

ACTIVE ETHICS

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Let's not use that "C" word. A less threatening term is "unethical." This won't make me popular with everyone out there, but let me put it right out there on the table: "It is **UNETHICAL** to take advantage of your partner's tempo." If you have heard otherwise, or are confused, this article is for you.

I know, I know. Some of you are thinking, "Larry, these nasty complainers are ruining our game. You know—the ones that call the director every time I take time to think." Yes, I know. I don't approve of litigiously "calling the cops" after any tempo break. Especially in a "social/fun" game, and certainly against new players, there is no need to scream for a director over every tempo violation. I feel your pain! But, let's not lose sight of the lesson.

Maybe your eyes normally glaze over when reading about this topic, but I can explain it in easy-to-follow English. When your partner takes 75 seconds to pass, you are not entitled to know that he has a problem. It is your ethical duty (obligation!) to not take advantage. If you have a marginal action, you must bend over backwards (break a few bones doing so) to do what is counter-indicated.

Example auctions:

Opponent	PARTNER	OPPONENT	YOU
3♥	Pass (slow)	Pass	??

Your partner took 75 seconds. You know he was thinking of bidding. You know he isn't broke. He doesn't have a flat 4-count. If he had "nothing," it would not have taken him 75 seconds to pass. You have unauthorized information from the amount of time it took him to pass. If you have a marginal balancing decision, you must not take advantage. Unless you are absolutely sure it is normal to take action, you should pass. This is the proper approach. It is the right thing. You'll feel proud of yourself. The opponents will respect you. You can die in peace. If instead, you violate the code of honor, you will incur the wrath of your opponents (and maybe a higher source). Expect a director and maybe a committee (ugh!). Don't bid, say, 3♠ with only 11 points and a so-so 5-card spade suit. If you have 17 points (or any other obvious hand), then you can make the indicated bid, of course.

PARTNER	OPPONENT	YOU	OPPONENT
1♠	Pass	1NT	Pass
2♥ (Slow)	Pass	??	

Your partner opened 1♠ then took 48 seconds to bid 2♥. What do your psychic powers tell you? Surely he has spades and hearts. What strength? He has extra values, of course. He was thinking of bidding more than 2♥. With a minimum, he'd have bid 2♥ in tempo. If you are considering making a marginal invitation now, don't do it! Just pass and take your medicine.

Did I mince any words? Is this not 100% clear to everyone? Read carefully: It is okay to huddle. Sometimes you have a problem. If you do take 64 seconds to pass, so be it. You did nothing wrong. It is your partner who has to uphold the spirit of the game. As long as he doesn't take advantage, all is well and good in the world. If you are at all confused about this (I know it is a tricky topic for inexperienced players), [please send me an e-mail](#) and ask away.

Notes:

1) I repeat—this is not for beginners. We don't want to scare them away. (We do, however, wish to educate them. If there is a nice way to explain this issue, I'm all for it).

2) This is also not for "social" or casual players. (But, I wish I could explain it to them, as well). At any level, I suspect that most players, at least subconsciously, are aware when they take advantage of partner's tempo.

3) I didn't want to overwhelm you, but there are also issues of tempo on defense! If your partner thinks a long time before ducking his ace, you are not entitled to know he has that ace. Be aware. As usual, you can take all the time you want on a trick. Just don't "read anything" into partner's slow plays.

4) I've discussed only slow actions. Don't fall into the trap of "fast passing." When the opponents skip the bidding, don't pass in 0.02 seconds to convey to your partner that you are broke. Furthermore, if you open a dead minimum hand, and the competitive auction comes back to you, please don't pull out your pass card while RHO is still placing his bidding card on the table. Such an action is at best unethical. At worst—well, I said I won't use that "C" word.

Let's use this one instead: Ciao