

Calling Time (Bidding and Playing in Tempo)

1. **Introduction**

The Laws of Duplicate Bridge say that it is “desirable for players to maintain steady tempo and unvarying manner”. Sometimes this is easier said than done, and all of us hesitate from time to time before making a call or playing a card – which is perfectly acceptable. That is, unless:

- a) it is intended to convey some extraneous information to your partner.
- b) it is deliberately supposed to mislead the other side (like hesitating with a singleton).

Please read on to find out why and when even normal hesitations can be a problem and also how to improve your play in tempo - and why this can be to your advantage!

2. **Hesitation in the Auction**

Whenever you hesitate before making a call, you are indicating that you have a choice of actions which may be very useful Authorised Information for your opponents, who are perfectly at liberty to take full advantage. It is also providing Unauthorised Information to your partner, who must make every effort to avoid making any call that your hesitation might indicate. Your partner may then have a very awkward ethical dilemma and feel obliged to demonstrate that your hesitation did not influence their choice of call and to not make that excellent bid they had in mind.

The same is true if you make your call with such speed that everyone knows you have a Yarborough, or in such a way as to draw your partner's attention to it (this 2C is Landy, partner!).

Here are some tips to help you make your calls in tempo, which will also avoid you giving useful information to your opponents and making problems for your partner:

- a) Always pause for 3 seconds before every bid, but make that 10 after your RHO's jump bid.
- b) Do your thinking while your opponents are doing theirs. If your RHO is in a trance during a competitive auction, use that time to work out your calls over his most likely actions.
- c) Only ask what a bid means if you need to know (i.e. your call will depend on the answer) and only when it is your turn to call. It is quite improper to ask when it is your partner's call. Also be aware that if you do ask a question and then decide to pass, you may be giving your partner Unauthorised Information.
- d) Only explain your partner's bid when asked, and never ever explain your own calls.

3. **Hesitation in the Play**

Just as with the Auction, your hesitations indicate a choice of plays with the same offer of Authorised Information for your opponents and Unauthorised Information to your partner. So does selecting a card to play and then replacing it before playing that or a different card.

The following tips will help you play your cards in tempo:

- a) Do your thinking at Trick 1. Most of us do this as declarer, but it is quite acceptable for the 3rd hand also to pause for thought after the opening lead and dummy are revealed. The leader, too, can leave his card face up to do some thinking after Trick 1 is completed.
- b) Look for problem holdings and decide what you will do in advance. For example, you hold the Axx or Qxx in front of dummy's KJxx, what will you do when declarer leads low?
- c) Pause for 3 seconds before playing every card, and think during your opponents' pauses.

4. **What if there is a Break in Tempo**

Firstly, point out the hesitation at the time and agree amicably that there has been a “Break in Tempo”. A hesitation in itself is not an offence and nothing at all to be ashamed of or cross about.

If, later in the hand, you think your opponents might have benefited from Unauthorised Information, then it is important and appropriate that you do call the Director.

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5. **Finally**

The aim of this “Ethic of the Month” series is to make our players aware of the day-to-day irregularities which are easily avoided, and thereby reduce the number of calls to the Director.

However, whenever there is any sort of issue at your table, it is important that you do call “Director, please!” and hold up a hand to show the Director from where the call has come. Please do not make your own rulings at the table without calling the Director, regardless of how long you yourself have been playing or directing.

You will also be well equipped if you venture out of the club to play in events at other clubs, and in Surrey County or national tournaments. Above all, enjoy your Bridge in the knowledge that we are playing to the best standard of behaviour promoted by the EBU.

David Burch
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