

The Business of Teaching Bridge

In a few years time, there will be twice the number of 70 year olds in Australia as there are now. And they will probably be in better health too. The impact of this is huge for bridge clubs. If we sell the game of bridge as the way to mental fitness, we have the potential to increase our numbers everywhere.

While teachers often feel that they are not well equipped for teaching when they are thrust into the role, there are many aids available today, and the approach they take to teaching is probably more important than what they say in the classroom.

(1) Attracting New Players

Advertise your classes where ever you can. Your bridge club, local community centres, social clubs, public billboards, and the local paper if you can afford it. Letter box drops yield approx 10% of success. The greatest resources for you are you members. Make them an offer (eg to extend their membership) for each beginner they bring along for you.

Make sure your ad has a big word "BRIDGE" somewhere at the top, and that it looks professionally done.

Be prepared to teach at other venues, eg golf clubs and country clubs, or private groups. It is all part of increasing the bridge playing population.

(2) Record Keeping

Data bases (and email categories) of all interested parties are essential. Have a code to differentiate the groups they fall into, eg that they completed a day time March beginners course in 2005 could have initials eg M05D etc

Email is great for keeping in touch, and if you press BCC (stands for – Blind Carbon Copy) all the group won't know the other email addresses.

Contact them before and after the classes start.

(3) Dressing for Success

As a teacher and a leader, you should be visible and dress up to show your students that you consider them and the course you're about to teach of great worth. The students will notice. Don't be apologetic about fees. People pay for value.

(4) Being Organised

Have name tags ready – you too. This will help you (and them) to remember everyone's names.

Have student info forms, plenty of books, and perhaps a folder or a small gift for each student that you budgeted for in the price for lessons.

Start on time, finish on time, introduce the students to one another at the beginning of the first session. The first lesson is the most important in that you are "selling" the game of bridge to them. You need to put a lot of energy into the class, as the students will sense your enthusiasm.

(5) Being "in touch" with your class

Try to notice the body language of the class, and adjust your teaching to this. Always be ready to stop talking and give them a hand to play at any time that you feel you are losing their attention. They are in bridge classes to "PLAY" bridge and you should give them lots of it.

(6) Keeping it Simple

It takes courage to teach less rather than more, and this should be one of your aims. It is wrong to push students through a set amount of a chapter just because you think they should be covering the whole thing. Remember that your class will learn when THEY are ready to, not when you think they should be learning. The teacher is the facilitator of the learning.

(7) Following up

Acknowledge your students' success at the end of the course, either with a certificate or a little party, and then make sure you keep in touch with a letter and a plan for their future in the world of bridge. The most important step is after the beginners classes are over. Persistence and encouragement on your behalf will pay off.

(8) Role of the Teacher

Encourage your students, reinforce your students, make sure they are in a safe learning environment. As a teacher, keep focused, deflect the difficult questions that take up too much of your time, "feel" your class, remember that you are the mechanical controller of the learning, and make the table the centre of that learning.

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