

## 1. Retaining Learners

**The most important part of the process STARTS NOW !**

### Use the following guidelines:

- It is important to have the **RIGHT DIRECTOR** for the beginner grade – someone who creates a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. Introduce the director to the class before they join the grade. · Keep the learners in a **SEPARATE GROUP** for at least 4-8 weeks to build up a bit of speed and confidence. However, try to play them close to the grade players to instil a sense of belonging to the grade.
- Allow beginners to use a cheat sheet for the rest of the year, which can be photocopied, put back-to-back and laminated
- Don't worry about playing fewer boards – they need to have **NO TIME PRESSURE** when starting out!
- Have helpers who can assist with bidding/play if asked
- Continue with “supervised sessions” throughout the year – have club members / teachers they can ask for help
- Hold an “Individual” competitions / fun days, eg Teams of 3 / BBQ days, to mix up the players and get them comfortable playing with different partners
- Always have a zero tolerance policy of bad behaviour – reinforce this from the beginning! Encourage politeness, friendliness and a sense of **FUN**.
- Once the learners are playing in their grade group, have **MENTORS/BUDDIES** who they can go to for any enquiries (those who went through the previous year's lessons?). The mentors should follow up with a phone call (preferable) or email every week or so, to check their progress/any problems/partners. This is especially important if the learner has missed a couple of nights. Find out why and encourage them back!  
Choose your mentors carefully. **Communication is vital!**
- Encourage your learners to come and watch a higher grade session
- Newsletter, celebrate successes, buddies all important to keeping beginners coming back
- Educate club members to expect slowness & more noise when beginners join regular club sessions. Remind club members of the “rules” when playing with beginners, eg no advice unless asked ...
- Have someone who beginners can approach to get a partner especially for the first few months while they find their way.

## 2. Retention of New Players

### Introduction

- The bridge lessons and play practice comprise only 20% of the task of retaining new members. The next 80% relies on how the club handles the introduction of new players into the club scene.
- Unfortunately many new players are "put off" by the unacceptable behaviour of a few club players. Clubs need to take control of rudeness at the table. They should adopt a "Zero Tolerance" to rude behaviour.
- What will get the beginners through the next few weeks is friendliness, kindness and encouragement. Remind the players in the session(s) where you introduce the beginners that the onus is on them to make their new players comfortable welcome and most importantly, unintimidated.
- Choose your most helpful and patient Director(s) for the beginners' sessions.
- This Director should attend one lesson and explain his role – he should tell the class that:
  - he is a friend not a critic
  - he knows the rules better than the players – he is the referee / umpire of the game
  - it is normal practice to ask a director for a ruling
  - Established players should not call the Director for minor infringements by a new player.
  - Do not expect the beginners to initially play at the normal speed of 24+ boards per session. Playing 16 to 22 boards would be more realistic.

### Introducing the Beginners into Larger Clubs

- Play them as a separate group until the players feel ready to join the rest of the club session.
- Allow cheat sheets to be used for at least a couple of months. The use of cheat sheets may take up extra time – supervised sessions may be quicker and easier to manage

### Introducing the Beginners into Smaller Clubs

- If a small club has only one room, it is likely they will be teaching their lessons on a separate night / session.
- At the end of the lessons, the beginners will join the regular playing session. It is important to keep them as a separate group until they feel ready to join the rest of the players. Cheat sheets may be used during this time.

- New players joining the regular sessions could carry an "L plate" to highlight their status. Hopefully the established players will ignore minor infringements, offer encouragement and praise the new players.

### **Other Initiatives**

- When new players are introduced to the Club, the Director will introduce the new players and remind existing members to be encouraging and friendly.
- Initially, sit the beginners East / West so they don't have to score. Do this for a limited time as they do need to learn to score and play at the same time.
- Offer free lessons to any club member wishing to repeat all or part of the beginners' course. Run supervised sessions for the beginners – choose your helpers carefully!
- Run simple seminars and ongoing lessons for both beginners and intermediates.
- Limit these social / seminar sessions to approximately two hours. This will allow participants time to socialise.
- A suggestion to mix new players into a club is to run an Individual (no conventions) session. This requires careful organisation, but if done successfully is a great way of integrating new members.
- If your Club decides to use mentors to assist new players, be very careful to hand pick them – do not ask for volunteers. Choose mentors with patience and warmth – bridge ability has nothing to do with it!

## **3. Retaining Club Members**

**Your club should be a place that is welcoming and friendly, a fun and interesting sporting club that is both competitive and social.**

It is the members themselves who make a great bridge club. Try some of the following to create positive experiences for your members:

- Have a CODE OF CONDUCT that all members must adhere to. TAKE ACTION when this is broken. Encourage good behaviour/attitudes.
- Shorter playing sessions? Socialise for around 45mins and then play bridge – reduce the boards to be played.
- Have a dress up event
- Run a Christmas Party – all must come dressed up! This can also double as your major Prize Giving event for the year.
- Run a quiz night, odd raffle, a lotto draw – have a "Swap a Jigsaw" or "Swap a Book" table, Garden offerings, etc.

- Run a charity event each year – a graded tournament with prizes for all grades
- Have an official Club Photographer – take pictures on all the above.
- What about a fun bridge event. For example “Slam Night”, “Goulash Night”, “Medley Night” or “Individual Night”
- Produce a Club Newsletter once a month – does not have to be large.
- Have a day of recognition for your volunteers – give them some reward. · Free membership for 90+ age group
- Get a large 40” to 50” TV and mount it in the Club. Now run a PowerPoint presentation each week – mention sponsors of the week, congratulations to members who have done well in tournaments, photos, etc.
- If you have electronic scorers, then your results can be displayed on the TV screen almost immediately the session ends.
- Have regular surveys of club members regarding play times, refresher/improver classes or social events – have a suggestion box and acknowledge these ideas
- Hold ongoing IMPROVER LESSONS
- Give out proficiency certificates after a full years play
- Create interaction between grades, other bridge clubs, other sports clubs · Maintain email groups and CONTACT REGULARLY
- Network your top players with emerging talent
- Provide FREE Minibrige Packs for players to take home to introduce friends and family to the game