

DO NOT BE A CALF

PAOLO COELHO STORIES

HOW THE PATH WAS OPENED

In “Jornalinho”, in Portugal, I found a story which tells us a lot about the instant choices we make. One day, a calf had to cross a wild forest to return to his grazing land. Being an irrational animal, it picked a difficult path, full of turnings and going up and down hills.

The next day, a dog that was walking in the same area decided to travel along the same path through the forest. Then a sheep that was the leader of his flock came, and when he saw the well-trodden path he made his followers walk along it too.

Later, lots of people started to use this path. They came and went, turned right and left, climbed up and down, avoided obstacles, complaining and cursing; and they were right. But they did nothing to find another way through.

As more people passed along it, the path became wider. The poor animals grew tired carrying heavy loads. They had to walk for three hours on a journey that would have taken only thirty minutes, if they hadn't followed the path opened first by the calf.

Do not be a calf

Many years passed and the path became the main street of a village and then the main street of a town. Everybody complained about the traffic because the route was the worst possible.

Meanwhile, the old and wise forest laughed at all the people who blindly followed the well-trodden path, without questioning whether it was the best choice.

We make too many mistakes in defence. But even champions make mistakes.

I have often heard the question: “how can I avoid the simple ones?”

Simple mistakes often result from a lack of concentration. There is a remedy for that: there are various techniques that can improve our concentration. Another reason is sheer laziness. We make a superficial judgement relying on our own routine and reflexes. We play like a calf; that is, a slow, awkward, ineffective player dependent on thoughtless routine. How can we eliminate this bad habit? We have to force our mind to continuous mental effort. At the beginning, it will require a considerable effort. After some time, the mental effort will become automatic. This chapter includes 60 defensive problems, in which all calf-like reactions are assigned to myself. It is a useful convention, since the reader should be very satisfied to find a better solution than the author.

CALF IN THE 21ST CENTURY

I would like to present two versions of the same deal.

VERSION 1

EW Vulnerable

Teams

| W | N | E | S |
|-----|------|-----|----------|
| 1NT | Pass | 2♣ | Pass |
| 2♠ | Pass | 3NT | All Pass |

♠ 8 7 4
 ♥ Q 10 4 3
 ♦ 7 5
 ♣ A 9 6 4

| | |
|----------|-------------|
| N | ♠ 5 |
| W E | ♥ A 9 7 2 |
| S | ♦ K Q J 8 6 |
| | ♣ 8 7 2 |

I select the ♣4 for the opening lead. Partner covers with the ♠10 and declarer wins with the king. West plays a diamond to the queen, South dropping the ♦10, and leads a heart to the jack, South following with the ♥8. It looks as if this is a desperate request for a spade return. Having no better option and trying to avoid upsetting my partner I return a spade.

Do not be a calf

The full hand:

| | | | |
|-----------|--------------------------|-------------|--|
| | ♠ 8 7 4 | | |
| | ♥ Q 10 4 3 | | |
| | ♦ 7 5 | | |
| | ♣ A 9 6 4 | | |
| ♠ Q 9 6 3 | N W E S | ♠ 5 | |
| ♥ K J | | ♥ A 9 7 2 | |
| ♦ A 9 3 | | ♦ K Q J 8 6 | |
| ♣ K Q 5 3 | | ♣ 8 7 2 | |
| | ♠ A K J 10 2 | | |
| | ♥ 8 6 5 | | |
| | ♦ 10 4 2 | | |
| | ♣ J 10 | | |

I played like a calf. Why? You will see. South wins with the spade king and returns the jack of clubs. He holds the trick and cleverly plays a diamond. West wins with the ace, plays the king of hearts and enters the dummy with a diamond. Have I planned what to discard on the diamond suit?

Here comes the ending:

| | | | |
|-------|--------------------------|-------|--|
| | ♠ 8 | | |
| | ♥ 10 4 | | |
| | ♦ — | | |
| | ♣ A | | |
| ♠ Q 9 | N W E S | ♠ — | |
| ♥ — | | ♥ A 9 | |
| ♦ — | | ♦ 8 | |
| ♣ Q 5 | | ♣ 8 | |
| | ♠ A J 10 | | |
| | ♥ 6 | | |
| | ♦ — | | |
| | ♣ — | | |

Thoughtless 9

I have to discard a spade on the last diamond trick. Declarer throws me in with a club and collects nine tricks.

How should I have defended?

After the heart queen I should have played a diamond to cut declarer's communications. West would win with the ace in his hand, play the king of hearts and enter the dummy with a diamond.

He would arrive at this final position:

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------|--|-------|---|--|---|--|---|--|---|--|-----|
| | ♠ 8 4 | | | | | | | | | | |
| | ♥ 10 4 | | | | | | | | | | |
| | ♦ – | | | | | | | | | | |
| | ♣ A 9 | | | | | | | | | | |
| ♠ Q 9 6 | <table style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table> | | N | | W | | E | | S | | ♠ 5 |
| | N | | | | | | | | | | |
| W | | E | | | | | | | | | |
| | S | | | | | | | | | | |
| ♥ – | | ♥ A 9 | | | | | | | | | |
| ♦ – | | ♦ 8 | | | | | | | | | |
| ♣ Q 5 3 | | ♣ 8 7 | | | | | | | | | |
| | ♠ A K J 10 | | | | | | | | | | |
| | ♥ 6 | | | | | | | | | | |
| | ♦ – | | | | | | | | | | |
| | ♣ J | | | | | | | | | | |

On the last diamond South would discard the ♥6, West the ♣3, and North the ♠4. Check for yourself: there is no winning continuation.

Do I have to know that in advance?

It is enough to realize that declarer will not have three convenient discards on the diamonds he will soon play.

What will be the course of events after a diamond return at the fourth trick?

Do not be a calf

We may come across a champion, who will answer by cashing the king of hearts and underleading his queen of clubs (instead of playing a diamond to the dummy), thereby cutting the defensive communication.

When South wins the trick with the jack of clubs, declarer produces this ending:

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------|---|---------|---|--|--|---|--|---|--|--|---|--|--|-----|
| | ♠ 8 7 4 | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | ♥ 10 4 | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | ♦ – | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | ♣ A 9 | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ♠ Q 9 6 3 | <table style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 100%; height: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 25%;"></td> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: center;">N</td> <td style="width: 25%;"></td> <td style="width: 25%;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">W</td> <td style="width: 25%;"></td> <td style="text-align: center;">E</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;">S</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table> | | N | | | W | | E | | | S | | | ♠ 5 |
| | N | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| W | | E | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | S | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ♥ – | | ♥ A 9 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ♦ 9 | | ♦ Q J 8 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ♣ Q 5 | | ♣ 8 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | ♠ A K J 10 2 | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | ♥ 6 | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | ♦ 4 | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | ♣ – | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

1. South can return a diamond (the defence of a calf). West will play three rounds of diamonds and ace of hearts, getting rid of clubs. After playing a spade, he will get a trick with the queen of spades.
2. South can play the spade ace and return a diamond (like a calf). Soon afterwards I will be endplayed.
3. South can play the ace and king of spades and return a diamond (the plan of a wise owl). This is the killing defence since the dummy will be squeezed.

Thoughtless 9

VERSION 2

EW Vulnerable
Teams

| W | N | E | S |
|-----|------|-----|----------|
| 1NT | Pass | 2♣ | Pass |
| 2♠ | Pass | 3NT | All Pass |

♠ 8 7 4
♥ Q 6 4 3
♦ 7 5
♣ A 9 6 4

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | N | |
| W | | E |
| | S | |

♠ 5
♥ A 9 7 2
♦ K Q J 8 6
♣ 8 7 2

This time I do not have the ten of hearts. I choose the ♣4 for my opening lead. Partner follows with the ♠10 and declarer wins with the king. West plays a diamond to the queen, South following with the ♦10 and plays a heart to the jack, South following with the ♥8.

I remember!!! Yes, after winning the trick with the queen I should return a diamond cutting the communication and...I played like a calf.

Do not be a calf

This is the final six-card position:

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------|--|-------|---|--|---|--|---|--|---|--|-----|
| | ♠ 8 4 | | | | | | | | | | |
| | ♥ 6 4 | | | | | | | | | | |
| | ♦ – | | | | | | | | | | |
| | ♣ A 9 | | | | | | | | | | |
| ♠ Q 9 6 | <table style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table> | | N | | W | | E | | S | | ♠ 5 |
| | N | | | | | | | | | | |
| W | | E | | | | | | | | | |
| | S | | | | | | | | | | |
| ♥ – | | ♥ A 9 | | | | | | | | | |
| ♦ – | | ♦ 8 | | | | | | | | | |
| ♣ Q 5 3 | | ♣ 8 7 | | | | | | | | | |
| | ♠ A K J 10 | | | | | | | | | | |
| | ♥ 10 | | | | | | | | | | |
| | ♦ – | | | | | | | | | | |
| | ♣ J | | | | | | | | | | |

Declarer, who does not have the option of a throw-in, will cash the heart ace and the sight of the ten falling will be just what he needs. Of course, instead of a diamond, I should have played a spade to create this four-card ending:

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------|--|-------|---|--|---|--|---|--|---|--|-----|
| | ♠ 8 | | | | | | | | | | |
| | ♥ 6 4 | | | | | | | | | | |
| | ♦ – | | | | | | | | | | |
| | ♣ A | | | | | | | | | | |
| ♠ Q 9 | <table style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table> | | N | | W | | E | | S | | ♠ – |
| | N | | | | | | | | | | |
| W | | E | | | | | | | | | |
| | S | | | | | | | | | | |
| ♥ – | | ♥ A 9 | | | | | | | | | |
| ♦ – | | ♦ 8 | | | | | | | | | |
| ♣ Q 5 | | ♣ 8 | | | | | | | | | |
| | ♠ A J 10 | | | | | | | | | | |
| | ♥ 10 | | | | | | | | | | |
| | ♦ – | | | | | | | | | | |
| | ♣ – | | | | | | | | | | |

Thoughtless 9

Now I would let declarer throw me in with the club ace. Two off will be our reward.

Note that if I make a mistake at trick four and return a diamond against a champion declarer, who is good enough to win and underlead his club queen, South may come to the defence's rescue by cashing the spade ace and returning a diamond. Now in the four-card ending I will be 'endplayed' with the club ace to lead hearts.

Difficult, isn't it? Yes, but defensive and declarer play techniques with which even average players are familiar today were a secret wisdom of the very best players forty years ago. In twenty years time such analyses will be a piece of cake.