

Catchy Quotes and Bridge Tips - Book Review

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New on the bridge book shelf: *Bridge: 25 Ways To Be a Better Defender* by Barbara Seagram and David Bird (Master Point Press, Toronto) is a comprehensive guide to the vast continent of defense at the bridge table, one that constantly beats the drum that defense is the most neglected aspect of the game.

The authors ask you to picture an image of a top bridge player in your mind.

What are you thinking of? Probably someone like Bob Hamman or Jeff Meckstroth trying to figure out a tricky contract as declarer. You don't usually picture them on defense. But we will be defending twice as often as we declare, thus this book.

Still, some principles overlap. As declarer you try to get an accurate picture of the opponents' hidden hands as soon as possible. As a defender, the goal is much the same, to get an accurate picture of the two closed hands (partner's and declarer's since dummy is on the table) as quickly as possible. The big difference, of course, is that declarer has full knowledge of his side's total resources (his hand and dummy's). Not so as a defender.

Each chapter leads off with a clever quote.

From Will Rogers we have, *"Even if you are on the right track, you will get run over if you just sit there."* Defense is a 13-trick undertaking.

Occasionally you put declarer under with the perfect lead, but often the follow-up is equally important.

From Seneca we have, *"If one does not know to which port one is sailing, no wind is favorable."*

And from Antoine de Saint-Exupery, *"A goal without a plan is just a wish."* You have to have a plan, at the outset. Then you have to be flexible enough to change it if the first plan isn't working.

And from Abbe D'Allanival, *"The more alternatives, the more difficult the choice."* The authors might also have appropriated Robert Heinlein for *"All of life is making decisions based on insufficient information."* There are the players who stumble through every defense in a fog. Yes, at the bridge table, just as in the life, you are going to have to make a decision about the best plan of action, often on incomplete information. *"We can try to avoid making choices by doing nothing, but even that is a decision."*

General George Patton advised, *"Take calculated risks. That is quite different from being rash."*

The authors cover opening leads (often, but not always, decisive), signaling and counting.

One of the most important decisions to come to early is whether to go active or passive. In an active defense you often have to take significant risks to set up your tricks before declarer can set up his or set up pitches.

On the other hand, if it looks like the opponents have pushed to their contract, then maybe a passive defense is best. Just don't give anything away. Let declarer do all the work himself.

Breaking new suits can be dangerous.

From Napoleon Bonaparte, *"Never interrupt your enemy when he is making a mistake."*

From Niccolo Machiavelli: *"No enterprise is more likely to succeed than one concealed from the enemy until it is ripe for execution."*

And finally here's one more that isn't in the book, but it's still apropos: *"Good judgment comes from experience, which comes from bad judgment."* We're all experienced at the bridge table.