

Kobayashi Maru

Between a Rock and a Hard Place

Facing Defeat and Testing Character

The term *Kobayashi Maru* is the name of a fictional spaceship employed in the television series *Star Trek* as a training exercise, and which has come to represent the actual and precipitating element of utter defeat by illustrating in a simulated environment a *no-win situation*. This situation, causing the candidate to choose between *a rock and a hard place*, introduces the candidate to the reality of the concept that not all battles can be won, overcome, or that any one participant or team is able to emerge as victor or even semi-victorious.

Although it is the objective of the exercise to demonstrate to the cadet the nature of defeat, the exercise surpasses the actual result and tests the moral strength of the cadet, which is the primary objective of the exercise.

The Japanese designation of *Kobayashi Maru* was employed in the opening scene of the film *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*, filmed and released in the year 1982, directed by Mr. Gene Roddenberry.

The actors are:

Admiral James T. Kirk	William Shatner
Captain Spock	Leonard Nimoy
Khan	Ricardo Montalban

It is of perhaps interest to members of the the Star Trek fan clubs only (so-called *Trekkies*) to note that all of Khan's men were Chippendale dancers at the time of the making of the film. The Chippendale dancers were popular as male strippers at certain clubs visited by women only.

The object and target of the exercise was to introduce and present to the future cadets of the fictional *Starfleet Academy* the definite possibility of defeat, of the concept of being defeated, and that all efforts lead to failure, because there is no appropriate or winning solution.

In the film *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*, the training exercise describes the *Kobayashi Maru* as a Class III neutronic fuel carrier-ship, with a crew of 81 and 300 passengers. The term itself for the carrier-ship is derived from the Japanese language and the word *Kobayashi* translates as *small forest* and is a quite common surname or family name in the Japanese society.

The term *Maru* is a common suffix for Japanese ship names. The Japanese suffix itself is loosely translated as *circle* and there are several theories as to its application to the naming of ships in Japan. One theory holds that the ship itself represented a floating 'castle', and the word referred to the *defensive circle* that protected the castle.

In the game of bridge the player in rotation is also presented and confronted, intentionally or not, with a bidding situation, whereby participation in which can only lead to defeat. Whatever action the bridge player undertakes the result is defeat and tests the character, the positive attributes, and the moral strength and fiber of the individual bridge player. Sometimes it is referred to as *the ultimate test under fire*.

This is, however, not a fictional exercise to test the bridge player and triggered maliciously by the partner of the bridge player. A *no-win situation* will present itself to every bridge player and the objective is to overcome the defeat as quickly as possible, move on to the next board, and cope mentally to combat the negative influences the previous board with its *no-win situation* has presented without harboring ill-will to anyone, who might have led to this situation.

Such an instance, such an auction, such a situation is referred to in many ways. Being members of a television society and of the technological age (*Note: remember the Sputnik Double*), such colloquial designations become popular to render the particular situation human and puts it in understandable terms.

Such a bidding sequence, which could lead to a *Kobayashi Maru* exercise, or place the individual bridge player between *a rock and a hard place* follows to illustrate this no-win situation.

The auction:

South	West	North	East
1 ♦	Pass	2 ♣	Double
Pass			

West is forced by partner to bid. West holds:

♠ 10xx
♥ xx
♦ 10xxx
♣ 10xxx

The situation is that South and North already show that the partnership holds the majority of the points with whichever approach they employ as their partnership agreement. The double of East confirms the location of the remaining high card points and shortage in the unbid suits or both Major suits.

However, the double by East implies or allows West to infer that East does not hold a 5-card suit, since East would just bid the suit over the bid of 2 Clubs.

The situation presented to West is the *no-win situation* or the *Kobayashi Maru* exercise. Whatever action West initiates, the end will result in defeat. The bridge player, in this case West, must decidedly take action, but an action, which will negate somewhat the sting of defeat. The ideal action, or perhaps the best action / solution by West is simply to pass. The result of 2 Clubs doubled does not end in a game bonus. Possible overtricks will only increase the negative score, but to add the game bonus would only add to the negative score and to the *sting of defeat*.

However, once West believes that the situation is somewhat under manageable control and that the action of passing has defused the situation also to the lowest denomination, another action occurs, which creates the identical situation, but with more profound and negative consequences. The continuing auction illustrates this point of the exercise:

South	West	North	East
1 ♦	Pass	2 ♣	Double
Pass	Pass	Redouble	Pass
Pass	?		

The partnership with the majority of the points realizes that the partnership East-West has misread the auction and has placed itself in an untenable and indefensible position and are reaching for a maximum score as a result of the situation.

The score for a contract of 2 Clubs redoubled, vulnerable, is 760 (not vulnerable: 560). This action assures the opponents of the game bonus if made. Overtricks are each 400 (200) points respectively.

West now faces his *Kobayashi Maru* and realizes that there is no possible solution. Any action taken by West at this junction will end in disaster. In the words of Captain James T. Kirk: *There is no solution as there is no chance to win.*

Again, the reminder remains that the exercise for the future cadets is to test the moral fiber of the cadet and candidate for *Starfleet Academy* and is the primary objective of the exercise. So is it also with the bridge player. How well does West accept defeat, the overly aggressive behavior of his partner, the resulting score and perhaps even the slight signs of victory arising from the side of the opponents.

It is this side of the bridge player, which must prove strong, even under such conditions, and show that even in the face of defeat the player will arise from this defeat to face anew the next battle, the next board.