

Defensive Signals Attitude.

Defense in Bridge is difficult. While the declarer sees all the resources his side has (his hand and the dummy) you on defense see only half the resources from your side and see half the resources from the other side. This is a major advantage for the declarer. Since the defenders have only half the knowledge of their side, the defenders must often guess. Your guesses will be good if you and your partner co-operate and help each other out. To try to negate some of this advantage for the declarer, the defenders must attempt to inform each other what are the assets that the defenders hold. To help on defense defenders come up with methods that try to convey the unseen information to their partners. It is this information exchange that should guide your defense with your partner rather than a pure guess. In defense players employ three type of signals to convey information. In this class we will look at only one of these signals “The Attitude signal”. The signal that is the most important, the most common and the most useful among the three signals is the attitude signal. It guides you in planning the defense. The Attitude signal is very simple, it gives one of two messages, it simply says ‘I like’ or ‘I do not like’. That is it. It does not say anything else. I repeat, it does not say anything else (it cannot say anything else. One signal one message.). For the attitude signal to be effective and correctly received it has to be sent at the correct time and with a clear message. This is how it is supposed to work: The only way that the defenders can do this reliably and legally is by the cards they play. Defenders play cards when they are following suit and when they are making discards on leads they can no longer follow suit. Many beginning bridge players think of the play of following a suit or a discard as having no important function except to follow the rule of the game. If they cannot take a trick, they throw off a small card that seems useless at the moment. This type of play is unimaginative and may prove costly later more often than not.

Every play you make, every card you play has a story to tell, even when you hold no honor cards and have only a few trumps in your own hand you must tell your partner what you hold. When partner knows what you hold he can defend intelligently. The story that your card tells may be an encouraging story or a discouraging story but you must tell your story. When your partner knows what you hold, he can make the best use of his own high cards that he holds in his own hand. When the card that you play conveys a story then the card that you play becomes a signal.

The card that you play on every trick – this is especially true on the first few tricks – has to tell partner one of three different things. It may tell partner I like (or dislike) this suit that is being played or it may tell partner I have an even (or odd) number of cards in the suit being played or it may ask partner that you would like him to lead a different but a specific suit. To discuss these three different type of signals we will assign them names as follows. The three signals are known as *Attitude Signal*, *Count Signal* and *Suit Preference Signal* respectively.

The Attitude Signal: Joseph B Elwell¹, a famous bridge authority was the first to use the attitude signal. In his days, it was known as the 'Echo.' An echo consisted of playing two cards on two different tricks in the same suit. If you played a high card on the first trick and then a lower card on a subsequent trick in the same suit you had completed an echo. The echo signaled that you liked that suit. This high – low play in a suit says I like this suit. The play of low – high is a non-committal signal; its meaning is not necessarily the opposite of the echo. You can very quickly see that the use of the echo signal very quickly can become difficult in the sense that it may either not be possible to complete the echo or by the time you complete the echo it is too late for the information to be useful. You would like to give the signal quickly and immediately. In modern bridge we most of the time try to interpret the beginning of the echo and assume that partner will complete it if he is given the time and an opportunity. Generally, we consider the play of any 'high' card as the start of an echo, the start of the echo says 'I like this suit, partner please continue playing this suit'. You have to be careful however in using the first card as the start of an echo. You can see that if player giving the echo holds only the AK32 then the play of the 3 will be the start of an echo. On the other hand if he holds 987 then the play of the 7 is not the start of an echo.

Since knowing which suit to lead or not lead is the biggest problem defenders face, the 'Attitude signal' is the most important signal, it is the most frequently used signal and the use of the attitude signal precedes all the other signals. Only when the attitude is known we can consider the other signals. For this reason we will spend this entire lesson on the attitude signal.

The Method: *When you play a high card in a particular suit, you say that you like that suit and want partner to continue that suit. When you play a low card in a particular suit, you say that you do not like that suit and do not want partner to continue that suit.*

The Timing: *There are two different occasions when you signal attitude. First, when partner leads a suit. Signaling when partner leads a suit is very obvious, since partner may still be on lead after this trick. You have to tell partner if this suit is a good suit to lead or not. The second occasion is when declarer is leading a suit (or trumps), on this lead, when you cannot follow suit and you have to discard. The card you choose to discard is your Attitude signal. Discarding a high card in a side suit says you like that suit and if partner can, he should lead that suit. Discarding a low card in a side suit says you do not like that suit and partner should not lead that suit. The attitude signal is done only at your first opportunity. If you forget to do it then, then the opportunity is gone and you cannot signal in that deal anymore. This makes it very important that both you and your partner be aware when a signal is made.*

¹ Elwell was murdered. His murderer was never caught. So he is famous also because his murder is still a mystery.

How often must you signal: Signal only once and signal only on your first opportunity! You do not signal a second and third time. That would be like telling partner you are not listening to me. Besides you may not have the cards required to signal a second and a third time. Even if you did have the cards to signal second and third time it might be too late for the signal to do any good. Remember there are only 13 tricks in a deal and you get only one or two opportunities to signal. So signal on your first opportunity and signal as loudly as you can.

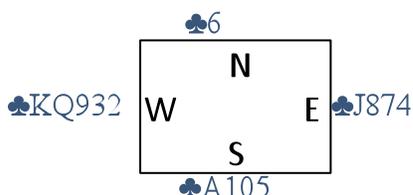


Figure 1. When and How to encourage partner. To show partner that you like the lead of the suit play the highest card you can afford.

Take a look at Figure 1. Here partner has led the King of Clubs against a No-Trump contract. In your system this shows that your partner also has the Queen. You want partner to continue this suit as your side can possibly take a few tricks in this suit after the Ace has been played. To encourage you should play the 8 of Clubs. Not the jack – even though the Jack will definitely tell partner that he has led a good suit but it will also cost your side a trick.

To encourage you must play *‘the highest card you can afford to play’*. So you should play the 8. In this example, you hold both the 8 and the 7. As far as you are concerned, both the 8 and the 7 are equal cards, but playing the 7 will give partner cause to think who has the 8. In some situations, this may lead to an erroneous judgment. So if you hold an honor in the suit that partner has led signal “I like” with the highest card that you can afford to play so that it does not end up costing your side a trick.



Figure 2. Do you show that you like the lead in this case? How do you show you like the lead?

Playing the 8 does not tell partner that you hold the Jack. This is a false assumption, what it tells partner is that you think that the lead partner has made is a good lead. That you think partner should continue with the suit that he led. Most of the time you will hold a high honor card but there are some situations where this may not be true but none the less you want partner to continue the suit. For an example of this, switch a couple of cards as

shown in Figure 2. This time also the contract is no-trump and partner has led the Queen. You know that partner has the Jack of Clubs but does not hold either the Ace or the King and may not hold the nine. Should you discourage partner from continuing the suit? On the contrary, you know that after the Ace and the King are played your side will be able to win several tricks in this suit so you should encourage partner with the 8. Do not encourage with the 10 as that may cost a trick if Declarer holds the 9. If you play the 4 partner will think you are discouraging as the 4 will not be interpreted as a start of an

echo. Notice partner holds both the 3 and the 2 which are lower than the 4 and he will know that 4 is your smallest card in that suit.

So you have just made an “I like” or “I do not like” signal. What is partner supposed to do? The signal that you make is only a suggestion to partner, it is not a command. Partner is also allowed to use his own judgment.

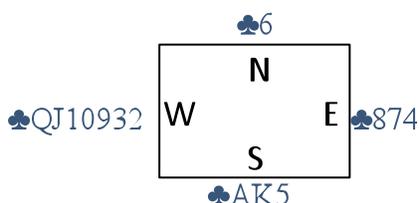


Figure 3. Partner should continue with the Club suit even when you show a discouraging attitude.

Take a look at Figure 3 for example. Partner leads the Queen of Clubs against a No Trump contract. You signal with the 4 as in your judgment this suit will not provide too many tricks. Partner can see that this is the lowest card you can hold. Will partner know that you are trying to discourage. Yes. Should your partner switch? No! Your Partner now knows that the declarer has the Ace and the King. Partner also knows that he wants you to return the suit if you

are able to win the lead. If the declarer ducks the Queen partner should play the 9 of Clubs next. This way partner is informing you that he has a sequence in the club suit from the Queen to the nine, and you should lead the suit when you are in the lead.

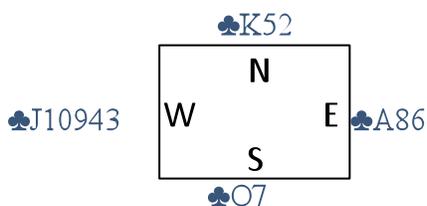


Figure 4. Partner leads the Jack. Dummy plays low, you should play the 8 even though you know that declarer will win the Queen.

What do you do when you see an honor card is in the dummy and you can cover that honor? In Figure 4 partner leads the Jack of Clubs against a No Trump contract and declarer plays the 5. You hold the Ace, you can win this trick but should you? No!! If you play the Ace declarer will play the 7 from his hand and then later he will score two tricks, one with the King and the other with the Queen. You should not play your Ace. You also know that partner holds the 10, if Next time partner leads this ten, then

you will be able to trap the King and capture it. This time you should encourage partner with the 8 (do not play the 6). When you encourage partner he will next play the 10/9 when he is in and you will be able to trap the King. Declarer will win with his queen but now you hold the tenace over the King with your Ace and the 6. Only one trick for the declarer when partner pushes the 9 through the (King – 2) next. Note that you might think that the 6 and the 8 are almost the same. How will partner know the difference? As it happens, many times partner can see almost all the small cards as he can this time (all except the 7). So he will be able to interpret the 6 as a low card and the 8 as the highest card you could afford to play.

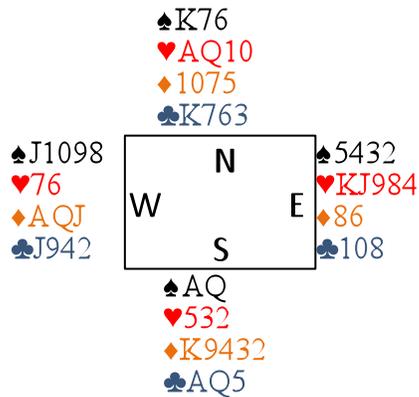


Figure 5. Partner leads the Jack of Spades, you play the 2. Declarer then plays the Ace, Queen and the 5 of Clubs to the King. You have to discard. Your discard should tell a story.

Opportunity to signal often arises when a particular suit is played and you do not have any cards in that suit. Take a look at Figure 5. Again, the contract is No-Trump and partner leads the Jack of Spades. You discourage even though you have 4 cards in the suit and the declarer wins a deceptive Queen. Your discouraging signal should tell partner that you do not hold the Ace. If you had the Ace you would have played the 5 and not the 2. Declarer next plays three rounds of Clubs. On the third round, you are unable to follow suit in Clubs, as you have no more. This gives you an opportunity to show attitude in a different suit. Your

attitude in Spades is known, your attitude in clubs is also known. (You discouraged in Spades first, now you have no more Clubs) So you can signal in either Hearts or Diamonds. You like Hearts so play the 9 of Hearts as a discard. Partner will consider this as a high card and will play a Heart when he is in with the Queen of Diamonds instead of another Spade. When partner plays the Heart, your side will score two tricks in Hearts. On the other hand, if you lead hearts your side will not score any tricks in the Heart suit. When you asked partner and he leads the suit your side will score three tricks in Diamond two tricks in the Heart suit and one more trick in either Hearts or Spades. You will score the long trick in Spade since you will return a Spade every time you win a trick. Remember partner led the Jack of Spades, he likes that suit and leading Spades from your side gives nothing to the declarer that he would not have obtained himself.

All the signals that we have played so far have been in the No Trump contract. The signals however are not limited to No Trump contracts. Defenders can and give signals in trump contracts also. In a trump contract, an encouraging signal does not necessarily show an honor. It shows attitude in that suit. You might like the suit led because you are short in the suit (a second use of the echo) and can possibly ruff the third lead in the suit. The following deals will illustrate this principle of encouraging when the contract is in a trump suit.

In Figure 6 Partner leads the King of Hearts against a contract of 4 Diamonds. You hold the Queen so you are almost certain that partner has the Ace so you encourage with the 9 since your side can score three tricks in the suit if Declarer holds three cards. Partner cashes the ace and leads the third Heart that you win. Now you

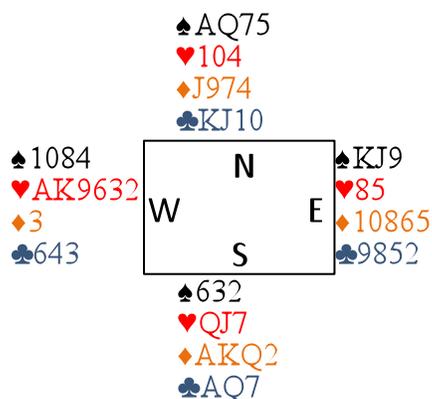


Figure 8. Partner leads the King of Hearts, this time you see that dummy has only two Hearts but you also have only two Hearts. If partner leads a third Heart and the dummy ruffs small you can over ruff. You show this by echo in Hearts(8/5)

declarer trumps with the 9, 7 or the 4 you score a trump trick right away else if he trumps with the Jack you will score a trump trick later. Then you still have a Spade trick coming and the contract is set. So this time you encouraged partner by saying “I like” even though you did not have an honor but you would be able to get a trump trick that you would not be able to get. So the idea of signaling is not really to tell partner that I have an honor card (although that is the most frequent message) but rather to guide the defense so that your side get all the tricks coming to them.

We have seen that the attitude signal is used in both trump and in the No Trump contracts. It is always the first discard because that discard is what gives the message. You give an encouraging discard not because you have an honor card but because you think continuing that suit is the best for the defense. The purpose of the attitude signal is not to confirm or deny the possession of any high card. It is to signal the best plan for defense according to what you are able to evaluate. Partner is allowed to overrule if he has different information from his hand. You may also give an encouraging signal or an echo when you can ruff a certain lead. To make an attitude signal you should use the highest card (to encourage) or the lowest card (to discourage) do not temporize with an in between card. We never signal with a card that will end up costing us a trick.

- a. **Other Attitude Signals:** What we have discussed above is the standard method of signaling in the USA. This is the standard method but not the only method. Here are two more methods of signaling. There are many more but the American standard is just as useful as any other and it is the simplest.
 - i. In many parts of the world people use what they call the “Upside Down” signals. The Upside Down method is similar to what we have discussed but it is exactly the opposite of what we have just decided. In this method a low card says I like this suit but a high card says I do not like this suit.
 - ii. Another method of signaling is “Odd Even” signaling. This method has many variations but the basic idea is if you play an odd card, you like the suit and if

you play an even card, you do not like the suit. Often players try to add extra meaning to the even card. So, if the even card is low than you do not like the suit that you discarded but like the lower ranking of the other two suits. This leads to more confusion than it is worth Remember a signal gone bad is a bad signal.

North

S A74
 H AJ8
 D 63
 C Q10984

Against 4 Spades partner leads the Diamond Queen. You wish you had bid Hearts. What now? Win the Ace of Diamonds. You want partner to lead Hearts. You know that you will lose one Heart trick.

West

S 953
 H 92
 D QJ9872
 C 65

Vul - -; Dlr S.			
W	N	E	S
			1S
--	1N	--	2C
--	4S	--	--
--			

East

S K8
 H KQ1074
 D A54
 C 732

You play the King hoping that Declarer will win this and when Partner gets in he will lead a Heart. On your Heart King partner plays the 9. Declarer is clever and plays low. This freezes the suit effectively unless you know what partner's 9 means?

South

S QJ1062
 H 653
 D K10
 C AKJ

You can see that partner does not have any honors in the Heart suit. His 9 is the highest card he has available. What do you play next? Continue with the Heart. The 9 is an attitude signal. Maybe partner has only two hearts and can ruff the third.

North

S 106
 H J1074
 D AQ4
 C 9642

Against 4 Hearts partner leads the Spade King. You can see that if partner cashes the Spade Ace then the contract is set as you have two trump tricks. What do you play?

West

S AKJ95
 H 2
 D 108752
 C J7

Vul - -; Dlr N.			
W	N	E	S
	--	--	1H
--	2H	--	4H
--	--	--	

East

S 8742
 H AQ9
 D J96
 C 853

South

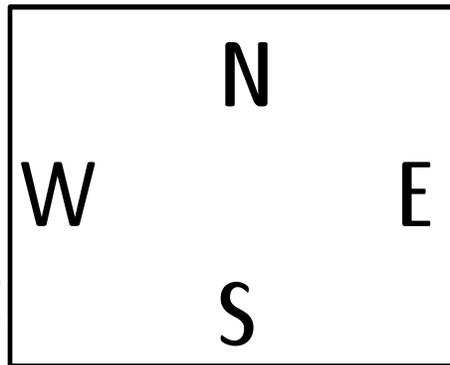
S Q5
 H K8653
 D K3
 C AKQ9

You should play the 8 of Spades. Do not temporize with the 7. Partner should cash the Ace and then you can wait for your two Heart tricks.

♠ AKQ
 ♥ Q76
 ♦ AKJ103
 ♣ 85

Partner opens with the K of Hearts. How do you signal?

♠ 1087
 ♥ AK93
 ♦ 7
 ♣ AQ1096



♠ 5
 ♥ 1052
 ♦ Q98652
 ♣ J42

You should signal with the 10 of Hearts. The Diamond suit in the dummy looks menacing but you know that it has no teeth. If you signal with the 2 partner will try to cash his Club tricks and you will lose your side's Club trick.

♠ J96432
 ♥ J84
 ♦ 4
 ♣ K73

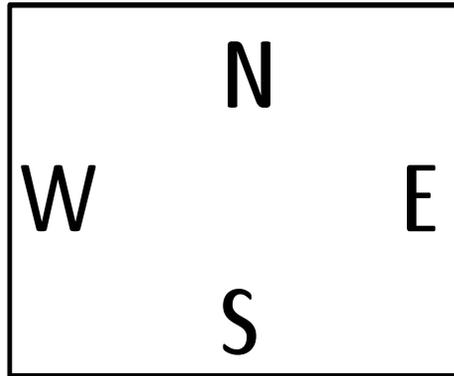
When you play the 10 partner will wonder what you are doing but all will be good in the end. When partner continues with the King you will play the 2. Partner will play a third Heart, you will follow on this Heart. In the end declarer will lead a Club and partner will get two tricks.

Contract is 4 Hearts. Do you think E-W can set the contract?

♠ AQ
♥ Q986
♦ 9852
♣ QJ7

Partner opens with the K of Clubs. How do you signal?

♠ 10982
♥ 2
♦ Q1043
♣ AK94



♠ 643
♥ A1073
♦ 76
♣ 10532

♠ KJ75
♥ KJ54
♦ AKJ
♣ 86

You should signal with the 10 of Clubs. Partner will next play the Ace and a third club. When you do not trump partner will be surprised. Declarer next plays the 6 of Hearts to his Jack (You did not play the Ace right) and a small Heart to the Queen which you win with the Ace.

Now you play the last club in your hand. This gives the declarer a ruff and a discard. This is considered a mortal sin in Bridge most of the times, but not this time. No matter where Declarer trumps your 10 and 7 of Hearts will be worth one trick.

As a defender having 4 trumps to the Ace is very powerful Use your assets wisely.