

## A Friendly and Welcoming Atmosphere

Probably the most important thing that any club can do to attract more people to play in its duplicate sessions and retain members is to make sure that everyone has a pleasurable experience. Bridge is both a social and competitive game, and it is important for a club not to neglect the social aspect. Being a friendly club does not mean that the quality of the bridge needs to suffer. The clubs which get this balance right are the ones most likely to be thriving.

Given a choice between two local clubs, where one club has poor playing facilities, no refreshments and apparently unsociable members, while the other club has comfortable playing facilities, free good quality tea, coffee and biscuits, as well as members who go out of their way to be friendly and welcoming, then players will mostly choose the latter.

So how does one go about creating an atmosphere that will encourage more people to play at the club? Perhaps the first thing to do is take stock and review the club's current situation to see if any improvements can be made. It might be a good idea to invite someone who has never played at the club before to attend a normal duplicate to give a full and frank assessment, and then the Committee can look at what should be done to improve matters.

Your club may, of course, already be a fine place to play at, but for those looking for ideas, here is a list of things the club can do to help create a friendlier atmosphere:

- Decide as a Committee that you are going to make the club a friendly place and keep it that way.
- Ensure that the playing facilities are kept clean and well-maintained. If the venue needs a face-lift, try to organise a group of members to do that.
- Provide good quality refreshments with the cost included in the table money. Don't leave the light in the kitchen turned off so that no-one wants to venture in there, and don't leave the one and only packet of biscuits unopened so that no-one dares be the first to break it open to take one.
- Ensure, if possible, that the club has personable TDs. The TD is often the one who sets the tone for the evening. Someone with authority but a good sense of humour will help create the right atmosphere.
- Remind all players that the club is supposed to be a friendly place and insist that everyone adheres to the policy of [Best Behaviour @ Bridge](#).

- Encourage less experienced players by complimenting them on a good play, but don't lecture them and don't point out their mistakes unless they ask for advice.
- Provide a Host System so that members can come along and have a game even if they have not been able to arrange a partner for the evening and potential new members can find a partner.
- Announce Members' achievements at the club, on the club website, in the club newsletter and using the club's email mailing list. These can be things like the successes of your teams in local leagues, individual members playing in county events, Master Point promotions, but also achievements in other areas outside of bridge if you learn of them.
- Celebrate Members' birthdays and anniversaries.
- Organise a get well card if a Member is ill. Welcome them back if they have been away for a while.
- Hold a Xmas and/or summer party.
- Organise evenings out for Members and their guests to the theatre or a concert.
- Organise club weekends away – with or without bridge.
- Organise bridge holidays for club members and their spouses.
- If it is an anniversary year for the club, put on some special events.

Many of the above ideas are covered in more detail in other sections of this Handbook, so please refer to those as and when required. Please also see the next section on 'Making Newcomers feel Welcome'.

## **Unfriendly reputation**

If your club has a reputation for being less than friendly, it is not easy to turn this around. The first and most important step is for the club committee to decide that it is absolutely committed to doing whatever is necessary to improve matters. Stamping out bad behaviour is essential, though not so easily done. Directors may need to remind everyone regularly of the imperatives of [Best Behaviour @ Bridge](#) and that the club should be a friendly place where all players can have an enjoyable game.

If everyone at the club has learnt over the years to tolerate Old So-And-So, even though he is constantly bad mannered, grumpy, criticises partners and opponents alike, and is generally unpleasant, then it is very difficult. Over the years Old So-And-So has lost the club quite a few members who couldn't stand his behaviour, but the remaining members are used to him and he's almost a friend.

Someone may have to bite the bullet and have a good talk with Old So-And-So. He may have to be reminded frequently. If he doesn't change his ways, for the benefit of everyone else it may even be necessary to ask him to leave, but that will be a decision for the club and depend on the circumstances. Some of the most successful bridge clubs are the ones that have introduced a policy of no tolerance whatsoever of bad behaviour.

As the atmosphere at the club improves, word will begin to spread that the club isn't as bad as it was, but this will need some active help to spread that word, and it can take a long time to erase a bad reputation. However, if a club has a reputation for good friendly bridge, word spreads by itself, and players will come to the club simply for that reason.