

Giving Off Some Attitude

So far we've talked mostly about playing the hand as declarer with a nod now and then to defensive plays. Starting this month defense takes center stage.

To my way of thinking, defense is harder than bidding or declarer play. Over time you can learn to bid sufficiently well so you and partner can hold a reasonable conversation about the level and strain of whatever contract you want to be playing in .

When you are declarer, you know all of your side's assets because you can see your hand and dummy.

When you defend, after the opening lead you still get to see dummy, but you don't know for sure what cards your partner holds and which ones are declarer's.

Because you and partner need to coordinate your battle against declarer, you need to develop ways to communicate while you are playing the hand.



Yelling (or even soft whispering) is not allowed at the bridge table. The cards you play have to carry the message.

Defensive partners have three weapons at their disposal to help describe their holdings to partner: attitude signals, providing suit count and giving suit preference signals.



Today we'll discuss attitude. Now when I talk about attitude, I don't mean shaking your head at partner's lead and making an exasperated sigh. And, I don't mean giving off attitude as though you were Cher, Madonna or Lady Gaga (depending on your generation).

Your first possible attitude signal occurs on the opening trick (and fortunately partner has to lead). You'll be in third seat. Sometimes you will play a high card in hopes of taking the trick. How high a card you can play provides partner some information about your hand, but that's not attitude either.

You show partner your attitude toward her lead when you can't take the trick—either partner's card is higher than yours or second



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hand played higher than you can.

When partner retains or regains the lead, she needs to know whether you want that suit led again or if you prefer her to switch to another suit.

Let's look at an example.

E-W Vul	♠ 9 7 5 2	♠ K 6 4 3									
South Deals	♥ K Q 6 5	♥ 7 4									
	♦ 4 3	♦ 9 7 6									
	♣ A Q 10	♣ K J 9 2									
Opening Lead	<table border="1"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		Wouldn't you like to know?
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♣ 3											

Example 1

Without your interference, the bidding went 1♥-3♥-4♥. Partner comes up with what appears to be a great lead, the 3♣.

If declarer doesn't play the ♣A from dummy, you are going to take the trick, which is fine but doesn't advance the lesson. Fortunately,

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declarer calls for the ♣A and graciously gives us a working example. Before you determine your attitude to partner's lead you need to try to understand it.

You and partner play standard leads. You hold the ♣2, so her lead is the smallest possible spot card. It could be a singleton, but that would mean declarer has six of them. Unlikely.

It is not a doubleton because partner would have led the higher card if she had two. It's probably from three or four small cards. (You know where all of the honors are, so partner can only have small cards.)

It could not be from five small cards because partner would have led her fourth highest from that holding, and there are no lower spots outstanding.

You conclude partner has three or four small clubs. With three in dummy and four in your hand, it means declarer has two or three small clubs. In either case you want to encourage your partner to lead the suit the next time she has the chance since you have the ♣K J sitting over dummy's ♣Q 10.

Using a standard attitude signal to show your love of clubs you play the ♣9, which is the highest club you can afford. You need the king and jack to cover dummy's cards, but those two cards also take care of any spot cards

declarer has. Should you ever get to play your ♣2 on a fourth club trick, declarer will be out.

Easy, right?

Let's take another example.

E-W Vul	♠ 9 7 5	♠ K Q 4 3									
South Deals	♥ K Q 6 5	♥ 7 4 2									
	♦ 4 3	♦ 9 7 6									
	♣ A Q 10 8	♣ J 7 2									
Opening Lead	<table border="1"> <tr><td>N</td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>	N			W		E		S		
N											
W		E									
	S										
♣ 3		Wouldn't you like to know?									

Example 2

Again the opponents are playing a heart contract and partner leads the ♣3:

Dummy pops up with the ace. If declarer has the king, your jack is going to drop and he will end up with four club tricks after he has pulled trumps. The defense needs to find another suit to attack.

You play the ♣2 (your lowest card) to let partner know to pick a different suit next time she has the lead. You hope she'll decide spades, but she'll need to figure that out by herself. So far, so good.

The third time is not the charm when your holding reverts to the first hand, but dummy has the second hand. Partner still leads the ♣3 and again declarer calls for dummy's ace.

E-W Vul	♠ 9 7 5	♠ K 6 4 3									
South Deals	♥ K Q 6 5	♥ 7 4									
	♦ 4 3	♦ 9 7 6									
	♣ A Q 10 8	♣ K J 9 2									
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N											
W		E									
	S										
♣ 3		Wouldn't you like to know?									

Example 3

You go through the same thinking process as before. Regardless of who has which clubs, you would love to tell partner to lead them again when she has the chance. However, because of the cards you and dummy have, you can't afford to play anything other than the ♣2. The bridge gods may not give you the perfect spot cards for the signal you want to make – you just have to hope partner can figure it out.

Some people (including me) play "upside-down" attitude rather than standard attitude. They want to save high cards for taking tricks and use low cards for signals (when they can.)

In example 1, they would use the ♣2 to show a positive attitude toward a future club lead.

In example 2, they would usually use the ♣7—which partner can probably read as a "high" card when declarer does not play the ♣2—to show a desire for a suit switch.

In example 3, the forced play of the ♣2 happens to give the encouraging answer you want. That doesn't prove that upside-down is better. It's easy to find a different example where a standard signal works and upside down does not.