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Bridge Today University and Bridgetoday.com present:
Improve Your Card Play with the Granovetters
(Tournament Level) BTU 260

Class 1

Welcome to our card play class. Here's our first tip – one that will reap huge rewards:

As declarer, your job is to form a plan (before trick one) and play the hand to the best of your ability - never dwelling on your side's bidding.

Focus on Your Contract

On a simple level, the discipline to focus on your contract saves time and energy. If you are in four spades, it's a waste of time to wonder how your partner could raise your spades instead of rebidding three notrump, which has nine tricks off the top. You may become angry, because you have to play a shaky contract when an alternative is cold, and, as a consequence, your emotional state may cause you to fail in your contract when it's makable. Whenever dummy hits, pretend that a friend has given you a play problem. In other words, if someone came up to you with two hands written down on a piece of paper and asked you to find the best line of play for four spades, you would concentrate on the task at hand. You might not even see at first that some other contract is superior, because you'd be focused on making four spades. Learn to do this at the table as well.

A Q 5
 A J
 8 7 6
 K Q J 6 2

K 8 7 6
 9 7
 A Q J
 A 5 4 3

	Partner		You
West	North	East	South
3H	dbl	pass	4S
(all pass)			

West opened three hearts and partner (North) doubled. You jumped to four spades. The king of hearts is led. Dummy comes down. Don't say, "Oh, no, 12 top tricks in three notrump if the diamond finesse is right and we're in this idiotic 4-3 game instead! Partner should have bid 3NT over 3H. Yes, why didn't you do that?" (Argument is started - you are no longer thinking straight.)

You win the ace of hearts and cash the ace and queen of spades. West shows out. Disgusted, you play on clubs. East follows to the first two club leads, then ruffs the third round. Suddenly, you start to sweat. You realize you've made some drastic errors. How will you take two diamond finesses? East returns a trump to your king. Desperate, you lead a heart, forcing West to win and return a heart. You score your little trump and lead a club. But East ruffs and returns a diamond. You finesse but you must lose a diamond in the end.

The whole hand was:

A Q 5
 A J
 8 7 6
 K Q J 6 2

4	J 10 9 3 2
K Q 10 8 5 3 2	6 4
9 3 2	K 10 5 4
10 8	9 7

K 8 7 6
 9 7
 A Q J
 A 5 4 3

There were many ways to make this hand. If only you could go back to trick one and duck the opening lead. There's very little that could go wrong after that. But you weren't thinking about the task at hand. Then when you discovered the 5-1 trump split, all you had to do was take a diamond finesse while you could still return to dummy for a second finesse. But you were too emotional and attacked clubs too quickly.

Now, would you have ever gone down if someone came up to you with two hands on a piece of paper and asked you how to play four spades?

Is there ever a time as declarer that you SHOULD stop and think about alternative contracts before playing the hand? There's no benefit in second-guessing your OWN bidding (at least at the table), but it's often worthwhile to consider what the opponents have bid or failed to bid. We will discuss this topic in the future.

Try this one:

A Q 8 3
 6 5
 J 7 6
 10 8 7 5

K 7
 K Q 4 3
 5
 A Q 9 6 4 3

West	North	East	South
1D	pass	1NT	2C
2D	3C	pass	3H
pass	5C	(all pass)	

There's not much in dummy, but don't get upset. Your job is to score 11 tricks, not to teach partner how to bid. West leads the king and ace of diamonds. You ruff (good play). What's your plan?

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Solution

If your opponents' bidding is normal, there's a very revealing clue. East has denied a four-card major, so West should hold 4-4 in the majors. Since he has rebid diamonds, he must hold at least five of them. Therefore, he is probably 4-4-5-0 shape. With this clue, your play is clear: Lead a spade to dummy and lead a club, letting it ride if East plays the deuce. Now draw trumps, cash the SK and drive out the HA, ruffing one heart in dummy and discarding the other on a high spade.

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As the late Vic Mitchell used to say: "If you're not listening to the opponents, you're not playing the game." Vic was one of the greatest players in the history of the game - and he believed in gathering clues from all three players at the table, not just your partner.