 minutes before the game starts  
b) 15 minutes before the game starts  
c) 20 minutes (or more) before the game starts.  
d) Other \_\_\_\_\_
6. You discuss and review conventions:
- a) Before the game starts  
b) By phone the day before  
c) By email  
d) Other \_\_\_\_\_
7. Your partner opens 1♠, then makes a raise to 3♠.

West	North	East	South
	1♠	Pass	2♠
Pass	3♠	Pass	?

What should South rebid with the following hand?

♠K Q 2 ♥Q 8 7 6 ♦10 5 4 ♣5 4 2

- a) Pass    b) 3NT    c) 4♠    d) Other \_\_\_\_\_

*PARTNERSHIP SYSTEM EVALUATION continued*

8. Your partner opens 1♠, and after your raise rebids 3♦.

West	North	East	South
	1♠	Pass	2♠
Pass	3♦	Pass	?

What should South bid with the following hand?

♠K Q 2   ♥A 8 7 6   ♦10 5 4   ♣5 4 2

- a) Pass   b) 3NT   c) 3♣   d) 4♣   e) Other \_\_\_\_\_

9. East preempts and the bidding proceeds as follows:

West	North	East	South
		2♦	2♠
3♦	4♣	passed out	

West leads the ♦A and North tables the following dummy:

		♠ K Q 10 7	
		♥ Q J 6 4	
		♦ 9	
		♣ A J 4 2	
♠ A 5		N	
♥ K 9 7 5	W		E
♦ A 5			♦ 2
♣ 10 8 7 5 3		S	
		♦ 4	

The ♦9 is played from the dummy

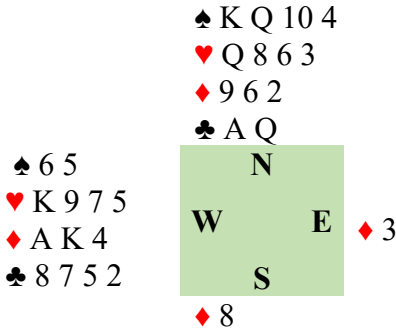
East follows with the ♦2, and declarer with the ♦4. What card should West lead next?

- a) ♣5   b) ♥5   c) ♠5   d) other



*PARTNERSHIP SYSTEM EVALUATION continued*

10. You are West and your right hand opponent opens with 2♠, raised to 4♠ on your left. You lead the ♦A and North tables the following dummy:

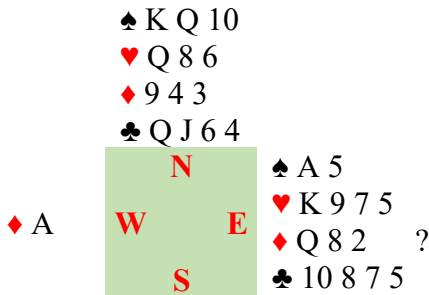


Dummy plays ♦2, East follows with ♦3, declarer with ♦8. What should you lead next?

- a) ♠7    b) ♥5    c) ♠5    d) ♣8    e) ♦K    f) other
11. South opens 1NT (15–17), and North raises to 3NT as follows:

<b>West</b>	<b>North</b>	<b>East</b>	<b>South</b>
			1NT
Pass	3NT	Passed out	

West leads the ♦A and North tables the following dummy:



Which card should you play?

- a) ♦8    b) ♦2    c) ♦Q

*PARTNERSHIP SYSTEM EVALUATION continued*

12. What do you bid with the following hands when your right hand opponent deals (all not vulnerable) and opens the bidding with 1♥?

♠10 5 ♥9 ♦K Q 8 3 2 ♣K Q 10 8 7

a) 2NT b) 2♣ c) 2♦ d) Pass e) other

♠10 5 ♥9 2 ♦K Q 8 3 2 ♣K Q 10 8

a) 2NT b) 2♣ c) 2♦ d) Pass e) other

♠A 5 ♥9 ♦A K Q 8 2 ♣K Q J 8 7

a) 2NT b) 2♣ c) 2♦ d) Pass e) other

♠10 5 ♥9 ♦K 8 6 3 2 ♣K 10 9 8 7

a) 2NT b) 2♣ c) 2♦ d) Pass e) other

13. Your partner overcalls 2NT as follows:

West	North	East	South
1♥	2NT	Pass	?

How do you respond with the following hands?

♠10 5 ♥K 9 2 ♦K Q 3 2 ♣10 8 7 2

a) 3♣ b) 3♦ c) 3NT d) other

♠10 5 ♥K 9 ♦K Q 3 2 ♣A 10 8 7 2

a) 3♣ b) 4♣ c) 3NT d) other

♠A 5 ♥K 9 ♦K Q 8 3 2 ♣A 10 8 7

a) 3♦ b) 4♦ c) 3NT d) other

14. Have you prepared a convention card with your partner?

a) Yes b) No

15. Is it your job to update and print the partnership's convention card?

a) Yes b) No

*Constructive Bidding 401* is the first of two books that provides advancing partnerships a complete and consistent framework in the form of a bidding system for competition in stratified tournaments at higher levels.

This first book emphasizes the importance of working with your partner. Concepts of teamwork from the business world are presented in a bridge context with a number of partnership development exercises.

The book moves on to hand evaluation and follows with a complete range of opening bids from 1♣ to 4♠ in all seat positions. Finally, it deals with responses to an opening bid.

This convention-rich system can be simplified to suit the requirements of individual partnerships at any level. Developing partnerships can start with the basic system and then add to it with the understanding that everything will work seamlessly together. The system's bidding philosophy is to aggressively locate and bid game contracts. Bidding structures derived from that approach depend upon shape and high-card points to differentiate between types of bids.

Patterned after a college textbook, concepts are presented, explained and then detailed in a tabular format. A summary and quiz following each major section develops the reader's understanding. The quizzes in both books contain more than 450 question and answers.



**STEPHEN PAUL (CALGARY)** is an avid club player and long-time student. Retirement from a successful engineering career afforded the time to pursue a fascination with competitive duplicate bridge. He is a firm believer that lasting success requires great teamwork, well-defined partnership agreements, and the support of understanding friends and family.

