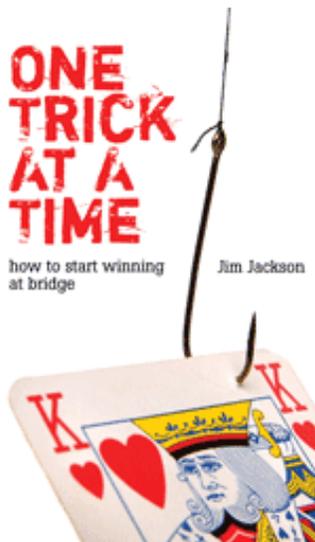


My Bridge New Year's Resolution

I had a great 2011. Most importantly, my family and I all stayed healthy. As I'm writing this article, I'm also in the process of finishing the final page proofs for my book One Trick at a Time: How to start winning at bridge, which Master Point Press tells me will be available in March.



Finally, I played with a lot of terrific bridge partners (at least 38) in 2011, and they allowed me to earn over 400 masterpoints for the year—my best year ever by a long stretch, and a record I don't expect to duplicate soon.

I can look back to the beginning of the year and honestly say my bridge game improved over the year. That's something I would like to say again next year, which brings me to the idea of New Year's resolutions.



When I was a kid, my mother used to “encourage” me to make resolutions. She even had suggestions! You can imagine how well that worked. I've learned instead to use SMART goals to encourage myself to improve.

Smart stands for Specific, Measureable, Agreed, Realistic & Timely. To focus on the desired result, the objective must be specific (not just a general, “play better at bridge.” To help focus and receive helpful feedback the goal must be measureable. Again, “play better bridge” is too loosey-goosey to be helpful.

SMART goals: Specific,
Measureable, Agreed.
Realistic & Timely

Agreed is the part my mother neglected. Neither children nor adults buy into top down goals.

Realistic is necessary—setting a goal to become a world champion in 2012 is specific, but it ain't going to happen unless everyone else stops playing the game. (Oh wait, didn't the Mayans predict the world would end this year? What if...?)

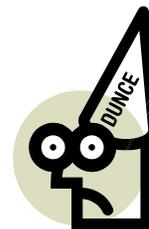


Finally, goals must have a timeframe, and “before I die” doesn't qualify. I'm going to use calendar year 2012.

Now comes the tough part, what specific areas of my bridge game do I want to focus on for 2012. The more I play the game, the more woefully inadequate I recognize my skills to be. I don't know about you, but Mr. Glass Half Empty can more easily recall any number of my many dunderhead plays than to come up with any brilliancy I committed.

For example, I messed up a cold 4♠ contract like this: From the bidding I expected we had a nine-card fit. After pulling two rounds of trump with both opponents following, I proceeded to play the side suits and was shocked when an opponent ruffed one of my winners. That was the setting trick, and I was down one.

Talk about feeling like a ...



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