

Attitude Signals by Sandra Landy

English Bridge *December, 2002*



The thing you want to know, when with great trouble you have selected the opening lead is 'Have I found a good lead?' Sitting opposite you, your partner often knows the answer – but how can partner let you know? Nods and smiles are not allowed; partner may only signal to you with the cards played.

West	North - Dummy	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> N ↑ </div>
♠ K 4 ♥ J 10 8 2 ♦ 9 3 2 ♣ Q J 9 3	♠ J 10 7 5 ♥ Q 7 ♦ K 10 7 6 ♣ A 6 2	

South opens 1♠, you pass, North bids 3♠, which is raised to 4♠. It's your lead and you decide to try the ♣Q, it looks the safest lead and the best chance to set up a trick for your side.

Declarer wins the ♣A and leads the ♠J. You win the ♠K, what now? Should you continue with clubs? Or should you switch to the ♥J? Could it be right to play a diamond?

If your clubs were ♣Q J 10 9, it would be quite safe to play another club, it cannot cost a trick. But if declarer started with ♣K 10 5, another club lead by your hand would give declarer an extra trick. It is possible that partner has the ♣K, but how could you know?

The answer comes from the card partner played at trick one? If partner plays a small card it is discouraging. It carries the message; 'I don't have a useful card in clubs'. But if it is a large card, it says 'You have found a good lead, I have a useful club card'. Of course when I ask my students which card their partner played, they always look at me blankly! I tell them to say the cards in their head as they are played, then they might take a bit more notice next time.

<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> N ↑ </div>	Partner?
Declarer	♠ 6 2 ♥ 9 6 4 3 ♦ A J 8 4 ♣ K 8 4
♠ A Q 9 8 3 ♥ A K 5 ♦ Q 5 ♣ 10 7 5	

Let's suppose this is the layout:

If partner plays the ♣8, surely it must be a big card, so lead your ♣3 when you get in. Partner should have a hand something like the one shown. You beat the contract if you cash your club tricks quickly, otherwise one of dummy's clubs goes on declarer's ♥A K.

<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> N ↑ </div>	Partner?
Declarer	♠ 6 2 ♥ K 6 5 4 ♦ A J 8 4 ♣ 8 7 4
♠ A Q 9 8 3 ♥ A 9 3 ♦ Q 5 ♣ K 10 5	

Now let's consider a different possible layout

If partner plays the ♣4, this is the smallest missing club. Partner won't have the ♣K. Switch to the ♥J and hope partner has a hand like this. Now you set up a heart trick for the defence and declarer has nowhere to throw his losing club. The contract would only make if you had led a second club when you won the ♠K.

	North - Dummy	
	♠ K J 7 5	
	♥ K 7	
	♦ K 10 7 6	
	♣ 8 6 2	
West		
♠ 8 4		
♥ J 10 8 2	N	
♦ 9 4 3	↑	
♣ A K 3		

The students played this hand next. Same bidding to 4♠, but this time Janice held the ♣A K 3 rather than the ♣Q J 9 3. Naturally, she led the ♣A, which held and she had to decide what to play at trick 2. With me standing over her, Janice remembered to look at the card Lucy played. It was the ♣9. The ♣9 is an encouraging high card. So Janice cashed the ♣K and played a third club to partner's ♣Q. She was pleased that partner had the ♦A to go with the three clubs, to get declarer one down. The clubs needed to be cashed quickly before one

of dummy's clubs was discarded, as declarer held ♥A Q 3. If Lucy had played the ♣4, I asked Janice what she would have done. She thought it likely that declarer would have the ♣Q and cashing her ♣K would just give declarer a club trick. So she said she would switch to the ♥J. This would be right if partner held the ♥A Q and could cash two heart tricks or just the ♥A and the ♣J 10 4, when partner could win the ♥A and lead the ♣J through declarer's ♣Q.

Making a signal on partner's lead is not the only time we use a high card as an encouraging signal. When we cannot follow suit and have to discard, we play that a high card is encouraging in the suit discarded and a low card is discouraging. Here is an example.

♠ 9 3 2
♥ A 9 2
♦ 8 3
♣ K Q J 10 9

The opponents bid 1NT, raised to 3NT and Peter had an easy lead of the ♣K. Dummy played the ♣4 from ♣8 6 4, Peter's partner, Janet, played the ♣7 and declarer the ♣2. I asked Peter what the ♣7 showed and was very pleased that he remembered last week's lesson. The king lead asks partner to unblock any honour held, otherwise give a count signal. So the ♣7 shows only one or two clubs, it is not an encouraging high card.

Declarer won the ♣A on the third round and started playing diamond winners. Peter followed to two diamonds, but what should he discard on the third one? The answer is the ♥9, a high heart showing where Peter had an entry. Peter followed this with the ♥2, so Janet could be quite sure the ♥9 was a high card. This told Janet to hang onto her spades, as Peter had the hearts guarded.

♠ 9 3 2
♥ A 3 2
♦ 8 3
♣ K Q J 10 9

With a different holding without a high heart card to discard, Peter would have had to discard the ♠2 then the ♠3, discouraging in spades. Had Peter discarded the ♥3, Janet might not have spotted that it was a high card!

Remember

When signalling attitude, we play **HELD** – **H**igh **E**ncouraging, **L**ow **D**iscouraging.

We play attitude signals on partner's lead.

We play attitude signals when we cannot follow suit and have to discard. To show the suit we want led, throw a big card in that suit or small cards in the suit we don't want.