

Esther Discusses "A Bad Day at the Office: Learning *Cardinal Bidding Principles* from a Mistake-Prone Bridge Session"

Bruce Thompson

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Bruce: Today, we are honored to have with us Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, Quintuple Gold Emerald Life Master (20 Million+ ACBL MasterPoints), who will talk us through "**A Bad Day at the Office: Learning *Basic Bidding Principles* from a Mistake-Prone Bridge Session**". Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, thanks for taking the time to be with us today!

Esther: D**n it, Bruce! How many times do I have to tell you to **NEVER, ever** call me Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen! Always, **ALWAYS, ALWAYS** instead call me, Esther!

Bruce: Errr, well, sorry again about that, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther.

Esther: Well, Bruce. Please try to exercise at least a modicum of empathy, assuming you have at least the limited capacity to do so. Can you imagine how relentlessly all the other girls in grades K through 4 of my elementary school years relentlessly, endlessly tormented me about my last name, Klinktoast-Houstonhousen?

Bruce: Well, yes, sorry again, Esther! I do understand that young girls can indeed be quite vicious to each other. Well, in any case, Esther, I recently had a very bad day at the bridge table. I wonder if you would talk through the bidding of 3 Boards in particular. I would like to try to learn from these (painful) mistakes, so that I don't make these (painful) mistakes again!

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. Bridge at times is quite humbling! And we ALL make mistakes! But you are very wise indeed to focus on trying to learn from your mistakes! It is important to understand how much a single mistake can make to your Overall Result!

How much can an inappropriate mutiny, or an egregious bidding error involving a lie to your Partner, on a single Board, make in your overall competition results? Your overall result or ranking is determined by (1) your Total Matchpoint Score, computed by adding up the Matchpoints your Partnership earned across all the Boards in the competition, or (2) your Total Percentage, which is equal to the sum of your Matchpoints, your Total Matchpoints, divided by that mathematically maximum possible number of Matchpoints in the competition, both of which will rank order the Pairs in exactly the same rank order.¹

If you are playing, for example, 18 Boards in the competition, and you earn a “Bottom Board”, or 0 Matchpoints, when you might at least have made a “Middle Board”, or a 50% Board, your Total Percentage will be reduced by $50 - 0 = 50 / 18 = 2.8\%$. *That is quite a bit, and can change your final rank order quite a bit, especially if you are in the middle of the ranking, where numerous Pairs will be grouped together!* If you are playing 18 Boards in the competition, and you earn a near “Bottom Board”, such as 10%, by for example not bidding a makeable slam that few other Pairs sitting in your Direction find, when you might have earned a 90% Board from bidding correctly, your Total Percentage will be reduced by $90 - 10 = 80 / 18 = 4.4\%$ by this single bad Board!!!

Bruce: OK. Here is the first Board that I would like to discuss along with the bidding at my Table. Please comment!

¹ Within the “**Esther Bridge Lessons**”, see: “**How Duplicate Pairs Bridge is Scored**”.

Board #10
 Knoxville 499er 9/14/23
 Vul: ALL
 Dealer: EAST

	NORTH (5)	
	S: 8 6 2	
	H: T	
	D: A 4	
	C: J T 9 6 5 4 2	
WEST (17)		EAST (11)
S: A 7		S: K Q J 5 3
H: K Q J 9 8 2		H: 7 4
D: K 8		D: Q 9 5 3 2
C: A 8 3		C: K
	SOUTH (7)	
	S: T 9 4	
	H: A 6 5 3	
	D: J T 7 6	
	C: Q 7	

Bidding

EAST	SOUTH	WEST	NORTH
PASS	PASS	1H	PASS
1S	PASS	2H	PASS
PASS	PASS		

Esther: Well, Bruce, the first error I see is EAST's initial bid of PASS. Here is a fundamentally critical (and important) principle of bridge:

"Flat" or "rectangular" hands play better in NT, but 2-suited hands play better in Suit Contracts!

The fact that 2-suited hands play very well in suit contracts led World Bridge Champion Marty Bergen to formulate his famous, and critically important "Rule of 20":²

"If the sum of your HCPs plus the number of cards in your longest 2 Suits equals 20 or more, open the bidding sitting in any seat!"

So, the failure of EAST to open 1S, when holding 11 HCPs + 10 cards in his longest 2 Suits = 21, is **egregious**.³ This

² Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons, see: "Lesson #26: 40 or so Bridge Bidding/Play 'Rules'."

³ In his fabulous, fantastic, great little 2011 "pocket book", so called because the book is small and can fit in your shirt or pants pocket, titled pocket posh tips for bridge players, Marty Bergen

error is especially egregious, because Spades is the King of Suits, because holding Spades you have more control over setting the final contract. Furthermore, EAST's Ron Klinger "**Suit Quality Test**" ("**SQT**") **Score** here is 5 cards + 3 honors = **8**. You can normally bid to a level equal to your "**SQT**" Score minus 6. Here, $8 - 6 = 2$, which means EAST can probably safely bid up to the 2 level. Also, here, with EAST holding 2 long Suits, EAST knows that EAST has a potential second bid, **2D**. As strongly emphasized in the "Esther Bridge Lessons" Lesson #52: "A Primer on the Basics of Bidding...", "**Do not make an initial opening bid unless you can see a reasonable second bid**", such as a re-bid or bidding a new suit! Of course, WEST's decision to set a **4H** contract, with WEST holding 17 HCPs, and WEST then knowing that E/W hold 8 Hearts, would have been massively more informed if EAST had made an initial Suit bid, instead of his initial PASS.

Bruce: Well, OK, Ms. Klink..., errr, I mean, Esther. SOUTH holding 7 HCPs wisely PASSes. WEST then bids **1H**. Is this the correct bid for WEST to make?

Esther: Well, yes. This **1H** bid by WEST shows holding (1) 5+ Hearts, and (2) at least roughly opening HCPs, or meeting the requirements of the "**Rule of 20**". All these things are TRUE.

Bruce: OK. So NORTH with 5 HCPs correctly PASSed. Next, EAST then bid **1S**. Do you agree with this bid by EAST?

Esther: Well, of course!!! WEST by this bid (1) denies holding 3+ Hearts with 8-10 HCPs, and (2) shows 5 Spades with reasonable "suit quality", and (3) enough HCPs to (belatedly) enter the bidding.

Bruce: Well, OK, Ms. Klink..., errr, I mean, Esther. SOUTH again wisely PASSes. WEST then bids **2H**. Is this the correct bid for WEST to make?

wisely writes, "Any hand with 5-5 distribution has great potential. This is especially true when you have good suits, and really gets exciting once you find a fit." (p. 17) Of course, a hand 2-suited 5-4 also still has appeal, especially if the hand also holds a void or a singleton! One reason for favoring 2-suited hands is that when you hold 2 long Suits, the odds of finding an 8-card fit go up immensely! See the Probabilities Section of the "**Esther Bridge Lessons**".

Esther: Well, Bruce, yes indeed! WEST is now showing 6 rather than only 5 Hearts! NORTH PASSEs. EAST then PASSEs. Do you agree with EAST's PASS?

Esther: Well, pardon my French, but **HECK NO!** No way! You gotta be kiddin'! EAST knows after WEST's second bid that E/W together hold 6 + 2 Hearts, which equals **Magic 8!!!** And it is actually better for playing a Heart contract for the distribution to be 6-2, rather than 5-3 or 4-4, because Declarer when drawing Trump will end up eventually spending only 1 Trump card to kill Opponents' Trump cards, rather than 1 Trump card in Dummy plus 1 Trump card in Declarer's hand! EAST simply must show WEST that the E/W Partnership holds 6 + 2 = **8** Hearts, so that WEST can then pursue a Game contract, if WEST believes this contract is makeable!

Bruce: Well, do you think EAST denied holding his 2 Hearts because he was mad that he didn't get to be Declarer and play a Spade contract?

Esther: Well, Bruce, frankly, I am not a psychoanalyst. But I am a Bridge Player, and a Quintuple Gold Emerald Lifemaster (20 Million+ ACBL MasterPoints), and I can say that EAST made 2 quite striking bidding errors on this Board!

Bruce: Well, Esther, I am glad that on this Board you were not sitting WEST while I was sitting EAST! So, here is a second Board that I would like to discuss:

Board #2
 Knoxville 499er 9/14/23
 Vul: N/S
 Dealer: EAST

	NORTH (1)	
	S: 5 2	
	H: 8 5	
	D: T 9 8 6 3 2	
	C: J 4 2	
WEST (12)		EAST (20)
S: J 8 7		S: A K Q T 4
H: T 3		H: A K 2
D: K Q J 5		D: 7
C: K Q 8 3		C: A 9 7 6
	SOUTH (7)	
	S: 9 6 3	
	H: Q J 9 7 6 4	
	D: A 4	
	C: T 5	

Bidding

EAST	SOUTH	WEST	NORTH
1S	PASS	2C	PASS
4NT	PASS	5D ⁴	PASS
5S	PASS	PASS	PASS

Bruce: OK, Esther. Do you agree with EAST's opening bid of 1S?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I do agree that EAST holding a singleton Diamond cannot bid NT. Opening 1S is not unreasonable.

Bruce: Well, Esther, is there another opening bid that EAST might have instead made?

Esther: Well, Bruce, with EAST's hand I would have considered opening with an "artificial" Strong 2C bid. It is true that EAST held only 20 HCPs, and normally I do not open Strong 2C unless I hold 22-24 HCPs. However, EAST does hold in a Suit contract first-Round control in 3 of the 4 Suits, and second-Round control in the remaining Suit, and 6 "Quick Tricks", and in his 5 Spades the top 3 "touching" honors, and 4 of the top 5 Spades! I would probably open 2C, and

⁴ This is a Roman Key Card ("RKC") 1430 response that says, "Partner, I hold either 3 or 0 key cards from among the 4 Aces and the King of Trump, which presumably is Spades." Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons", see: "Convention #3: Roman Key Card (RKC) 1430".

then, assuming WEST shows any signs of life, then show my Spades to see if WEST has any Spade support, and go from there.

Bruce: OK, Esther, on the actual Board, EAST did open 1**S**, and after SOUTH PASSEd, WEST then bid 2**C**. E/W are playing "2 Over 1",⁵ and this bid (1) shows opening or near-opening point count, and (2) 4+ Clubs, and (3) says absolutely nothing about WEST's Spade holdings, one way or the other. WEST's bid asks EAST to show a 6th Spade card, or another Suit. NORTH PASSEs. EAST then bids 4**NT** asking WEST about WEST's "key cards." What do you think about this 4**NT** bid by EAST?

Esther: Well, Bruce, there are various problems with this bid. First, EAST knows that E/W hold $20 + \sim 13 = 33$ HCPs!!! But EAST does not know whether WEST has any Spade support. And EAST should want, if possible, to play a 6**S** contract!!! There is a critically important bridge principle that says:

The more you and Partner have, the more you and Partner should talk before you set the final contract!

Before this (ridiculously) "fast arrival" at the 4**NT** "key card" asking bid, EAST should instead further describe his hand, and also allow WEST to show his possible Spade support. Instead of bidding 4**NT**, since EAST cannot re-bid Spades because EAST does not hold 6 Spades, EAST should have bid a "side feature," such as 2**H** or 3**C**. Then WEST would show 3+ Spades, and the bidding could then proceed from there. Avoiding "fast arrival," and talking further, will inevitably lead to the correct bid on this Board, 6**S**, rather a *dismal* result and a near-bottom Board score!

Bruce: OK, Esther, here is the last Board that I wanted to discuss from "Ferris Bueller's Bad Day at the Bridge Table."

⁵ Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons", see: "Convention #1: '2 Over 1' ('2/1')".

Board #11
 Knoxville 499er 9/14/23
 Vul: NONE
 Dealer: SOUTH

	NORTH (9)	
	S: J 6 4 2	
	H: J T 9 6	
	D: A Q 6	
	C: J 6	
WEST (12)		EAST (9)
S: Q T		S: A 9 8 7 5 3
H: A K 3		H: Q 7 2
D: K 9 7 4		D: J
C: 8 7 5 3		C: Q T 2
	SOUTH (10)	
	S: K	
	H: 8 5 4	
	D: T 8 5 3 2	
	C: A K 9 4	

Bidding

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
PASS	1D	PASS	1S
PASS	1NT	PASS	PASS
PASS			

Esther: Well, Bruce, SOUTH was probably correct to PASS. SOUTH has 10 HCPs, 9 cards in his longest 2 Suits, but that Spade King singleton might not be very useful. Next, WEST holds 12 HCPs, and 12 + 8 cards in the longest 2 Suits equals **20!** I think sitting WEST I would also open 1D rather than 1C, as WEST did here, to show Partner my better Minor Suit, and that I hold at least 4 Diamonds. Next, NORTH is correct to PASS.

Bruce: OK. What do you think of EAST's bidding 1S as Responder?

Esther: Well, that seems to be a correct bid. And EAST knows that he has a later Spade re-bid, if one is needed, because EAST holds 6 rather than only the 4 promised Spades.

Bruce: OK. SOUTH PASSes. WEST bids 1NT. Do you agree with this bid?

Esther: Well, yes. EAST has shown, so far, only 4 Spades. WEST's 1NT bid TRUTHFULLY denies holding (1) 4 Spades, or (2) a different biddable Suit.

Bruce: So, NORTH PASSes. EAST then PASSes, and the contract is set at 1NT. Do you agree with EAST's bid of PASS of WEST's 1NT bid?

Esther: Well, absolutely, *positively*, no!!! First of all, EAST should at least communicate more about his Spade holdings. Here is the BIG problem with EAST letting this contract being set in NT. Always remember the critically important bridge principle:

"Flat" or "rectangular" hands play better in NT, but 2-suited hands play better in Suit Contracts!

Even though WEST has shown at least 4 Diamonds, EAST holds a singleton Diamond Jack! Thus, E/W may end up playing a NT contract with only 5 Diamonds, with the Opponents holding 8 Diamonds! Yikes! EAST's hand certainly ain't "flat"!

Bruce: What could EAST have been thinking Esther?

Esther: Well, Bruce, perhaps EAST was focusing on HCPs, which is indeed an important focus in NT contracts.⁶ But you also have to think some about distribution, because in NT Opponents can "run" a long Suit.

Bruce: So, Esther, what should EAST have bid rather than PASS WEST's 1NT bid?

Esther: Well, I think EAST should have bid 2S, showing at least 5 Spades, and not let WEST play 1NT with EAST actually holding a singleton Diamond, but also 6 Spades. In this actual competition, **15 of 22** E/W Pairs played a Spade contract. Of these **15** Pairs playing a Spade contract, **6** E/W Pairs made 3S, **7** E/W Pairs made 2S, and **2** E/W Pairs made 1S. Of the **4** E/W Pairs playing a NT contract, all 4 Pairs played 1NT, and 1 of these 4 E/W Pairs went down 2, 2 of these 4 E/W Pairs went down 1, and 1 of these 4 E/W Pairs bid 1NT but made 3. I think, Bruce, my *malodorous misanthrope*, all this means, **"'Flat' hands play better in NT, while hands that are 2-Suited or hold a long Suit play better in Suit contracts!"**

⁶ In the words of Savannah Grand Life Master, Yoda, "Points are for NT!" In the words of Marty Bergen in the title of his best-selling bridge book, **Points Schmoints!**, when it comes to Suit Contracts!