

THE  
**100**



**BIGGEST  
MISTAKES**

THAT  
**POKER PLAYERS  
MAKE**

ALEXANDER FITZGERALD



## Alex Fitzgerald



Alexander Fitzgerald is a professional poker player who has been in the industry for over a decade. After running away from home during high school, Alex worked as a commercial fisherman and security guard, until he found success playing Texas Hold'em.

While describing himself as having average intelligence, Alex has been able to accrue more than \$3,500,000 in tournament earnings around the world. This includes final-tabling WPT (World Poker Tour) and multiple WCOOP (World Championship of Online Poker) events.

In addition to his extraordinary success as a player, Alex also runs a poker consultancy which serves more than 1,000 professional poker players in 60 countries.

Constantly at work, Alex has published hundreds of training videos, articles and webinars. He is regarded by many as one of the most important tournament coaches in the world.

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All sales enquiries should be directed to D&B Publishing:

[info@dandbpoker.com](mailto:info@dandbpoker.com)



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[www.dandbpoker.com](http://www.dandbpoker.com)

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# Other Books by Alex Fitzgerald

## The Myth of Poker Talent

The Myth of Poker Talent is a comprehensive guide to both playing poker and being a poker player. While online MTT players may benefit the most from Fitzgerald's insights, the book is applicable to all variants of no-limit hold'em (tournaments or cash games), live or online. Just be ready to put in the effort.

*Ben Saxton, PokerNews.com*

... this is the best poker book I have ever read. And I really don't even think it's close.

*Keith Woernle, PartTimePoker.com*

## Exploitative Play in Live Poker

I am pretty sure I have said before that a book I was reviewing at the time changed my life, but this time it didn't just change my life, it completely 100% altered my entire poker existence... I don't know about you, but I am never going to be satisfied with where my poker game is. I must admit I don't know what I don't know. I have to go out there and find the answers to the questions I don't even know that I have. I don't want to just grab any old book from any old shelf and learn any old information. I want to learn the best from the best. I am telling you: Alex Fitzgerald is the best of the best.

*Shannon Mack, CardPlayerLifestyle.com*

First of all, the book was fantastic: a read that I could not stop reading, gluing me to the pages. I'm not sure if it was the way the writer spoke or worded things or just perhaps the no-bullshit way to dominate a poker table that kept me wanting more and more.

*ProfessionalRakeback.com*

# CONTENTS

	Introduction	10
01	The Biggest Mistake Poker Players Make	14
02	The Most Important Poker Lesson	20
03	This is 90 Percent of Your Job	27
04	Double Down When The Getting's Good	30
05	Live for the Kill	33
06	Slaughter the Big Blind	45
07	Slaughter the Threebet Caller	48
08	Not Paying Attention to Players on Your Left	54
09	Being Petulant Children	59
10	Trying to be Perfect	63
11	Cold Calling Too Much	72
12	Not Engaging in Probabilistic Thinking	76
13	Not Calling with Big Tex Behind	81
14	Not Using Large Bets to Isolate Bad Players	85
15	Not Freezing Out Good Players Behind	92
16	Not Betting Big in Multiway Pots	103
17	Not Check/Folding to Regs Who Call	107
18	Not Checkraising Versus Cold Callers	110

19	Not Using Small Bets Multiway	114
20	Balancing When There's No Need	118
21	Not Doing Enough Experiments	123
22	Not Looking For Live Tells	127
23	Not Studying the Right Way	133
24	Not Tracking Their Time	139
25	Not Investing in the Intangibles	144
26	Not Playing Back at Three-bettors	150
27	Not Paying Attention to the Players Behind You	154
28	Not Buying the Showdown	156
29	Not Going For Thin Value	158
30	Not Showing Them Different Bets	160
31	Not Schmoozing to Find Home Games	162
32	Not Playing More Home Game Pots	165
33	Calling With High Cards Only to Fold The Turn	167
34	Not Value-betting Versus High Cards	169
35	Not Value-betting With a High Card	171
36	Failing to Use Basic Continuation Betting Theory	173
37	Believing the Bad Regs Can Play	178
38	Letting Opponents Dictate Pot Size	182
39	Not Hiring Poker Coaches	185
40	Not Analyzing What Opponents do With Pairs	190
41	Always Playing a Hand in Direct Fashion	193
42	Not Taking Care of Your Pitching Arm	196
43	Not Thinking Through Potential River Bets	202
44	Always Playing a Pair the Same Way	206
45	Not Using Appropriate Software	210
46	Not Drilling Every Single Day	214



47	Not Reading How the Player Reads You	216
48	Being Results Oriented	219
49	Overvaluing Mediocre Draws	222
50	Playing Incorrectly Against Short Stacks	224
51	Not Playing Multi-table Satellites	226
52	How Many Outs Do You Truly Have?	232
53	Not Hand Ranging Through Each Street	235
54	Being Afraid to Make Mistakes	239
55	Not Thinking About Unorthodox Value	243
56	Not Using Unorthodox Bets	246
57	Making a Confused "Value" Bet	249
58	Not Practicing What You "Already Know"	251
59	Being Unwilling to Move Down	254
60	Not Playing Ace High for Value	258
61	Not Diversifying Your Poker Portfolio	263
62	Not Paying Your Taxes	265
63	Not Knowing When to Hold'em and When to Fold'em	267
64	Playing Poorly When Tired or Distracted	273
65	Not Laughing at Your Opponents	278
66	Not Wanting to be Wrong Much of the Time	281
67	Not Valuing Mental Training	285
68	Getting Emotional When You Play	288
69	Not Wanting to Admit You are Wrong or Don't Know	291
70	Finding Friends Who Don't Challenge You	294
71	Not Taking Notes on Your Cellphone	298
72	Going Easy On a Wounded Dog	301
73	Not Exploiting Condensed Ranges	304
74	Giving Someone an Undeserved Showdown	307

75	Not Being Curious	310
76	Never Defending the Big Blind Properly	312
77	Not Holding Yourself Accountable with Bets	315
78	Not Finding People Who Pump You Up	317
79	Broadcasting Wins	320
80	Never Freezing a Player With an In-position Call	321
81	Never Trapping in Short-stack Situations	323
82	Never Floating Versus a Flop Check-raise	325
83	Playing Games With too Much Rake	327
84	Letting Someone Buy a Turn and River	331
85	Overestimating How Many Draws a Player Bets	333
86	Never Trying a Delayed Continuation Bet	335
87	Not Having a Work Ethic	337
88	Not Practicing Deliberately	343
89	Not Taking Time Off	350
90	Letting Someone Chat to You While You Play Online	353
91	Trying to Play Through a Life Downswing	357
92	Trying to Rewire Yourself Overnight	359
93	Expecting the Spark to Last Forever	363
94	Not Loving the Pain	369
95	Not Taking Money off the Table	372
96	Not Developing a Winning Culture	375
97	Not Taking Care of Your Health	379
98	Not Taking Care of Your Family	384
99	Not Enjoying This	386
100	Recapping the 100 Mistakes	391
	Recommended Further Reading	395

# INTRODUCTION

## Rinse and Repeat

I am going to use repetition as a teaching method in this book.

Have you ever taken a language class? How many times did your teacher ask you the same questions? You can't speak a foreign language without knowing the fundamentals.

I am in my mid-thirties now. I can still repeat to you, word for word, certain things my football coaches said to me 20 years ago.

Back then, their constant repetition of certain concepts annoyed the hell out of me. Now that I'm older, I understand. They knew none of us were going to the NFL. They were preparing us for real life.

Whenever our bodies got tired, they would yell: "You got more than that! Come on! What is this?! I know you got more than that!" After the 300th time they succeeded in getting me to move more I learned my body was a liar. My brain was telling me I was tired long before I was actually tired.

Whenever we were telling our coaches we deserved more playing time they would say the same thing: "Don't tell me. Show me." Talk is cheap. Your actions speak so loudly I can't hear what you're saying.

When we blew off tests at school, I'll never forget the disgusted look one football coach gave us. "How do you walk into a classroom knowing you're not ready for a test? What kind of man are you?" He changed my life forever that day. He equated preparation and study with manliness. I never saw the world the same way again.

I could go on. I had several football coaches. They all had a significant impact on my life.

The only way they got through to me was through repetition. They said the same concepts again and again. They said certain phrases so many times it drove me crazy.

It worked. Their lessons permeated my subconscious for the rest of my life. They programmed all of us into believing we could outwork anyone on Earth.

When I teach poker, I borrow from their methods. There are certain anecdotes and sayings that I repeat extensively. I want these ideas to permeate your unconscious mind. You should be able to mouth the words as I'm saying them again.

Why do I repeat myself? It's not because it helps book sales. It's not because my students like it. On the contrary, most people would rather be entertained when they read a poker book. They don't like it when I double check that they memorized the most important concepts.

No. The reason I am going to repeat certain important lessons with you is because there will come a day when you are tired and playing poker. You will be up at 4:00 AM in a wild cash game with someone who is bleeding chips. You will be playing day four of a live tournament. You will be playing heads-up for an online poker title at 7:00 AM after starting play at noon the day before.

There are no words in the English language to explain how exhausting these moments are. Trying to focus when your body is shutting down is no laughing matter. The stress is astounding. You know that any mistake could cost you thousands of dollars. The errors will stick with you for the rest of your life.

Your ability to reason will be stripped from you in these moments. You will be left with stress, fatigue, your fundamentals, and your discipline. You will find out what you are made of in these moments.

I hope at times this book is entertaining for you, but that is not its prime focus. The most important lessons of this book should stick with you in the toughest and most profitable moments. You want to be programmed for success when adversity comes. You want to be ready for it. You want to live for the storm. You want to be that stone cold killer on the table for the rest of your life.

True training is exhausting and repetitive. True training is difficult. True training is not always fun. True training is not always entertaining.

But real training should prepare you forever.

My sincere hope is that you will play better poker for the rest of your life after you read this book. If that means I have to make you uncomfortable and sacrifice entertainment in the process, then so be it.

## How to Read this Book

This book is designed for busy people. Almost all of the lessons are short reads. The tone is meant to be conversational.

It is recommended that you read one chapter a day. Try to read one chapter during a break at work or during your commute. Take notes if you can.

As you go throughout your day, refer to your notes and try to think about how you could implement the new chapter into your game. Make it a part of you.

There are a lot of lessons here. If you try to devour all of them in one sitting, you will likely not absorb all of them.

If you go through these lessons slowly, then the core concepts are more likely to become a part of you.

Each chapter has a specific focus, but they all interconnect with each other. The most important subjects related to your success will be repeated throughout the chapters.

I'll occasionally use personal stories to make a point. Forgive this indulgence. Stories are memorable. Statistics are not. The only set of life experiences I have access to are my own.

## The Language in This Book

The pages of this book have come from my extensive experience working with poker players for thousands of hours. In my work, I am often not blessed with the luxury of using choir-boy language. I have to say what is memorable and what will stick with the client. I have no choice. If they do not get results, I am not doing my job. I need to tell them something that will stick with them when they are fatigued at the poker table. End of story.

I will try to refrain from coarse language when it is unnecessary, but if a colorful anecdote has ever worked well in the past, I will present that anecdote unedited here.

When I refer to poker players in this book, I typically refer to them as men. That is not because there aren't incredible female players out there. I

refer to poker players as men because most of them are. If I were to refer constantly to “men and women” or “he and she” then the text would become distracting. I would much rather just get to the point. I appreciate your understanding.

# CHAPTER 1

## THE BIGGEST MISTAKE POKER PLAYERS MAKE

### Introduction

To start this book, we will discuss the biggest mistake poker players make. It's this: Going pro when it is unnecessary.

We have all seen poker on TV. When we see these otherwise normal men hugging millions of dollars, we all have the same thought: "What does it take to be a poker professional?"

Do you want to know what it takes to be a professional? It's simple. There's a great debate about what a professional is, but the formula is basic:

Make all your money from playing poker.

Pay your bills each month.

That's it.

Every month the poker player gets in the ring. His opponent? The bills he will have to pay by the end of the month.

If the bills are larger, then the opponent is mightier. If the poker player slays the bills, he is an advanced poker professional.

But if you are paying for a studio apartment in North Dakota with your poker winnings and subsisting on day-old produce then you are still technically a professional poker player. If anyone says otherwise, you can tell them to try doing what you're doing. Nine out of ten people won't be able to pull it off.

## Poker Bosses

Most people say they want to play poker professionally so they can work for themselves. They are enticed by the notion of not having a boss to answer to.

My tax statements say I work for myself.

Last month I made \$50,000+ from poker.

However, I have many bosses. Here are their names: rent, health insurance, dental, car payment, taxes, groceries, electricity, water, disabled mother's healthcare, mother's groceries, and so on.

I can take any day off I want, but at some point those bosses will call me up at my apartment. They will tell me to get my ass back to work.

## Why Even Become a Professional Poker Player?

Why do you even want to become a professional poker player?

Is it so you can tell people you're a professional poker player?

Do you think Bill Gates and Oprah Winfrey ever told anyone they were entrepreneurs? No. They made money. They did a little of this and a little of that. They invested their time wisely. They don't care what you call them. They care what they're doing.

Don't box yourself in just because you want to write "professional poker player" or "entrepreneur" in your Twitter bio.

What is the prime motivation? What do you want to do this for?

Money? If you want money, then don't restrict yourself. Take any opportunity to make money you can.

Do you want fame? There are 18-year-old kids on TikTok who have more fame than most poker players ever will.

Find out what truly drives you and pursue that. Don't pursue the title.

## Professional Gamblers

Do you want to quit your job and gamble so you can be your own person? Do you want to look in the mirror and see someone who lives off their wits?

I highly recommend this course of action, even if 99% of people who try it will fail.

I quit my last real job at 18. I thought I knew a great deal about the world. I didn't.

Becoming a professional gambler teaches you quickly what you're made



of. You have nothing but your balls and your brain. There's no one pushing you. Every day you wake up and it's on you to follow through. If you don't follow through, your family will suffer. If you don't follow through, then you will suffer.

You find out very quickly in this world that having the right haircut, tattoos, Twitter bio, or politics doesn't help much. No one is coming to save you. Everything is on you.

In this world, you quickly stop caring what your job title is. Your real focus is on paying your bills and taking care of your dependents. If someone asks you what you do for a living you make up something on the spot. You never have a prepared answer because you've literally never thought of it. You don't have time to think about that kind of thing.

You can call yourself a "professional gambler" at this point. Even if you expand into business and finance that is all technically gambling.

If your mother doesn't like you calling yourself a gambler, just say you're an "equity analyst."

## **Real Jobs Have Benefits**

There are numerous benefits to having a normal job. They should not be ignored.

In most real jobs you have one boss. That boss is literally paid to manage you. If you do not bother him or her then they will generally leave you alone. They're the person who will decide on your schedule, days off, salary, and so on. If you work for yourself then you will have to create all of this for yourself.

Employers in the United States will often help you financially with your healthcare and social security. Many of them will file your taxes for you. All of this is expensive and time-consuming. Poker players handle all of this themselves.

Tax law in the United States does not favor small business ownership or self-employed people. Those people actually pay the highest taxes in the United States. You will pay a higher tax rate when you're self-employed.

Tax law for professional gamblers also has some damaging quirks. Gambling losses do not count against gambling wins if they happen in separate years.

Traditional employers are tasked with the responsibility of keeping the business solvent. They worry about the Xs and Os. They worry about finding work for all their employees. This is a never-ending job. The employee gets

to go home on Friday night and think about nothing work-related until Monday morning. Many business owners do not have this luxury. When times are tough, they are working nonstop.

Some of the best poker players I have ever met held on to their day job. They like their day job. They like the healthcare plan for their family. They like the stability.

What they like most is playing poker and not worrying about anything. If they lose, they go back to work. No harm, no foul. If they win? Guess it's time to pay off the house.

It's extremely hard to beat someone like that.

Professional poker players can toy with mediocre professionals much more easily. If a kid is in over his head and is worried about a downswing, he is not going to play well. Traditionally employed people rarely have this flaw.

## What Am I?

I am not a professional poker player. I was a professional poker player for many years. Now, thankfully, I have other ways of making money. I don't just trade hours of my life on the felt for money anymore.

I quit my last security job on October 31, 2006. I was a commercial fisherman before I took that job. I also dabbled in kitchens, furniture moving, and landscaping before all of that.

All those jobs left me sore and exhausted. I swore to myself I'd never work a job like that again. I didn't have any education to speak of, but I was going to find a way to make my own money with my mind.

What I didn't understand at the time was that the human body and mind love routine. Hustling every day of your life is anything but routine.

The human body also loves physical exercise. Humans have made incredible evolutionary sacrifices so that they can walk all day. Sitting in a chair from sunrise to sunset is not what nature intended.

Hustling to feed your family is hard. The human mind and body can abhor the process. You are not a coward if you don't want to do this.

## The Man in the Ring

Every month I get in the ring again. Every day is another round. It's a long fight. I have to coast in some rounds. But at the end of the month there is no option. I must vanquish my foe in the other corner.

My opponent, of course, is my bills. Every month, the opponents get

bigger and scarier. Nothing is getting cheaper.

Somehow, I am undefeated since I quit my security job. I am 173 - 0. But that doesn't mean my opponents don't hit hard. They have left me spitting blood into a bucket.

If you want to know what true professional poker is, it is this: Paying those bills every month. It's not about the title or what anyone thinks of you. It's not about the accolades. It's not about the tournament wins. There is only one true victory in professional poker.

"I'm not playing for the thrill of fucking victory here. I owe rent, alimony, child support. I play for money. My kids eat." - Joey Knish, *Rounders*.

## Where I Get My Money

A good deal of my money comes from coaching poker.

I initially didn't want to be a poker coach. I wanted to play all day. Playing is more fun. But around the 30th time someone asked me to coach them up, I finally relented.

To my surprise, I found I enjoyed the work. I found it gratifying watching my pupils win. I also found the process of teaching made me a better player. Who knew?

I have no qualms with charging money to talk about poker. I paid dearly for the lessons I am teaching. Additionally, if I help you make \$1,000 and then you pay me \$100, we both profit from the deal.

I have no qualms with being a poker coach either. Some people want to say they only play poker to earn all their money. But money is money. Why would you prefer to have less money if you can both coach and play?

I bet Sean McVay would coach and play if he had the option to do both.

## Helping You Make Money Is Easy

Helping people make money at poker is easy.

Most poker players in the 2020s have been playing for a long time. They are avid fans. They have 90% to 95% of their game dialed in. They just need to shore up the last few leaks. This is where I come in.

Believe it or not, being 95% of the way to great poker is not nearly good enough. The rake is steep in practically all forms of poker. The vast majority do not beat it. If you have one or two weaknesses, you are going to be a slowly losing player. It might take years, but it will happen.

Lucky for you, I have absolutely zero natural poker talent. The only way

I have made money for 15 years is through execution of the fundamentals. Your leaks are old friends of mine. I only started making money when I got to know your leaks intimately.

When someone lacks something in their poker game, I can almost always spot it, because chances are that I struggled with that same problem at some point in my career. I know exactly how to fix it, because I had to do it myself at some point.

With a few quick fixes I can generally get a guy making money. Most people have the exact same issues with no limit hold'em. The human mind cannot see games of chance fairly. It's like looking at an optical illusion and trying to see the trick. With a small amount of training, any person can be taught to see where the illusion is created.

This book is dedicated to the most common issues poker players have. If you fix these 100 mistakes, you will be well on your way to making serious money at cards.

## CHAPTER 2

# THE MOST IMPORTANT POKER LESSON

### 101st Airborne

I wasn't going to say a word around this man.

My girlfriend had given me the rundown. He was nearly 100 years old, 101st Airborne, family man, and a grandfather.

I sat in front of him. He wanted to meet his granddaughter's boyfriend. I did my best to smile and not act nervous. In my teens, *Saving Private Ryan* and *Band of Brothers* had a profound effect on me. I was stunned by these heroes among men. Now, here I was. Sitting in front of someone who had actually parachuted behind enemy lines.

"You play poker for a living?" he asked.

"Yes," I said, surprised to be talking. He had been telling me war stories. I heard he didn't love discussing the war. For some reason, he had let me hear about some of the things the movies never tell you. I was surprised after an hour that I was talking.

"Yes, I play cards," I informed him.

"I see it on the TV," he said, motioning toward his ancient set he never bothered to update. "I played some during the war."

"Yeah?" I said. His family had told me he'd been quite good. At different times, he would send money home to his young bride. They suspected it was from poker games.

"You know, the thing about poker," he continued, "it's all just being pa-

tient and paying attention.”

I stared stunned. I had been saying a version of this for 15 years. This man had been playing cards when FDR was president. He just said more or less the same thing to me.

For the next hour or so, he told me tales of card games from his time in the service. He perked up noticeably. I had never been more grateful for poker in my life. This man and I, separated by generations and a war that changed the world, could connect through this one game and have some laughs. Age, socioeconomic standing, upbringing, none of that mattered. We were just two guys talking cards.

## The Only Lesson You Need

I truly believe anyone could have become a professional poker player in my circumstances. I was bred to be immune to the greatest leak of all.

The biggest mistake poker players make is not being patient. They want to see if the flop hits them. It's natural. We don't go to the cardroom to fold. We go to the cardroom to play. When we see a beautiful suited hand or some pretty face cards we want to see if we can hit the flop. This is human. Homo sapiens have been gambling for thousands of years. It's in our blood. We can't fight it.

The problem is you're not going to beat anybody seeing every flop. Remember your first home games? How did everyone play? They wanted to see flops. The first home games I played actually had rules against raising pre-flop. I'm not kidding! They thought it was rude!

If you can recall your early forays into poker, you probably aren't proud of them. We look down at 9♥-6♥ in middle position when we're starting and we limp in. It's only later that we find out what a terrible play that is.

The problem occurs when we get "better." Once we start making plays that no one blinks an eye at, we assume we have become better at no limit hold'em. However, it is incredibly difficult to beat the rake in no limit hold'em. If we are gaining acceptance from everyone, that means we have gained the acceptance of losing players.

When someone loose opens from early position and we have A♥-4♥ in middle position, we want to call. No one will blink an eye if we do so. However, if three of the players to our left love squeezing when the loose player opens, we have a huge problem. We're not even going to see the flop a large percentage of the time. We are just donating some free money to the pot for our more aggressive opponents to enjoy.

But why don't we fold? Because if we fold and everybody just smooth calls and that board comes with three hearts, we want to kill ourselves. What are we even doing in the cardroom? Oh, my Lord. That's the best hand I would have seen in nine hours! One bet goes in. Another guy raises. Oh no! What have I done? Any idiot could have called there!

Exactly. Any idiot could have called there. Is any idiot making money from no limit hold'em? When we call there, we are not playing for money. We are playing to avoid pain. The satisfaction of saving a couple of big blinds will never feel that good. If we see we would have flopped a huge hand, the pain will be monstrous. The two feelings don't compare. As humans, we naturally work to avoid pain.

This evolutionary response is not a bad thing. If we are dating someone who makes us feel terrible, it's a good idea to get out of the situation. That can be a sign that something bad is brewing. We don't know what it is but we're not going to stay around to find out. Similarly, if you're walking around at night, gut impulses can alert you as to where you shouldn't walk. None of these feelings are bad. Your genetic line got here through exquisite loss aversion.

The only problem is that that same genetic wiring can be manipulated into financial losses. Marketers do it all the time.

If you want to understand your leaks intimately then you should study marketing. The human mind has many biases it can't remove. They are there for a reason.

Loss aversion helps us protect our young. Almost all humans will gamble to save another human life. That is noble. It also makes us terrible gamblers.

Making money at no limit hold'em isn't hard. You wait for a big hand and then you bet the shit out of it. No matter how bad you run, you don't deviate from this strategy.

I was playing cards once in the back of a calligraphy class in high school. No, I don't know why I was in a calligraphy class. This is what happens when you don't care about your education because you're playing cards all the time.

Anyway, I looked down at a hand and threw it in the muck. I was the last person to fold pre-flop. At that point, one of the guys in the game groaned loudly and said, "Come on! Stay in the game! Why do you fold so much?" Needless to say, he had a big hand and he was pissed that I didn't want to play.

The reason I folded so much in that high school game was because there was no ante or blinds. In the game they played, everyone was dealt a hand

and then you declared how much money you wanted to wager. You lost nothing by folding. You could literally play only aces and you would make money in this game.

Later, I would play full-ring cash games. In this form of poker, you did have to pay the blinds, but in a \$1/\$2 game, that was \$3 for nine hands. If I bought in for \$200, it would be more than 66 orbits before I ran out of money. That's about 600 hands. If you're playing 30 hands an hour live, that's 20 hours of play. During those 600 hands, you would often get dealt a premium hand, raise, and get one other player to fold on the flop. This gave you additional orbits to pick up the big pot.

The way to make money at no limit hold'em was to wait to cooler someone, but never go broke on a cooler yourself. If you suspected you were beat, you just called down or folded. If you had the better of it, you rammed and jammed. Most people can't fold. This strategy works.

Again, anyone could have become a professional poker player given how I grew up. I had "I want to just see the flop" beaten out of me.

My father and grandfather are commercial fishermen. They're about as tough as men come. I went up to Alaska to work once and went, "Nope, I'm not tough enough for this." I'm uncoordinated and that is one of the most dangerous jobs in the United States. That might have been the family business, but I wasn't raised the way those men were raised. I needed to find another way to make money.

Luckily for me, I did work one season as a commercial fisherman. I saw how those bad asses made their money. I was bitching and moaning, but nothing fazed them. Sleep four hours and get up to work some more? Let's do it. Six weeks straight of work with no days off. Let's go!

Those guys let me ride their coattails kicking and screaming. When I got home, I went back to the cardroom. I'll never forget this. There was a misdeal on the first hand I played. I had already looked down at queens. I laughed and threw the hand away. Nothing was fazing me at that point.

For the next few hours, I sat there stunned at the amount of money people just squandered on terrible hands. I'd spent months watching guys work 100-hour weeks to feed their families. I had scars all over my knuckles from where the fishing nets had cut up my hands. The money I had earned from all the work I had done for those months was less than what all these people were throwing away in one night.

Like I said, seeing the flop was beaten out of me. For the first time ever, I could feel the pot sizes in my gut. I'd see how one bad call of A♥-4♥ became



a bad flop call when the guy hit a bad ace. Then, the bad flop call became a bad call down. Then, the guy was out enough money to pay for some new furniture! What the hell was he thinking? Doesn't he know what that money is worth?!

I became a cardroom rat once I saw the money people were giving away. When I wasn't playing live, I was home playing online.

The cardroom felt like heaven after fishing. Free drinks? Heating? Good looking women bringing me free drinks? Hell, I'll just sit here and listen to music all day and wait for aces. This job is easy!

Anyone could have become a professional poker player given that kind of background. It became a joy to sit there and wait for premium hands.

To my astonishment, back in 2006, you didn't need to play much more than aces to make money. I would play 10-10+, A-Q+.

Is anything different in the 2020s? In many live games, no! I know a woman who plays Q-Q, K-K, and A-A. She cleans up! Some guys just have a problem folding to women, I guess. She zeroes in on them.

I have another friend who still plays barely more than 10-10+, A-Q+. He'll play suited broadways in late position and that's it. He also cleans up. He short-stacks and has some other tricks, but he would even tell you he's not that complex. If I recall correctly, he used to work doing manual labor jobs. Again, this is another guy who has no problem sitting on his ass.

You might be reading this now and thinking, "There's no way it's that simple!" You're right. There's more to it than that. We will get into the rest of the recipe in this book. But there is one caveat we will discuss now: Just because this is simple does not mean it is easy.

Losing weight is simple. You eat less and work out more. That doesn't mean it's easy. The human body fights for crap food like a toddler. It makes your life miserable.

Good poker is similar. It's simple. It doesn't mean it's easy.

Folding is hard work. It's easier for recent immigrants from a war-torn country because they know how good they have it. It's not easy for the typical resident of a first world country.

In my last three winning sessions, I played 16 hours, 16 hours, and 13 hours straight.

It is difficult to do anything for 16 hours. It is difficult to sleep for 16 hours.

Did you take a standardized test to get into university? How tired did you feel after those three or four hours? Poker is like taking a standardized

test every day of your life. Sometimes, it's akin to taking a standardized test for 16 hours straight. Oh, yeah, if you mess up one question on this test it can destroy your entire session.

You have queens. You raise. One gentleman calls you pre-flop. The board comes 10-8-5 rainbow. You continuation bet. He raises. What do you do?

Depending on the situation, this question has myriad answers. You played a premium. So far, you have played the premium well. But what do you do at this point? A wrong decision can destroy all your work for the day.

This is where the second part of the fundamental equation comes in: Pay attention.

While you're spending all that time folding, you need to pay attention to everyone at the table. What hands do they cold call with? What hands do they raise? What hands do they bet the turn with? What hands do they raise the flop with? Do they look comfortable with a big hand? Do they look tense with a big hand? You need to be gathering all this intel.

The right move might be to fold those queens because you've only seen this gentlemen raise sets post-flop. He calls with draws. You're open to being wrong, because in general you won't be.

Do you know how hard it is to fold those queens when you're 11 hours into a session, and that's the best hand you've seen in two hours? I've seen grown men scream in anger in situations like this!

But that is the wrong way to look at the game.

Folding can be a highly exploitative play.

Have you ever flopped a set, continuation bet, and then watched three people fold in quick succession? How badly did you feel you got beat in that situation?

You want to give that feeling to your opponent. You want to study him the way a professional boxer studies film. You want to know his movements more than he does. You want to enjoy the process of studying because you know the knockout is coming.

The most fun part about playing poker is you get to be a detective for big money. You need to get in the minds of your opponents. Would he do this with that hand? Would he play it that quickly? How sure are you?

Many people think they understand human nature. They are pundits on television. They write books. They give lectures at universities. They get degrees and titles.

In poker, you get to find out if you actually understand human nature. If you truly see human beings for what they are then you will make a good

living in this game. If you're actually bluffing yourself with high-minded bullshit, you will find out quickly how wrong you are.

There is no regulatory committee here. The cards don't care how popular you are. Socioeconomic standing, family ties, race, sexual preference, height, education level, title, ethnicity, political correctness, attractiveness, nothing matters at the card table.

If you pay attention and stay patient, you will win.

## CHAPTER 3

# THIS IS 90 PERCENT OF YOUR JOB

### The Real Skill in No Limit Hold'em

Let's discuss the third largest mistake poker players make.

Do you want to be the best poker player in the world?

Let me ask you this question. Who is the best poker player in the world right now?

You could ask 100 devout poker players that question and get 10 to 20 different responses. That doesn't mean you shouldn't try to be the best poker player in the world. It's your life. Live it however you want.

I had a friend who wanted to be the best poker player in the world. There's no chance you know his name. He's one of the best poker players I've ever seen. He made millions of dollars trying to be the best poker player in the world. Trying to become the best poker player in the world is not a bad goal.

But let me ask you something. When I told you no one knows my friend's name, how did you feel? When I told you there's no clear consensus as to who the best poker player is, how did you feel?

If you thought, "Wow, that sucks," that means you're looking for recognition.

We all want recognition. If we told our parents, "Hey I just graduated from med school!" and they ignored us, we would think they were borderline abusive. No rational observer of that interaction would find your wanting recognition to be odd. If you truly did become the best poker player in the world, it's only human that you'd want someone to recognize your achievement.

Let me ask you another question.

When you were reading the lines above, did you skim the parts about recognition? Did you focus in on how my friend had made millions of dollars?

You, my friend, are motivated by money.

This also is not a bad thing.

In American culture there is this weird stigma around money. On one hand, everyone is obsessed with it. I've been to many countries where no one asks you what you do for a living. Americans, however, seem to want to size you up financially the moment they meet you. They'll change how they speak to you based on your profession.

At the same time, no one talks about financial education. The schools don't teach you how to pay your taxes. Celebrities go broke all the time because they received zero financial education growing up.

In this book, you and I are going to speak as adults. If you find my discussing financial matters to be somehow belittling, please find another book. I am not going to be afraid to discuss money. You're curious about money in poker. I have answers. We will discuss them.

If you want to be the best poker player in the world, you should find the best competition you can afford. You should practice often.

If you want to be the richest poker player in the world, you should find the dumbest players on Earth who also have tons of money.

There was a time I wanted to be recognized as a great poker player. I was miserable. I was trying to prove myself in big tournaments versus players who were excellent. At the end of the day, flips decided most of our fates. I had no control over that. Humans do not like it when they have no control over their future.

Then, I discovered money was what actually motivated me. I found softer games. My life rapidly improved. No one knew what kind of money I was making anymore, but who cares? Was recognition going to buy me a new cellphone? Was recognition going to help me take my girl on vacation?

No. In the real world, recognition doesn't help much. Money is what gets things done.

People say money doesn't buy happiness. I guess poor people then are the happiest people.

You know what solves a lot of problems? Money.

I didn't get proper dental care growing up. With money, I was able to walk into the best dentist's office I could find in New York City.

My girl never saw Paris. Money showed her Paris.

I messed up my back. I know a hundred working men who hurt their back and never could afford to fix it. I had the money to fix mine.

My sister once suddenly lost her job. Money was what calmed her down.

My mother got kicked out of an apartment recently. She didn't do anything wrong. The owner suddenly sold the property. You know what got my mother into a new apartment quickly? Money. Money paid for the movers, paid for the cleaners, paid the first and last, and paid for her new furniture.

As we already heard from Joey Knish: "I'm not playing for the thrill of victory here. I owe rent, alimony, child support. I play for money. My kids eat."

Recognition doesn't pay for all those things. Having people like you or recognize you as a great poker player doesn't help your family. It's nice if you're recognized. Everyone wants to be admired, but it's not necessary.

If you're motivated by money, then your job is to get into a game with the most money possible.

Ninety percent of your job is picking the right table.

There are D-list celebrities up in the Hollywood Hills who have made more money from poker than I will in my entire life. Why? Because they read a poker book once. That, and they play against moron celebrities with millions of dollars to spend.

Those D-list celebrities are doing the only thing that matters. They play for money. They find tables with lots of loose money floating around.

I can't tell you how many great poker players I've met who busted themselves through terrible game selection. Someone will be throwing an absolute party at \$2/\$5 but they just have to play \$5/\$10.

If you're playing tournament poker, table selection is mostly done for you. Unless you're playing large buy-ins or turbos, there are generally enough bad players in a large field to justify the buy-in.

In cash games you need to hunt. You need to find weak sites. You need to find cardrooms with whales. You need to work your way into private games.

Sometimes, you will see an edge that no one else is seeing. Some guys might play decent poker when the stacks are big but are prone to gamble when someone shoves a short stack. In this case, you want to buy-in short and shove your premiums.

How can you identify a loose cash game? Look for tons of limping. Look for goofy hands constantly winning big pots. Raising and reraising is not good. Silence is not good.

If you can find the right game, be patient, and pay attention, you'll be 90% of the way to winning poker.

## CHAPTER 4

# DOUBLE DOWN WHEN THE GETTING'S GOOD

### Execute

A truly talented boxer is a sight to behold.

Have you ever seen one of these trained killers? They come in shredded to the gods. Their body is their armor. They move with such grace.

What people don't understand about boxing is that it's closer to fencing than barbarism. Technically, to win a boxing match, you don't have to land a single hard shot. Boxing rounds have been won without a single punch being thrown. The sport is about tricking your opponent into positioning himself poorly. You do that largely through footwork. There is a scoring area in boxing. If you touch your opponent in that area with any kind of punch, while avoiding his blows, then you will win on the scorecards.

There are two types of fighters in boxing. There are boxers and there are punchers. The public loves the guys with power. Mike Tyson was far from the best boxer of all time, but the whole world still knows his name. Boxers are guys akin to Floyd Mayweather Jr. They expertly hit the scoring area of an opponent and get out before they're touched themselves.

The most truly terrifying fighters in the world are the guys who can box and punch. They will constantly keep their distance from their opponent. They will touch the scoring area just enough to piss off their opponent. Then, one of the greatest moments in all of sports will occur.

The other fighter will realize that he cannot outbox the masterful tactician. He will decide to go for broke. He will abandon his defense and brawl.

If the boxer is paying attention, he will see the exact second his opponent abandons his defense. In that second, he will throw the biggest shot of the night. That is when his opponent will fall. That is when the bright lights will flash. That is when the match is over.

In no limit hold'em, you will be boxing most of the time. You will raise in late position to pick up the blinds. You will be continuation betting to pad your stack. You will be folding when the angle just isn't right. You will be protecting your jaw. One misstep in no limit hold'em can lead to a knockout. You have no choice but to be cautious.

But there will come a moment when your opponent leaves his jaw unguarded. This is your chance to end the entire session. If you do not go for the kill at that moment, you're not playing cards. You're playing to hit the flop. It's no different from Pai Gow.

This is the fourth biggest mistake poker players make. When the odds are in their favor, they do not pump up the pot.

I want you to imagine a sportsbook. You know that the Seattle Sounders are playing a friendly versus Manchester United that day. You decide to put some money on the match because your friends are watching it.

To your astonishment, the odds are even money between these two clubs. This makes zero sense. Obviously, no club from Major League Soccer can hold a candle to Manchester United.

Before the sportsbook can change anything, you ram the max bet in there on Manchester United.

Now, let's pretend in some alternative universe Manchester United didn't send their best guys and the Seattle Sounders have the match of their lives. Would you have made a bad bet?

Absolutely not. That's just an act of God at that point. You'll take that bet every day of your life.

The same thing occurs in no limit hold'em. You'll see a guy who is opening constantly. He's opened some real clunkers. Unsited broadways. Suited two-gappers. Just junk. Any position works for him.

He opens again. You look down at A-Qo. What do you do?

Many guys will flat here. Why? "What do I do if I three-bet and he four-bets?!"

Typically, when recreational-style players who open a ton four-bet they have the hand. Ask yourself, "Does he do this with A-Jo?" If the answer is "not likely," just fold.

But what is going to happen there 90% of the time? He's going to call



with whatever piece of shit he opened. He's out of position. You're in position. You can take some cards off if you want a four-card flop. You can jack up the price if you hit. You're Manchester United. This clown is Division 3 Paraguayan soccer.

Could he win? Sure. Weird stuff happens. They could play anti-soccer and win on penalty kicks. Anything can happen.

Is it likely they'll win over time? Absolutely not. He's calling you with A-Jo, A-10o, A-Js, A-10s, A-9s, A-8s, A-7s, A-6s, A-5s, A-4s, A-3s, A-2s, K-Qo, Q-Jo, Q-10o, K-Qs, Q-Js, Q-10s, and Q-9s. Those are all hands you obliterate. You're also in position. If he wants to run this bet, we'll do it all day baby.

Sometimes you'll take this bet and lose three times in a row. Sometimes people at the table will chortle because you keep three-betting and it keeps not working.

Ignore them.

These guys all want to play the same brand of poker. They're saying: "I'll raise with anything I want to see the flop with and you can call with anything you want to see the flop with! From that point, we'll make our big decisions. If any of us loses a pot then we won't have to feel bad about ourselves, because at the very least we'll have the excuse that we hit the flop. Let's play this game forever!"

Forget that. When he opens up his defense, you send the straight right hand to his jaw. Once you hit the board, do not stop betting! Ninety percent of these guys can't bluff post-flop! They'll fold their high cards, call with their pairs, and raise their two pair or better. If he's calling you then he's probably got a garbage pair. Charge him!

# CHAPTER 5

## LIVE FOR THE KILL

### Most People Don't Want to Win

Most people don't actually want to win.

Most people want to play perfectly all the time.

The most common mistakes poker players make are these:

They aren't patient. They play too many hands. They throw away money seeing flops with weak hands.

They don't pay attention. They don't take advantage of free information that they can cash in for real money later.

They don't find good games to play in. They don't look for the money. They play for glory. They play hoping that one day they'll walk into the card-room and everyone will stare in awe. "Did you see him? There goes Dennis Fucking Pedersen."

They don't double down when they have the best hand. Instead of playing a huge pot with a better hand in position heads-up they instead consent to a multiway pot where everyone can run down their hand.

The final huge mistake poker players make is they don't actually play to win. They don't go for the kill. They're not out for the money. They play to be perfect.

If you can fix every mistake I discussed above, you will be a winning poker player. The rest of this book will be used to pad your pocketbook. But those mistakes are the biggest ones. If you don't correct them, they will bury you. And the error we're about to discuss is the worst mistake any poker player could make.

If you're playing to be perfect, then you'll never make money at this game.

No limit hold'em is about winning every pot you can, but also still having the presence of mind to understand when you can't win a pot. It is a delicate balancing act. No player in history has ever walked that line perfectly.

Most guys won't even try to walk that line. If they push the other players around at the table and it doesn't work out for them, they know they are going to be mocked.

Most guys retreat into the same game. They raise too many hands. They call with too many hands. They see too many flops. They never have to feel bad about folding a great hand. They never reraise pre-flop because they're worried about playing a big pot when they miss the flop. They're worried about a pre-flop four-bet that never comes. They instead just call all the time so they never have to feel that insecurity. They play to hit the flop. Once they hit something, they rarely fold. Sometimes they win with this strategy. Sometimes they lose. But they never beat the rake long-term.

These are all egregious errors. But the worst of the lot we haven't even discussed yet.

Imagine this situation:

You have A♥-Q♠ in a cash game. You are 200 big blinds deep and so is everyone else.

You raise from the hijack to 4x the big blind. The big blind, a looser recreational player, calls. The board comes A♠-2♠-4♥. The big blind checks to you. You bet 6x. He calls.

The turn is the 4♣. He checks. What do you do?

Let's say you bet 11x. He calls.

The river comes the 7♠. He checks. What do you do?

Many people check here. They don't want to bet and then face a check-raise.

Why be afraid of that? Nine out of 10 guys don't even know how to bluff here.

If he was bluffing, what hand would he have? What could he be bluffing with?

When I ask you questions in this book it is a good idea to look away from the pages and actually consider them. Research has shown that people who do that retain more of the information.

You're already here anyway. You might as well get something out of it.

The final board is A♠-2♠-4♥-4♣-7♠. What hand could he be bluffing with? He didn't check-call you on the flop with king high to check-call you on the turn with king high just to check-raise you on the river and make your

life a living hell. Nobody cares about you that much.

He would have to be turning a weak ace into a bluff. When was the last time you turned a weak top pair into a bluff? I'm being serious. Try to think of the last situation. Where were you? What were the circumstances that led you to doing that?

If you can't think of an occasion where you turned top pair into a bluff that's okay. Many people have never done it. Most of the time, you are trying to show down top pair. Most of us don't ever think to turn the hand into a bluff.

But that's exactly the point. This gent probably isn't thinking of that either. The way to play this river is straightforward. We bet. If he raises, then we fold.

If you're worried about the flush draw there, let me ask you something. How many combinations of flush draws does he have?

If you don't want to get value from weaker top pairs, let me ask you something. How many combinations of weak top pair does he have?

If we don't know the answers to these questions, we should ask ourselves how exactly we're going to face this river. This is one of the most important decisions of our entire session. The average win rate of a good cash game player online could be seven big blinds per 100 hands. In this one situation we are weighing whether to fire 20+ big blinds. This is going to change our session mightily.

Fortunately, you don't have to do much to get some rudimentary numbers here. There are several poker calculators on the market. They'll count the combinations for you. The one I like to use is Flozilla.

I can't describe to you how cool these hand calculators are. When I started playing in the early 2000s you had to do most calculations by pen and paper. It was cumbersome. I made mistakes constantly. Now, with \$30 and a willingness to watch tutorial videos, you can start ranging your opponents much more effectively.

Advanced mathematics in no limit hold'em is important to learn once you start playing better opposition. I have multiple friends who teach me about GTO. But, truthfully, a simple handle on the fundamentals will crush many loose recreational players.

This is a situation where knowing basic combination counting math will help you a great deal.

The problem poker players have when they only play to learn is they visualize ranges inaccurately. Right now, I'll tell you how I'll range this guy. You

visualize it in your head. See if you can spot the issue.

We assume our opponent probably would have three-bet A-K pre-flop, so we rule those hands out. We have him calling pre-flop with broadways, suited gappers, off-suit aces, 10-10 and below, and suited kings. By the river, he's given up everything that's not top pair or better. He folded his smaller pairs by the turn, we'll assume. He's slow-playing everything two pair or better just to make our life more difficult. He is never leading a flush when he hits it on the river. He is never check-raising a flush draw earlier in the hand. He didn't check-raise a four on the turn to get value from it.

Right there, that's a lot of "ifs." As you can see, it's far more likely he'd lead some flushes, raise some fours, but still check with the intention to call if he had top pair. That helps us. But to make sure we're not playing poorly, let's make his range as scary as possible.

On the river we now think he has A-Js, A-10s, A-9s, A-8s, A-7s, A-6s, A-5s, A-4s, A-3s, A-2s, A-Qo, A-Jo, A-10o, A-9o, A-8o, A-7o, A-6o, A-5o, A-4o, A-3o, A-2o for top pair.

For made flushes we think he has K-Js, K-10s, K-9s, K-8s, K-6s, K-5s, K-4s, K-3s, J-10s, J-9s, J-8s, 10-9s, 10-8s, 10-6s, 9-8s, 9-6s, 8-6s, 8-5s, 6-5s, 6-4, 6-3s, 5-4s, 5-3s, 4-3s.

For other value combinations we have 4-4, 2-2, 6-4s, 5-4s, 4-3s, K-4s. That four presents some problems.

No one visualizes ranges in their mind this well. When they're at the table, everything turns into a blob in their mind. When the pressure is on, they don't even list the hands in their head. If they were more able to take their time and list the hands in their head, they would essentially be reading the preceding paragraphs.

If you're arguing with me about the range, please realize that is not the point. I'm not saying the ranging is 100% correct. You never know anything with complete certainty in no limit hold'em. I want an example for you to look at. Nothing more. Nothing less.

What is the issue when you visualize a range this way, even if you were close to exact accuracy?

You're counting each hand as one. You're visualizing A-Js individually and K-Js individually. But that's not how this works. There are two combinations of A-Js you can make when we can see the other two aces between the board and our hand. There is only one way to make K-J of spades. Therefore, you should visualize two A-Js and one K-Js.

How many combinations of K-10 of spades are there? Again, one. How

many combinations of A-Jo are there? This one is much more difficult. You need to combine all the unsuited jacks and aces you haven't seen. It adds up to six combinations.

This is a basic hand reading fundamental that most players screw up all the time. It's not their fault. They have never used a poker calculator to count all the combinations. They have never taken a deck of cards and sat there with the flop spread out on their carpet while they tried to come up with all the other combinations.

Most recreational players are interested in poker because they like to play poker. They do not want to study the game. This is understandable. Study is hard. Sitting at your desk drinking a cup of coffee while you analyze just how badly you butchered a hand is not fun. Getting back into the game to get your money back is much more enjoyable.

But you don't have to study that much to understand these concepts. There are far more ways to make top pair with an unsuited kicker than nearly any other value hand. Every flush combination you're counting here is one. Additionally, people like to fast-play their big hands. There's a good chance your opponent would have led the river, fearing that you would check back your ace. It is less likely that your opponent would lead a weak ace. He is probably hoping for a cheap showdown.

If your opponent would have possibly played their best hands differently, then you can't even count all their combinations. It's more likely they have those junk pairs.

Even if your opponent has all their value combinations in this example they still are weighted towards bad top pairs. Out of the 112 combinations your opponent could have on the river, 66 of them are a weak pair.

You could be asking a good question right now. "What if I think he's folding a weak ace on this river but calling or check-raising me with his flushes?"

That's a great question! If your opponent is a tough customer, then that absolutely could be the case. But remember at the beginning of this hand we said he was a recreational player. Recreational players struggle to fold top pair on the river. In fact, what is truly bonkers is to see the random things recreational players will call you with when you fire this river. I've been shown 5-5, K-Jo, etc. Of course, this has happened online where I could look in the hand history and see my opponent's hand even when they muck, and there's less of an embarrassment factor online, but it's hard to believe live players are playing any better.

Additionally, recreational players tend to not be great at check-raising

rivers for value. That doesn't always help you on this river. Sometimes they check-call a made flush instead of raising it for value. But many of them will also lead their fours on the turn and made flushes on the river. That makes your opponent's range on the river almost exclusively weaker top pairs that you destroy.

Regardless of how you exactly range this gent, chances are you've got him smoked. You must bet to get the money.

But many guys won't do that. If you look at a database of online hands you can filter for all the triple barrels. It is astonishing. Sometimes a guy will play 500,000 hands and he'll have six whole triple barrels for value with top pair. Every single one of them is top pair, top kicker. No draw ever comes in. The board never pairs. No risk. No hurt feelings.

There was a study years ago. They gave kids math problems that they could easily solve given their grade level. When the kids finished the exam the researchers said, "Wow, you're so smart!" They then gave the kids math problems that were much tougher. The kids were terrified to reveal themselves as not intelligent. They decided they just didn't want to play the game anymore. They quit.

Interestingly, if you told another group of kids "Wow, you worked so hard!" then gave them the tougher math problems, they would keep working. Some of them even solved the math problems that were beyond their grade level.

There was another experiment. They brought a person into a room. In one corner of the room there was a basket. The game was to try to throw bean bags into the basket for cash prizes. There was a shot close to the basket, good for a dollar. There was a manageable free throw that paid \$5. Then, there was a moonshot on the other side of the room that was good for \$20.

The best value for the difficulty level was the free throw, but a large number of people didn't go with that shot. They'd take the half-court shot. If they missed, they'd go, "Who cares? I wasn't even trying." Others took the lay-up because it was so easy. A ton of people didn't take the realistic free throw.

Why do I tell you about all these experiments? Because it reveals human nature.

We would like to think we are more logical as adults. Yet, I'm sure every one of us can think of several occasions in our life where we behaved illogically. There are a lot of actions that we wish we could take back.

If we were truly rational creatures then marketing wouldn't be a thing.

Every advertisement would simply list the benefits of a product and the price. They wouldn't show an artificially inflated price slashed down. There'd be no indicators of what group you would fit into if you bought the product. There would be none of that.

Look at all the products in your house. Can you honestly say that marketing didn't affect you when you bought these items?

Did you ever get fired up by a news story which, two weeks later, you learned was nonsense? You saw the whole video. You saw the reporter manipulated the facts. Whatever. You learned you were duped.

The hardest part about teaching poker players is that most adults believe they are completely rational. If that was true, we would never make mistakes. We'd never stay in relationships past their expiration date. We'd never yell at our kids. We'd never stay in a job we had outgrown. We would never sit through a movie we knew was awful 45 minutes in.

This river I am discussing right here is the entire point of no limit hold'em. The game is about taking your opponent's chips. Preferably, you'd like to take all of them. That can happen in one pot. That can happen in 100 pots. But your goal is to get all those chips.

If you are in a situation where you are reasonably sure that you have the best hand and you do not bet, then you are not playing to win. You are playing for fun, glory, or something else. I don't know what you're playing for, but it's not money. I would have to put a gun to the head of a poor man here before he checked that river.

Why do people not bet here? Why do people check the turn to manage the size of the pot? Why do people check back that river? It's simple to play. You bet. If he raises, you fold. He's a recreational player. If there's one thing you can gamble on, it's recreational players struggling to check-raise-bluff rivers.

People check there because, if they're being honest with themselves, they play poker for an escape. We all get a dopamine high when we turn over the best hand and the pot is pushed our way. Our boss might be chewing our ass out at work but here we're top dog. We're almost positive we'll win this hand if we check. Why risk getting check-raised? If we check back and he has the flush, we can say, "Damn it, I knew you had it." If we have the best hand, we can turn our hand over and quietly take the pot. Someone whispers "nice hand" to us. Thank you. It was a nice hand.

If we bet here for value and the guy check-raises us, then the pain starts. It doesn't matter what we do at that point. We're screwed emotionally.



Let's say we fold to a check-raise. The human mind abhors an open loop. Why do you think Netflix ends every episode of its shows with a cliffhanger? Then, it starts playing the next episode. Netflix does that because its designers know you'll keep watching. You need to know the answer to the cliffhanger question. You'll watch for just a few more minutes. Oh, wait, what the hell? It's 2:00 AM? Shit, I have work tomorrow!

It's the same thing here. IS HE BLUFFING ME? DID I JUST COST MYSELF ALL THAT MONEY?

Some people will call just to know what the guy has. They'll pay real money they could also trade for goods and services just so they can sleep at night.

If you fold and he shows you the bluff, it's the worst feeling on Earth. Now everyone at this table knows the truth. "I suck at poker! I'm not top dog at work or here. No matter where I am I'm getting worked!"

What if you value bet and he just calls you with a four? You'll look like such a dunce! Why would you bet that hand? You could just check!

Financially this bet makes total sense. Emotionally it's a train wreck. If we're hoping to feel like top dog when we play poker, this a great way to ruin that.

I can't tell you how many sessions I have had where I value bet the second-best hand three or four times in a row. Then, I will three-bet a good hand for value, only to get four-bet. I fold. I three-bet another hand in a good position. I continuation bet the flop. My opponent calls. I have nothing. I check back the turn. I fold on the river when I still have nothing.

I'm playing to maximize my wins, but in that moment everyone at the table thinks I'm a moron. Then, they get a free lunch. They don't even have to flop top pair and show it down to feel like top dog. They don't need to have a pot pushed to them. They can feel superior just by bringing up what a dumbass I am. They can gloat. "Oh, look at you trying," seems to be the message they are sending.

Does this suck? Yes, of course it sucks. No one likes being mocked. But again, it flies in the face of logic. When you watch crushers play poker on TV they're ALWAYS viciously value betting and three-betting. Ninety-nine percent of the poker-playing public will watch that and then go play at their cardroom just to see flops. They raise pre-flop only because they don't want to be raised off their limp. They cold call an open raise so they can see the flop. They check back streets of play so they can show down their hand and feel good about themselves. It is the exact opposite of what they see the

pros on TV doing.

That's not to say there aren't occasions where you should pump the brakes or allow your opponent to bluff. There are. It's just that if you're doing it constantly, that means you have a bias. You have to ask yourself why that is.

When I used to pot control too much it was because I didn't want to feel bad about myself. No one was going to bluff me! I wouldn't even give them the chance!

I was hoping for a cooler to give me all my chips in every session. I was like that guy throwing the bean bag from the other side of the room. If I got it in, I could gloat about my incredible shot. If I missed, I could always say, "I wasn't even trying!" My ego was intact no matter what.

When I was 19, I didn't want to prove to myself that I actually was a dumbass. I wanted to think of myself as some great professional poker player who had outwitted society. Ha ha! My girlfriend might have moved on to some guy she met in med school, and I might still be eating gas station burritos every day while I play cards online, but at least no one is bluffing me! I still don't work for anyone! Ha!

Once I started focusing on making money rather than simply feeling good about myself, that's when I started doing much better in poker.

I have never had a student start playing to win who didn't start doing better.

The key is to see every bet, call, raise, or fold as an investment opportunity. The other players are there, sure. But they're almost like characters in a video game. They don't matter. What matters is your assessment of the situation at hand. You're never 100% sure about anything. You're making the best guess you can with the information available to you. You're never going to be flawless. You're always going to make mistakes. Your job is to make smaller mistakes than the other guy.

The mother of all bad mistakes in this game is trying to play perfectly instead of trying to win. If you go for the big value bets constantly, you will be able to cover up numerous wrongs.

This can't be overstated enough. That is why I am taking so much time on this section.

There was a time in my life where I was worried about failure. I was like those kids who were worried about exposing themselves as not smart. I had never done well in sports. I had never done well academically. I had issues with my weight. I had very little going for me. Needless to say, intelligent

women were not exactly into me at this time. I felt pretty bad about myself. When I played I didn't play to win. I played to feel better about myself. If I failed at poker, I didn't know what I had left.

Everything changed once I stopped feeling sorry for myself and caring what other people thought. Everything changed once I actually started focusing on winning.

An entire book could be written on the winner's mentality, but let me give you a few basics. What I discovered was that cynicism is cowardice. Cynicism means you never have to be wrong. You never get your hopes up, so it's okay if everything goes to hell.

I thought I was a rational person, who made decisions based on facts. The problem is that human beings are not great at recognizing what is factual. All our information is filtered through people. People are easily misled.

Let's say you walk down the street near your house one day. A rock flies out of nowhere and hits you in the nuts.

The next day you walk down the same street. Again, your nuts take a knockout blow. You double over.

You walk down another street. On this street your nuts remain untouched. The next day you walk down this street again. Blissfully, you realize once again nothing is flying at your family jewels.

In this scenario, you have no idea what is going on. You are lacking facts. But you would still be foolish if you didn't walk down the street that left you safe.

This is what someone eventually taught me: My perspective is not accurate. Your perspective is not accurate. There are more than 7 billion perspectives on Earth. What are the chances yours or mine is the correct one?

All we can do is assess results.

At some point I recognized that everyone who was cynical like me was losing in life. They were walking down the wrong street. They were afraid to try because they didn't want to have their fear of losing come true. They might stand right next to the basket and throw the bean bag in. They might tell people "I'm not even trying" and throw it from the other side of the room. But none of them were really trying or succeeding. Their negativity was a poor mask for how afraid of inadequacy they were.

At the same time, I realized my friends who identified as winners were much happier than I was. They made more money. They had more friends. Sure, a lot of what they believed didn't seem to be 100% factual, but what do I care? I wanted the results. I can choose my perspective. I have that power.

From that point on I started watching sports more and following winners. I got into their routines. I got into their mental game. I hadn't watched sports on television for nearly a decade because I had been so busy with poker. But I knew I had to change how I was looking at my game and my life. I needed to identify with winners. I needed to surround myself with winners' mentalities.

I read compulsively. I read books every day that discussed the mental game, winning, or mastering oneself.

That's when the dimensional shift happened in my game.

Whatever you focus on, you'll end up seeing more of it.

Have you ever thought about buying a certain model of car? Then, you go out into town and you see that car everywhere?

Your mind is overwhelmed all the time. It can only show you so many things you're seeing.

If you're obsessed with all the ways you can lose, and feel bad about yourself, that's all you're going to see. That might help you avoid some of these mistakes, but it's not going to help you win.

But if you start believing you'll get a heroin high when you get paid off by someone with third pair after you value-bet-jam top pair on a river, you will find that opportunity. Clues will start presenting themselves to you constantly. Every day you will act as if you're building up to that opportunity. You will eat differently. You will prepare differently.

If you decide to pick a perspective in which you win more often, you will start working harder to find those knockout opportunities. You will be dumbfounded by all the information and clues you were missing.

On this river, you have the best hand most of the time. The recreational player is going to call too much. You want to pad your stack. You fire. If he raises, you're 90% sure he can't do that with a bluff. You take those odds.

Human beings abhor uncertainty. Don't you find it fascinating that on every hot button topic, people have exactly one of two views? Generally, if an issue has proponents on each side, then both sides have some kind of argument. You would assume that most people's opinion would be somewhere between the two viewpoints. But that's not the case. Look at Facebook. People will swing wildly one direction or the other just so they can feel the security of certainty. They can't accept other evidence. They want to be secure in their illusion.

You will have to learn to live with uncertainty. You won't get to show down your hands and see every flop. You're going to have to live with the fact that you might get bluffed, because most often you're going to be right

about value betting. You're going to have to live with the fact that when you three-bet, some small percentage of the time you're going to get four-bet bluffed. You will have to live with not knowing if you would have hit the flop. You will have to live with all of this because, in general, when you value bet in pots against passive players, it is a good idea. You will live with this tension because generally it's a better idea to double down on your bets when you likely have the best hand in position.

## CHAPTER 6

# SLAUGHTER THE BIG BLIND

### The Weakest Player at Every Table

When a good regular player cold calls you on the button, what percentage of hands does he have?

It's 6% to 12%. Somewhere in that range.

When that same decent regular player calls you from the big blind, what percentage of hands does he have?

It's 30% to 50%. Somewhere in that range.

Who is more likely to make a garbage hand that you can value bet to death?

The big blind. The big blind is going to make tons of garbage pairs.

If you flop a good top pair versus the big blind, you should be thinking about how to get three streets of value. If you flop second pair with top kicker, you should be thinking three streets.

Most people want to see flops. They raise so no one raises them off their limp. They cold call pre-flop instead of three-betting so that no one can four-bet them. Then, they see the flop. They try to hit a big hand. Then, they bet.

This sounds like a great idea until you realize everyone else has the same plan. Most of the pots will end up multiway. In the 2020s, people have gathered that one pair doesn't mean much if serious money starts going into a multiway pot. If you flop two pair or better in a multiway pot, you're only going to be playing for stacks with another huge hand.

You and everybody else in the cardroom are essentially trading coolers at that point. You are taking turns feeling like top dog before you go back to your normal life. If one of you loses? "I had two pair/three of a kind/a flush.

What am I supposed to do?" No harm, no foul. Your losses are explainable. No one blames you. You don't blame yourself.

If one of you wins, great.

No one feels bad about themselves. No one ever gets better, makes money, or beats the rake either, but who cares? Everyone here is playing to feel better about themselves and everyone gets a turn to do that.

If you want to make money at no limit hold'em, then you are going to have to learn to make money with pairs.

If you raise 38.2% of your hands from the button, for example, you will have an over-pair or better 9.12% of the time. You will have top pair or better 23.1% of the time. If you can learn to get serious money from your top pairs, then you will be expanding your potential for profit considerably.

We've already outlined in the previous chapters the biggest mistakes poker players make.

Now, we're going to give you a little finesse. Let's discuss where we can make the easiest money.

The worst player at any table is typically the big blind. The guy can be an excellent poker player from every other position except that one spot. Everyone in the big blind seems to have a brain fart and not realize that passive poker is awful.

Imagine this: A player limps in from middle position with J-2s. The button behind him raises. The limper flats out of position with his J-2s.

The board comes K-J-5 rainbow. The limper checks. The button bets. The limper calls.

The turn is an offsuit 4. The limper checks. The button bets again. The limper calls.

The river is an 8. The limper checks. The button bets. The limper tanks.

Regardless of what the limper does at this point you're probably thinking, "Wow, this guy is pretty bad at poker."

But people will do the same thing from the big blind and no one bats an eye! The button raised pre-flop? Well, I'm getting a discount. I'll see the flop with J-2s. Oh, I flopped a pair! I'll check-call that. The turn is more or less a brick. The button could be bluffing when he bets here again. He could have a straight draw. I'll call one more time. Oh, what do I do on this river?

The only difference between those two scenarios is that the player paid the big blind involuntarily. Everything else is the same. The button could be playing the exact same range for all we know. The positions are the same. The board is the same. The passive play is the same.

Why one of these plays is socially acceptable at the poker table and the other gets mocked is beyond comprehension. Both players are losing money versus a vicious value bettor.

Making money in position while playing no limit hold'em is child's play. Making money out of position in no limit hold'em is incredibly difficult. You are not a coward if you constantly get the hell out of the pot when you are out of position.

If you are going to call from the big blind, you are going to need to bring firepower to the party. You have to turn your pairs into bluffs. You have to check-raise bluff. You have to donk lead bluff. You have to have some kind of hand. You need a combination of all of this not to lose your ass off playing huge pots out of position with weak hands.



## CHAPTER 7

# SLAUGHTER THE THREE-BET CALLER

### The Other Weak Player at the Table

If you raise and a good, solid regular cold calls, what percentage of hands does he have? It's 6% to 12% of hands.

If that same player raises from the cutoff, what percentage of hands does he have? It's 20% to 30%.

If you three-bet from the button following this cutoff raise, does that reg ever want to fold? If you are in North America, Europe, Latin America, Australia, or anywhere where casual poker is played then the answer is probably no.

This is the second person at the table who is consistently playing poorly. This player could play well from every other position. However, when they get three-bet by the button, they do not play logically.

Many players open 20% or 30% of hands from the cutoff, hijack, and lojack. That gives you a ton of opportunities to three-bet exploit them.

You can three-bet them with a mediocre hand. However, if you're just learning to three-bet bluff, then you can start with any hand that beats their range.

You might think you have the ability to three-bet bluff, but the data shows most people can't. The average three-bet percentage in online low stakes poker is 6% (excluding three-bet shoves with a short stack).

If you have a catalog of your online hands, filter your three-bets with a condition of "all-in pre-flop false" on your filters. Most people discover they don't three-bet bluff nearly as much as they think they do. Worse, many

discover they don't three-bet for value either.

If someone is opening suited aces, suited gappers, suited connectors, and unsuited broadways then you can three-bet wide for value. For example, K-Jo might not be a hand you want to open from early position in a game where everybody is flatting you. But if one player has opened ahead of you with this wide range then you should three-bet that same hand.

This is what many new players do not understand. A-Jo is not a hand you want to play UTG when there are tons of players flatting you or three-betting you. The hand plays poorly out of position. It traditionally makes mediocre pairs which won't make money out of position. If the pot gets large, then your hand is probably not good.

However, that same weak A-Jo becomes immensely powerful if a normally decent player is opening and calling too much. If that player is opening A-A – 2-2, A-Ks – A-2s, K-Qs – K-9s, Q-Js – Q-9s, J-10s – J-9s, 10-9s – 10-8s, 9-8s – 9-7s, 8-7s – 8-6s, 7-6s – 7-5s, 6-5s, A-Ko – A-10o, K-Qo – K-10o, Q-Jo – Q-10o, J-10o then some surprising hands have a real equity edge. A-Jo has 54% equity. K-Qo has 50% equity, which means everything position affords you is gravy. Even a hand like 10-8s has 40% equity. You will have position the entire hand, so it will be easy to make up for that equity deficit if your opponent has weaknesses post-flop.

Is it likely that your opponent has weaknesses post-flop once you three-bet them? Absolutely. They should be folding too much to three-bets pre-flop because the general player outside of high stakes games doesn't three-bet enough. But if they do that then they won't get to see the flop and, as we've discussed, people hate not seeing the flop. They want to see if they'll hit it and, once the flop comes out, the mystery has been solved. If they hit the flop then they will continue. If they did not hit it, they will quietly fold. No more open loop in their head. They don't have to worry about what might have been.

Of course, any poker theorist or analyst will tell you, "Do not put your money in out of position with an inferior hand." This is poker theory 101. The player in position can choose to take free cards whenever the out-of-position flatter is unwilling to lead into the raiser. That describes 99% of players. This means the player in position is working with a four-card flop if they so choose whereas the out-of-position player is working with three. The in-position player can elect to have three betting rounds if they like their hand. This allows them to put more money in the pot. However, if their hand is mediocre, they can elect to create a post-flop hand with only two betting

rounds. This allows them to control the pot size.

This is a stupidly big edge.

When I started playing poker as a teenager, a much better player told me, "Just play all your big pots in position and you'll be fine."

At that age, I was about as sharp as a pound of wet leather. But I learned in high school about cheating from someone else's paper. If the person was smarter than me, I was not above stealing their techniques. I had no pride. I wanted money.

All I did start out was play my big pots in position. I had no post-flop game. I had no tilt control. I had no ability to hand read.

None of it mattered. I made money hand over fist.

If you play your big pots in position with generally superior hands, you will make money at no limit hold'em.

It has been more than a decade since the poker boom happened. If people were ever going to become intellectual tight-aggressive players, they would have done it by now.

There are tons of training sites out there that can improve your golf game. That doesn't change the fact that most people play golf to relax. They don't focus much when they play. That's not the point. The point is to enjoy a day away from the office while you stroll in the sun.

Most poker players are in it to enjoy themselves. Poker can get expensive the same way golf is expensive. That doesn't motivate people to get better. They are there to enjoy themselves.

Pay attention to how you live your life. Be conscious for one day. Notice how you are constantly looking for something to captivate and fascinate you. Email, social media, playing with the dog, talking to someone, television, work, a podcast, the list goes on. Have you ever forgotten your cellphone and then gotten in line for something? How bored did you feel? Did you realize how long it had been since you were truly bored?

Humans abhor boredom. That's why meditation is hard. We need something to hold our attention literally every second of the day.

At the poker table, our greatest enemy is ourselves.

Anybody reading this could become a professional poker player. All they would need is a desperate situation.

If you needed the money to live, then you would play the tightest you've ever played. You would wait for a big hand and bet the hell out of it. You wouldn't be fighting boredom. Terror would be ruling the day.

We run into problems at the poker table when we get bored and we have

money to spare. At the beginning of a session, we can watch the game on TV. We can talk to our favorite dealers. We can check our text messages on our phone. But all of that only works for so long. At some point we're going to want to get involved.

Even if you *did* have your cellphone while you were standing in line, was it enough? You still ran out of things to do, correct?

That's exactly what happens to everyone at the poker table. After about an hour they have run out of things to do on their cellphone. They want something to happen. They're bored.

Then they get dealt a hand in middle position. Okay, it's decent. K-8s. "It's the best hand I've seen in a while," they say to themselves, as if that means anything.

They raise. Then some asshole reraises them in position.

They just KNOW at that point the guy is messing with them. They're going to call and take the flop.

The board comes K-6-2 rainbow. Bingo!

They check and the jerk continuation bets. They call easily.

The turn is a 9. They check.

The guy on the button bets again.

They call without thinking. It's top pair. They're not folding on the turn.

The river comes another 2. They check.

The player in position takes a few seconds to gather himself. Then he fires a large bet.

How often do you think anyone folds K-8 here?

The answer is rarely. Assuming it's not for all their chips, and that they're able to muck if they lose, then they will call nearly every time.

Why? You don't even need to ask why. Scientists have repeatedly proven that people make decisions based on their gut and retrospectively construct logic to justify it. It's all bullshit. If you want to learn more about this read *The Righteous Mind*, *Thinking Fast and Slow*, *Irresistible: The Rise of Addictive Technology* and other books in that vein. You can also Google "Psych in Real Life: Choice Blindness" to get a briefer lesson on it.

There was a hilarious study. Some retail analysts found that 95% of people in stores would leave if their ass brushed up against another person's ass. The analysts started interviewing these people after they left the store. None of them said they left because they felt uncomfortable having brushed up against some other person's ass. They felt weird, they left, and then they created a reason. "I'm late for something" or "I didn't see anything I liked."

Have you ever folded to a river bet and then been awake at night wondering if you got bluffed?

Most people subconsciously don't want to deal with that. They know that if they call, they can construct some reason for calling, the same way those people invented reasons for running from stores after rubbing asses. "I thought he had [insert draw here]" or "I'd seen him do [insert crazy play here] earlier." Then, they don't have to stay awake with an open loop in their minds.

If they call and you are bluffing, they get their high. It rushes through the veins.

I have looked at thousands of players' databases. The average guy was not folding there 80% of the time.

It is important to note that there was a ton of deviation between those numbers. Some guys never called a river bet without the goods. Some guys were more balanced. Other players had tighter ranges pre-flop. The average doesn't mean a ton here. But it points us in the right direction.

What was more revealing was examining every player's calls on the river. If you want to make a grown man cry, make him look at every one of his river calls one after another. There are times you have to call wide because of river odds, but many people overdo that.

It was rare to pull up someone's river calls and not find numerous strange, loose calls that made zero sense. If we were studying humans as an alien species then we would identify this as one of their psychological weaknesses.

Did you notice in the K-8s example hand how normal that hand looks? No one would blink an eye if that hand was played on television. Yet, what happened?

The guy played a HUGE pot OUT OF POSITION with a HORRIBLY weak hand. This is poker 101!

If you're the guy on the button who has noticed this guy is opening too much, then you could generate a 20 to 40 big blind pot in your favor with K-Q offsuit! How many people make that kind of money with that weak of a hand?

No one folds to your three-bets? Go larger! If he makes it 2.5x go to 10x or 12x. You'll be stunned how often the initial raiser still calls but cold calls behind you will be much less likely.

Now you can set up 50+ bb pots in your favor with K-Qo!

You might be thinking, "This play won't work in my games."

You might be right! If you play in Europe or on sites with primarily European regs then they will open good tight ranges and fold weak hands to

three-bets. They take the game very seriously over there.

In the United States, we grow up playing poker casually. When you are 8 years old, your parents will invite you to play a friendly game with other family members at a reunion.

I spent 10 years outside of the States once I graduated high school. Many of those years were spent in Europe. What surprised me overseas was how much chess was played. At gatherings you'd see chess being played instead of poker. If you met someone in Europe playing poker, they were often REALLY into the game. They were not casual fans. They knew the basics of tight aggressive strategy.

That's why game selection is so important. You can find casual players in Europe on sites tied to sportsbooks. Everyone plays terribly in live poker when they get bored, especially if the game is not high stakes. In North America everyone calls this three-bet too loose. In Latin America most people will do the same.

If you can game select, that is 90% of your job.

After that, you are isolating players who will play huge pots with you out of position.

Those players are typically anyone in the big blind and bored regulars who are opening too much because generally no one three-bets them.

Pay attention. Look at what they open. You see something that widens their range considerably, then attack. No one normally three-bets these players. It's considered a social trespass to break up the "let's see the flop" party in weak games. They do not have experience in defending themselves.

If you pay attention, stay patient, game select, isolate the weak ranges, and go for the river bet kill then you WILL make money at no limit hold'em.

## CHAPTER 8

# NOT PAYING ATTENTION TO PLAYERS ON YOUR LEFT

### The Most Important People to Notice

Let's recap the most important mistakes poker players make.

I put these at the front of the book because research indicates most people don't finish books. If you get just these details you'll make a lot of money at poker.

The biggest mistakes poker players make are:

Not paying attention and not staying patient. Trying to see too many flops and showdowns because they can't stand knowing they might have folded a potential winner.

Going pro when there is no reason to.

Not practicing good table selection.

Not increasing the size of the pot when they have an edge with their hand and position.

Not value betting because they're worried about trying to play perfectly and never feeling bad about themselves. Not playing to win.

Not isolating the two weakest players at the table for maximum profit. The two weakest players are weak regs who open and call three-bets with too many hands and pretty much anyone in the big blind.

Let's move on to discuss some more ways to help you pad your wallet.

When you sit down at a table, where should you turn most of your attention?

In short: to the players to your left.

You need to pay attention to them right away. Do they hold their cards a certain way when they're ready to fold? Are they fiddling with their chips? Do they look like they'd rather not touch a chip? Does it pain them to fold anything? Do they fold easily and without much deliberation? Do they look visibly annoyed when you open?

Pay attention. The people who make money in no limit hold'em play in position. You can find this in any statistical analysis of the game. When a guy plays a hand on the button, he will make much more than if he played the same hand in early position. When a poker player three-bets in position with a decent hand, it's difficult for him to lose money.

You need to be looking at the people to your left and asking yourself, "Are they going to three-bet me? What can I do to stop them?"

"Does this person like to fold? Are they indicating they are about to fold? Can I move up in position?"

You're looking at a weak big blind. You want to get to that player. Your next job is to look at the players to your left and determine how to get through them.

Are you opening too much? Are they going to do something? Do they look content to let you keep opening?

Sometimes you will sit at a table and the players to your left will let you work. They will be clean cut chaps. They will be content to fold.

Other times you will have guys who can play. If you keep opening ahead of them, they will feel they have to do something. They'll give away their feelings on the matter early. They'll show visible agitation when you open. They'll take their time folding. They'll keep looking down at their hand while they're wondering if there's still a way they can play.

If you're playing online, you will have to pick up on timing. If someone is automatically folding, that means they're looking at their hands. If there is a long time-bank on them every time it's their turn, it might mean this is a more casual player who wants to play each hand. After all, they didn't play poker this particular night to fold! This is someone you should pay attention to.

You still need to pay attention when you are out of the pot. Are your opponents cold calling with goofy weak hands? You will need to continuation bet more versus them if they cold call versus you. Are these players three-bet bluffing? Then you will need to take flops with them, check-raise sometimes with air, or four-bet bluff.

You can get information for free when you're not playing a hand. Tommy Angelo said it best: "This game is an information war." If you have a deadly



read on a guy, then it's like having the cards turned over. Would Mike McDermott have ever beaten Teddy KGB if he didn't pay attention to his Oreos?

Not every read is going to be deadly. Some just give you hints. This range is wider, this range is tighter, this person doesn't raise with that kind of hand, and so on. If you pay enough attention you can become like a detective. You will put the hints together to find the likely culprits.

If you're not paying attention to the hands you're not in, then you're not playing to win.

A desperate and hungry player would be wired during the hands he is not involved with. He wants the money that badly. You want to imitate that player.

If you're playing online, you can use hand replayers to watch the last hand. You can make it a habit if you're not playing many tables. When you're dealt a hand, you can replay the last hand at hyper speed before you do anything. This will help you track each hand in minimal time.

Pay attention to what the players to your left are doing. Do this always. Do they open too much? Do they limp too much? Do they call too much? Do they hint at when they are going to fold? Can you move up in position? If a particular site allows you to use a statistical display, then use it. Look at the numbers. Does an opponent fold a ton? Then start bulking up your opening range. Get to those big blind flatters who have no idea what they're doing. If they keep giving you that open lane, take it!

Never stop looking at the people to your left.

When you have a mediocre hand, pay attention to what the guy to your left does. You'll get guys who tip their hand all the time. They'll pay zero attention during most of the hands. Then, suddenly, you pause for a second and he is paying great attention to what you do.

Sometimes the opposite will happen. A guy will keep staring you down on every deal. Then, suddenly, he looks at his hand and pretends to pay zero attention to what you're doing. He's trying to help you raise.

None of this is 100% reliable. That is why you need to take the free information given to you when you're not involved in hands. It can all help you shade decisions. If you're on the fence about a particular play, these reads and statistics can be the tiebreakers. Adding this kind of information will allow you to play much more focused sessions.

Let's give you a hypothetical to see if you're getting this.

This happened in a real session I played.

I promise all the details I'm about to write have a point. Hang with me.

This is 2016. I woke up in Prague. I rented an apartment in the city for a

tournament series. I got out of bed. I turned off the TV I was watching the night before – NFL games on my RedZone international streaming package. I went into my galley kitchen and fixed some breakfast. The Czechs love their heavy sausages. I picked up some of them the night before from a local butcher. I cook the sausages with butter and mix them with eggs. I make an espresso shot and have it with my breakfast. I call an Uber and get to the cardroom.

I sit down at a World Poker Tour event. The player to my left is a fashionable pro on the tour who plays great no limit hold'em. He's on his cellphone exclaiming to himself, "Damn!" He laughs to himself. He clearly knows whatever he's momentarily upset about isn't a big deal.

What should you do at this point? What do you think I did?

If the guy seems friendly you should inquire, "Everything alright?"

"Yeah," he mutters, "I got some bets riding on the games today. I'm having a hard time getting updates though." He shows you his phone so you can see what he bet on. It's NFL football.

What should you do at this point?

You want to make nice with the people to your left.

You should give him your NFL streaming password.

I threw that paragraph of random details at you to see if you could pick out the one that was important.

"You want to watch the games? I have the international NFL streaming package," I said. He was ecstatic. "You have that?" NFL has different streaming packages for different parts of the world. I had the international version because I was living outside of the States at the time. This gent probably had the stateside version, which wouldn't work in Prague. If he wanted to watch the games that day, he'd have to hand over another \$100.

I gave him my password. He set up his laptop on a tray next to him. He played good cards for the remainder of the day, but any time he wanted to fold he knew he could always go back to watching NFL football. Do you think that made it easier or harder for me to play pots with weak big blind players that were to his left?

I ended up final tabling that World Poker Tour event. I can't say if making nice with a player to my left helped or not, but I'm sure it didn't hurt.

People get bored. When people get bored, they want to play hands they wouldn't normally play.

You want to make sure the players to your left are having a good time. If you're Daniel Negreanu, your personality can provide entertainment and help you get open-raises through. If you're not that affable, the least you can do

is dress presentably and be polite to the people on your left.

There is this study discussed in the book *The Righteous Mind* by Jonathan Haidt. I'm going to heavily paraphrase it here. If you want the full details of the study, I suggest you pick up that book.

People were asked to make a quick judgment call on a fairly neutral topic. They were then given 20 minutes to reason with themselves as to whether their initial judgment call was correct or not. They were instructed to take out a piece of paper and argue for or against their position. On one side of the paper, they would come up with reasons for why they were right. On another side of the paper, they'd list reasons for why they could be wrong.

It turned out that people were exquisitely talented at coming up with reasons for why they were right. The side of the ledger that helped them reason for their argument was filled. The side of the paper where they were supposed to reason against themselves was mostly empty. The same thing happened when people with higher IQs took the test. Nobody filled out the side of the ledger that brought up reasons why they were wrong. The more intelligent and educated people were just better at arguing their case. Nobody was good at telling themselves they could be wrong. No one wanted to change their opinion. No one wants to challenge their worldview because that means they are seeing the world incorrectly, which would mean that their safety is not guaranteed. People will make a judgment in less than two seconds and hang on to it for the rest of their lives.

What does this mean for us? People make snap judgments about you the second you sit down.

Ideally, you do not want the players to your left noticing you. You should not dress like you're going to rob a liquor store after the session is through.

Dress somewhat presentably. Be kind. I find the easiest thing to put on is a decent sweater. Sweaters are good for casinos, which traditionally get pretty cold. You can roll up your sleeves if it gets warm. Wear decent jeans, a nice sweater, and shoes as opposed to sandals. For whatever reason, in most of the world many people will consider you "dressed up" if you just avoid shorts and sandals.

Be kind to the people on your left. You don't want them feeling a thrill when they three-bet you because you've been a jerk to them. If they're watching a game, ask who is their team. If they win a pot say "nice hand." You don't have to do much to have your raises challenged more infrequently.

This is a game of inches. You need every edge you can get. Put yourself in position more. Avoid being out of position. Pay attention. This will take you far.

## CHAPTER 9

# BEING PETULANT CHILDREN

### The Silliest Mistake We All Make

I want you to imagine you're back at that sportsbook you visited earlier, and the Seattle Sounders are playing again. This time, two old friends are talking. They gamble often for fun. One is clearly inebriated.

"Hey, I want the Sounders in this friendly versus Barcelona," the inebriated one says.

"Ummm, okay, sure. You want 2-to-1 on it or what?"

"No, no. Straight up. Even money," he says burping out his Stella Artois. "I like the Sounders."

The less inebriated friend looks confused, but he tries to keep a poker face. "Okay, sure, let's run it. \$100?"

"\$100," the drunk one says. Then he puts his beer up in the air.

The more sober one puts his drink up. There's a look of concern on his face. Should he ask if his friend is okay?

They say "cheers" and clink their drinks together. The match starts.

A couple of hours later Seattle has unsurprisingly lost the friendly by eight goals. The drunk one goes, "Damn, I love Seattle's colors." He hands over \$100 to the more sober friend. The sober friend pockets the bill quietly.

The two friends walk off. You sit there confused. You go home later.

The next day you're in the same sportsbook. The friends are there again. The same guy is drunk and once again he makes a hilariously bad bet.

"I want South Korea in Olympic hockey," he says. Today he's knocking back screwdrivers.

"Umm, they're playing Canada today," his friend says. "What odds do you want?"

“No odds. Straight up. \$100?”

“Yeah, sure,” his buddy says.

A few hours later South Korea has lost and the lucky sober man is being paid \$100.

Imagine every day you go to this sportsbook. Every day you see the drunk man making a similarly foolish bet.

Two weeks later the drunk guy finally gets lucky and wins a bet. His sober friend goes, “God, you are so lucky! That was such a STUPID bet you made! How could you ever think that was a good idea?! What the hell were you thinking?”

The drunk gentleman says, “Friend, I’m wealthy. I come here to let off steam, drink some beers, and cheer for underdogs. You don’t have to mock me. I know who I am.” The man then walks off. You never see him again.

Who is the idiot in this equation?

If someone plays badly and wins, they are the equivalent of this guy. Even if they mock you after winning their bad bet, you should clap them on the back. “You got me that time! Nice hand, sir!”

If they are simply gambling politely for fun and you mock them? Ask yourself at that point if you’re really playing poker for money. Your ego got hurt here. Casinos don’t have an ego. That’s why they keep taking these bets and cheering when their whale wins.

If you play big pots in position with generally superior hands, you are the less inebriated friend in this equation.

Does your opponent check to you on every flop out of position when they call your three-bet? Then you are operating with a four-card flop whenever you’d like one and your opponent is operating with a three-card flop whenever you want to apply pressure. That is a huge edge.

Your opponents will play weak hands for similarly hilarious reasons. Did you laugh when you heard our intoxicated friend say he liked the Seattle Sounders’ colors? Why do you think people raise and call with 4-6 suited out of position?

Your job as the sober-minded friend is to be polite and take the action. Wish the gentleman well if they win. Make it fun.

If you cannot understand this, then you will not make money at no limit hold’em.

You’re never a lock in no limit hold’em. You’re pushing thinner edges.

If you’re going to win a hand 60% of the time in position, that still means 40% of the time you will lose. If I put 10 Dixie cups in front of you and put

a prize under four of them, I would look stupid if I said, “Oh my God, you’re so lucky!” if you randomly picked one of the cups with a prize. If you played the game again, won, and I got even more angry? How odd would that be? Does that seem logical?

Yet every day you play poker you’ll see someone have two continuation bets fail and they will throw a fit.

Every day you play poker you will see someone get three-bet three times in a row when they open. They will blow a gasket.

“Goodness gracious! Three times you got three-bet?! It’s almost like there’s eight of them and one of you!”

You ran into hands three times. That is what will have happened the overwhelming majority of the time.

Usually, no one is check-raise bluffing you. It’s hard to find people in almost any data set who are capable of that. If you are table selecting correctly then what probably happened is your opponents hit their bet. You took the New York Yankees. They took the Seattle Mariners. The Mariners had a good day. The end.

(I’m from Seattle, by the way, if any of you are getting angered by the Seattle jokes. I felt it was only fair to mock my home city when it came to these hypotheticals.)

In this book so far, we’ve discussed basic strategy to make money from no limit hold’em. If you ever manage to be so lucky as to find juicy private games with low rake, you could make money for a long time by simply applying the rules we’ve looked at so far.

But we had to discuss variance in this section because there’s only one way you could mess up playing in those private games. If you bitch and moan constantly in an otherwise friendly game, people tend not to like it. You might find the host conveniently forgetting to send you an invitation after a while.

If you tilt, that is totally normal. That is how humans are wired. It takes a long time to get over variance. It gets beaten out of you eventually, but it can be a long road to acceptance.

In the meantime, you will have to get good at keeping your mouth shut when you lose. You don’t have to say “nice hand.” Just stay quiet until you feel better. If you can’t calm down, just leave.

As the years go on, the time it takes you to return to level should shorten. But if it doesn’t happen like that, I recommend hiring a sports psychologist or mental coach. I got much better as a poker player once I started working with Tricia Cardner, John Wood, and Jared Tendler. At this point in my career,

I usually just laugh at variance.

This section above was not written for you. I wrote something similar for me years ago.

I did some studying and found out the human mind sucks at remembering statistics. It's an emotion-generating machine. It's not logical. Memory champions use stories to memorize the order of decks of playing cards. People who lose their emotional reasoning faculties through head trauma are unable to make decisions on anything. They can spend all morning deciding on what breakfast cereal to eat. Humans evolved to have emotions help drive them to survive. They use stories to memorize what is important and what is dangerous.

The story that was running in my mental software for years was, "I've worked my ass off to study poker. I deserve to win." Unsurprisingly, every time I lost and I was proven delusional I would get comically immature.

Once I learned through an absurd amount of reading how human minds actually absorbed concepts, I created this story of the sportsbook for myself.

Every time I lose a pot now I laugh to myself. I don't need to think of this fictional sportsbook anymore. I just imagine the lucky gambler being given these absurdly good bets but getting mad when he lost one. I imagine the faces of everyone else at the sportsbook staring at him.

Let me take that back. I can still get tilted deep in tournaments that take multiple days to play. But remembering this mental exercise gets me level again. I hope it works for you as well.

The only thing you need to be worried about is if you're becoming the gambling friend who loves underdogs. If your mind is intoxicated with tilt or entitlement, as mine was for years, you might take a bad bet just because you feel you're "due."

If you find good poker friends who will be honest with you, stay accountable to them. Research indicates that people make better analytical decisions when their educated peers will review their work later. You can read *The Righteous Mind* to learn more about this research.

# CHAPTER 10

## TRYING TO BE PERFECT

### Thinking You Should Play Perfectly is Narcissism

There was a time I had too much confidence playing poker. I didn't lose a pot for years. I thought I was a much better player than I was.

When reality finally crashed in, I realized I had a lot to learn. I hit the books with a vengeance. No one was going to outwork me!

Before, I would get angry when I lost due to variance. I could recount, in exquisite detail, all the times I had been robbed deep in tournaments.

What I didn't understand at that time was that all of poker was softer. If the games are softer that naturally means you're going to go deep more often. If you're going deep more often, there will be more opportunities to suffer bad beats. In fact, it's more likely to happen deep in tournaments because the stacks are shorter and people keep getting all-in. When I was complaining about variance, that simply exposed my lack of experience to tournament warhorses who had been in the game for decades.

Once I realized my mistake, I resolved to be a different kind of player. No longer would I care about variance! I am now going to grade myself based on my performance!

From that point on, I became insufferable whenever I thought I played badly. I'd curse myself out at the table. I'd pace. I'd mutter to myself. I'd get heated. Bad beats no longer affected me, but if I failed to get in a value bet or make a good fold? Watch out! Here came the fireworks!

Sadly, this is just a more high-minded form of narcissism than getting emotional about bad beats.

Many poker players have made the same errors I've made. They'll be in a beautiful locale for a live tournament and they will refuse to leave their



room because of a bad play they made. They make their spouses and friends worry.

The problem with this viewpoint is that it assumes you know everything about poker. If you alone can decide when you play badly, that means you have all the answers. You assume you possess some mythical power to have known what the cards were before they were flipped over. That is, of course, completely unrealistic.

I had one trick when poker started. I could detect when someone wanted me not to apply pressure. I would then disappoint them. In 2006, that would get people to fold. No limit hold'em for real money was a new game for most of the world at that time. People were naturally scared. If you applied pressure, you could get them to buckle.

As the years went by, people got much better at hitting the call button. I shifted to nut peddling in cash games using many of the techniques I've already described in this book. This allowed me to pay my bills. I would play tournaments for varying backers when I felt energetic enough to play long sessions.

Around 2011 or so the big bluffing party was over. You couldn't just bully people nonstop anymore. You needed to learn finesse.

I made a mistake at that time that many people make. I began studying hard. That made me feel entitled to results. I was waking up early most mornings and working with many different poker players on my game. I'd let everyone ask me questions in the lab. If I didn't know the answer I'd hire people to help me figure it out. Gradually my results improved. However, my attitude did not.

I knew I was working harder than 99.9% of my competition. I thought that meant I was entitled to results.

Wrong. No limit hold'em doesn't work that way. No matter how much you eat right, sleep well, grind the solvers, or meditate, you can still get beaten by some asshole who snorted coke at an Applebee's before the session.

That isn't a one-time thing either. You can get beaten by that guy, the mailman, and a Vegas snake milker every day of the week. A downswing can last for months. You know why?

This is gambling. No matter how well you think you are playing you are still not God. You are not going to adjust perfectly to every situation the moment a change is required. You will make mistakes. The equities run close to each other. People will make moves that are unexpected. You are not a mind

reader. You're not going to be able to look through the computer or a guy's sunglasses and know that this is the one bluff he has run all week. You will play the odds, accept he's generally a tight player, fold, and find out you were wrong. It will happen all the time.

Your entire job at the poker table is to make more right decisions than wrong ones. That's it. If you're going to make a mistake, make it a small one. You have a weak pair versus a guy who knows how to fire more than once? Feel free to fold. It might be a small mistake, but calling down, playing a guessing game, and being wrong is a huge mistake. Those aren't the mistakes you want to be making.

Do you have top pair with a second kicker versus a passive opponent? Fire three streets. Not firing the river is a huge mistake compared with accidentally value owning yourself on occasion versus freak two pairs.

You're looking for big value bets. You're looking to corner weak players. Get the big blind alone. Get some clown who opens too many hands alone. Take them to the flop. Outwork them. Be tougher than them. Never give them a bet they don't deserve. They don't bluff enough. You don't owe them anything. Let them talk trash. Let them show you a bluff once a week when they finally find their guts. You don't care. You're going to outwork them. You're going to be quiet. You're going to smile. They can't hurt you.

This is the problem with players who come into the game and expect themselves to play perfectly: One, it's impossible. You're guaranteeing yourself misery every single session because you'll make mistakes every single session. The more you accumulate tilt in this fashion, the worse you will play.

Second, trying to play perfect poker is an awful way to make money.

People like to gamble. Can we agree that is a correct statement? I assume gambling has been around for thousands of years because humans enjoy it.

Great. We agree on that. Humans enjoy gambling. Can we also agree that some of these humans who enjoy gambling haphazardly without an edge also like playing poker?

Of course, some percentage of people love playing cards. Many gamblers like playing a game where they think they have an edge. Poker gives you ample opportunities to see skill in yourself that doesn't actually exist. I can attest to this.

So we know there are people who just gamble for the hell of it and a lot of them like poker. We know that poker is a game played between people. The house gets its cut, but some poker player at the table is going to take

the recreational player's money. The house takes a fee, but the house isn't looking to felt the recreational player.

If you're playing in tough games all the time you need to ask yourself why that is. Is that cardroom or poker site really that nice? Could you deal with a lesser one if the action was softer?

Once you are in a game with soft competition, that is 90% of your work. Now you will be playing with people who can't stomach not seeing the flop. What if they could have made a ton of money!? You will also be playing with people who don't want to worry for weeks on end about whether they got bluffed or not on a certain river. They will pay real cash money to find out what you have. If they occasionally catch you in a bluff? That's even more of a dopamine hit. That makes them more addicted to calling you.

In these games your job is to keep isolating people who play too many hands. If you get heads up, you can carve out some pots when it's likely the guy missed with his high cards. All this raising, reraising, and three-betting will make you look like a more reckless player than you actually are. You will know that you are targeting certain players, but they will not know this.

It's at this point you will start bombing them with huge value bets. That is how you're going to make your money. You are going to pay attention. You are going to be patient. You will identify who flops pairs and hates folding them. Then, you are going to make better pairs and bomb the pot.

Notice how in no part of this process are you playing perfectly. There will be times when your opponent flops a set and you will bomb the pot. There will be times when your opponent gets fed up with your relentless betting and goes on a suicidal bluff. It is completely unlikely you will catch that bluff unless the player is giving off a physical tell, because if you're in a great game it's unlikely that your opponents are capable of regular bluffing. You will need to know that the player can regularly run a bluff before you start sorting out a wider range to defend with. If you have no indication that the guy is capable of turning a pair or missed draw into a bluff, then you're stuck. You're going to have to exploit what is normally his absurdly tight post-flop raising range and make a thin fold. If he then shows you a bluff, that means he doesn't generally do bluffs. Any professional poker player who normally runs bluffs will tell you they hate showing. They don't want people calling them the next time they bluff, which is likely to be soon. Someone who shows you a bluff likely did it because they had a secret they wanted to share. This is a big moment for them. Someone who regularly bluffs will not be stunned that their bluff worked out. They won't be dying to share that with everyone.

If you put yourself in a good game, then you will generally be right on most decisions. It will generally be right to reraise a weak opener because they will call with so many weak hands. Maybe one time in a session they'll four-bet bluff, but most of the time they will only four-bet with premium hands. If you simply three-bet with all your good hands and try to take him to value town post-flop, then you will be right most of the time. That is as good as most professional players can do. The only way you can derail this gravy train is by getting paranoid when that four-bet comes in the first time. If the guy keeps four-betting you, that's a different matter but the first time it comes in you will have to play the odds. Generally, weak players and even most regular players will not four-bet bluff. Unless you have some outstanding statistical or physical read then you're forced to play the odds and fold. If that guy then shows you a bluff and you throw a fit, that means you think you should be able to play perfectly.

I used to be this kind of player. It was profoundly narcissistic to think I could somehow play better than almost every pro I ever met. Most pros, when they're stuck without much information, will keep remembering they selected this game for a reason and lean on the odds. They'll fold. If they get shown a bluff they will laugh and say, "Nice bet." They'll move on with new information. That's true confidence.

I didn't do that. You're going to learn from my bad example.

I felt entitled to good results because I worked harder than most people. Some people feel entitled to good results because they think they're smarter than everyone else. Make sure you're not either of these people.

The problem with becoming entitled to good results is that you eventually get your ego wrapped up in it.

Many people will tell you, "I've never watched a training video. I've never read a poker book. I never work on my game." The reason many of them do this is because it's a freeroll to being a badass. If you lose, who cares? You weren't even trying. If you win? What a roguishly dapper gunslinger you are!

When I was studying my ass off for years at a time and not getting the results I wanted, I felt stupid. I worked my ass off and I wasn't winning. I was trying as hard as I could to win and I was getting beaten by people who looked like they were playing bingo. How dumb does that mean I am?

This is a terrible view to have of the game. You will never play perfectly. No one has ever played perfectly in poker. When you work on your game, you will come across new concepts that will take time to implement. While you are incorporating new facets to your game, it is highly likely you will

make numerous mistakes. Your opponents, meanwhile, are playing bingo. If you are game selecting correctly, pretty much all your opponents should be chasing cards. Some are going to hit their hands. They're the only guys you remember. When a guy limps or calls a reraise repeatedly and keeps missing the flop, that isn't memorable. There's a continuation bet, there's a fold, and the hand is over. No showdown. No big pot. No memory. You're forgetting all those hands.

I was so worried to make a mistake when I had my ego wrapped up in the game. I started doing so many weird plays. Some guy would open off-suit aces and suited gappers and...I wouldn't three-bet him. I would just call. If I saw the flop and hit something, great! I could start betting and making money. If I missed the flop, no harm no foul. I didn't lose much. I didn't want to three-bet and have the guy four-bet me off my decent hand. That would make me feel stupid.

When my ego was wrapped up in this game, I would raise an ace in position. The big blind would call me. The board would come A-7-6. I'd have A-8o. The big blind would check to me and...I would check. I was worried he'd check-raise me and I wouldn't know what to do. I was worried I'd fold the winning hand like a sucker or call down with a weak ace, see two pair, and be proven a bigger sucker. There was no way for me to win. Forget the fact that this guy check-raises something like 5% of the time, and it's always two pair. I *knew* that, but I couldn't *feel* it in the moment. I could vividly remember all the times I was forced to bet/fold that hand. I could vividly remember all the times I called down and had the second-best hand. I didn't want that to happen to me again. That made me feel dumb. I didn't want to feel dumb. I wanted to feel smart. I wanted to feel like I had a right to sit at this table and expect a living from this game.

Then it occurred to me. There was another option. I could just check! Then if he bets the turn, I'll just call! Yeah! That's a good idea! That way if he makes his stupid donkey ass-end straight with the 5-4o he should have folded pre-flop I won't lose much! I'll be able to show the ace and say, "I had you." Yeah, that's a good idea!

Sure, if I check here, I lose value from a few hands such as A-5, A-4, A-3, A-2, J-7, 10-7, 9-7, 8-7, 7-5, 9-6, 8-6, 6-5, 6-4, 9-8, 10-8, 5-4...okay I guess that's a lot of hands, and he's super passive, and likely to pay me off for multiple streets. But remember pot control man! I don't want him to win a big pot off me! That will make me feel dumb! He could have A-K or A-Q. Oh, wait, he would have three-bet those hands. He could have A-J! Wait,

he might have three-bet some of those combos. He could have A-10, A-9, A-7, A-6, or 7-6! That's probably what he has given how I've been running lately.

I think I've made my point. Forgive the scenic route I had to take. All the research is clear. Satire and stories are memorable. Statistics are not.

We are starting with all these concepts and ruthlessly drilling them because if you can't get these fundamentals then you're doomed.

Scared poker is losing poker. Period. If you get your ego wrapped up in this, you will be playing scared. Your sense of self will be on the line every time you play a pot.

You need to value bet the river. Every single person says the same thing. "I can't beat these donkeys! They never fold!" Then, they have what is likely the best pair and they don't bet it! How does that make any sense?

They bet the river and, once in a while, the guy raises. They know it's unlikely he's bluffing enough to induce many calls because good games don't feature many guys who can turn pairs into bluffs. But they get scared about folding and being shown a bluff. So they call off all their chips knowing they're likely wrong! How the hell does that work?

Let me suggest another model.

One of the greatest things I ever saw happened in a backroom tavern. I was in San Diego. I was 12. My dad was working a boat there. He took me to a backroom boxing match one night.

A prospect came out. Good looking guy. Rippled with muscles. He was undefeated. The local crowd loved him!

The challenger came out. He was an ugly guy from Tijuana. Everyone booed him. He was a journeyman. He grinned with a crooked smile. He loved the hatred!

His record had a number of losses. However, it didn't look like the journeyman got the memo that he was supposed to lose. From the moment the first bell sounded he ran at the prospect with an intention to kill him. He elbowed. He scraped the tape of his gloves across the prospect's eyes. He pushed him. He stomped on his feet. In a clinch, he'd throttle around so he could administer a head butt. He was the dirtiest fighter I have ever seen.

He didn't win the fight. He got the shit knocked out of him. But he made the prospect pay. He would get hit three times, but then he'd fire back one shot that counted. The shot would rock the prospect back and he would run after him. He just wasn't quick enough to ever capitalize on his good moments.

At the end of the fight, they announced the scorecards. The prospect sat on his stool bleeding as he was declared the winner. The journeyman stood on the ropes and spread his arms wide. The crowd cheered this Mexican warrior.

He laughed. He remembered how they booed him minutes earlier. Then, he spit blood all over the crowd.

He laughed more while grinning with his crooked and bloodied teeth. Then, he stormed off. Everyone was stunned.

I can remember that moment like it was yesterday. Looking back, I always wondered if he started coughing and then he played it off like he meant to do it. I don't know. But what's more important is what it teaches us.

No competitor who gives it his all is a loser.

If you play hard, if you play to win, and you play with money you can afford to lose, then you have won.

If you are not firing in value bets because you're scared of a raise that never comes, you're like the man in the ring who won't engage with his opponent. He'll live until the end of the fight, but his only reward will be a half-life.

No limit hold'em is a fist fight. You're going to get hit. The cards decide how much power anyone has on any particular day. Some days you'll have zero power. You'll have to find angles. You'll have to be patient. Other days you will have Mike Tyson power. On those occasions you have to go in swinging, come whatever may.

They asked Bryan Cranston (Walter White in *Breaking Bad*) how he dealt with so much failure in Hollywood. He was a bit-part actor in sitcoms until his 40s. He put all his money into a movie that didn't take off. He got turned down for multiple jobs the same week he got the *Malcolm In the Middle* gig.

How did he keep going in face of failure? He said he focused on the process. His job was to manage his finances, live below his means, and audition. That was it. He would show up and give the best audition he could. He left nothing on the field. He'd leave exhausted. He'd get up in the casting director's face if he felt that would make his audition more intense. If he felt he could have done something better, he noted it and then he applied himself more the next time. When he got home from an audition, he threw the script in a basket and forgot about it. When he did get a call back, he would have to fish the script out to remember what role he'd just won.

We need to be like these two men at the poker table. We need to make sure we are playing with money we can afford to lose. We are buying into a

golf tournament that has cash prizes, sure, but what we're really buying is a chance to play some competitive golf for a couple of rounds.

We are at the poker table to play poker. The end. Real life can get monotonous. This is our break. We might have to defer to others at work. At this poker table we get to do whatever we want. We are going to play for the win, no matter what happens. We are going to play hard. We are not going to play for our ego. We are not going to play to feel better about ourselves. We are going to play for money. Our session might last two days or two hours, we don't know. It doesn't matter. The reason the game is so exciting is because we don't know what is going to happen. We're going to love the game for its unpredictability and give it our all every single time we play. And if we bust? There's another game tomorrow. They can't kill us off every day.



# CHAPTER 11

## COLD CALLING TOO MUCH

### The Recipe for Failure

Alright, let's talk some hardcore poker strategy. I think I got your mind right to play poker for the rest of your life. Return to this book often if you feel yourself getting entitled or tilted. It should work to set you right.

Now let's talk about cold calling.

Do you know what a cold call is?

A cold call is when someone raises ahead of you and you call them pre-flop without anything invested. If you call from the big blind that isn't a cold call because you already had something invested.

If one person raises, someone else three-bets and you call, that is considered cold calling the three-bet.

How often do you cold call in a session?

You should not be cold calling much.

If you track data of poker hands, you will find many players making money with three-bets. In fact, sometimes guys in tournaments will get reckless with three-bets and they will still make a profit. In cash games you can easily get caught three-betting too much. The stack sizes are deep. Your opponents will have a lot of firepower. They can easily four-bet and bluff you. They can also call you and check-raise on numerous flops. In a tournament, the smaller stack sizes can make fighting back difficult. You'll see many inexperienced players give up and let you make money. Tournaments are crawling with inexperienced bad players because they're blinded by first-place prize money.

You can find ample evidence that three-betting haphazardly isn't that bad of an idea. But you can't find much evidence that cold calling haphazardly is a good idea.

This is logical if we think about it. If we three-bet, we generally get the pot heads-up. If we don't get it heads-up, at the very least everyone will check to us and we can take a free turn card, assuming we're three-betting in position. When we cold call, however, there are several issues.

If you're playing tournaments, you need to look behind you. Are there players with 10, 20, or 30 big blinds? Those people are very likely to move all-in. If there are several short stacks, it's likely someone will move in over your cold call.

Do you have aggressive players behind you in a cash game? That's an issue. When you cold call, aggressive players can squeeze you and your friend who is opening a ton of hands. They can make it 15x and you are all stuck. If you're playing 100x stacks, a four-bet commits you. If you call, you can't set mine. He or she just put you in a vice grip.

When you fold in this situation, you are giving up two, three, or four big blinds depending on the raise size. That is not easy to recover.

Near the end of a tournament, a win rate might be as low as five big blinds per 100 hands. If the players are good and the stacks are short it will be difficult to make money. If you throw away a 2.5x cold call because you weren't paying attention to stacks on your left, then you just took a big bite out of your profits.

When you examine data sets, you'll almost always find the same thing. People can make calls work from the big blind and button. If you're heads-up and getting a discount from the big blind, all you need to do is save a small percentage of your big blind over time and you'll out-perform a fold. That's possible heads-up when you can put in donk bets and check-raises.

Cold calling from the button is much more difficult because you have nothing invested at the start of the hand. If someone raises to 2.5x and you call, that means you need to earn more than 250 big blinds every 100 times you play this way BEFORE you start making profit. If you end up folding to jams from the blinds on a large percentage of those 100 hands, you will have a hard time making back the hundreds of big blinds on the other occasions.

However, it's far more likely you will make the cold call profitable from the button. You will be in position throughout the entire hand. You will have more information. It might be less likely that action checks to you in position because you didn't three-bet, but at the very least you'll be able to pick up pots when the initial raiser gives up on a bad board.

From the cutoff, you have a big problem. If you cold call, the button will be sitting there with a prime opportunity to squeeze. They will know that if

they three-bet, they can apply pressure on players who are out of position. They will get to act last for the rest of the hand. If you check to them on most flops, they can take free cards when they want and apply pressure when they hit or it looks like you don't like your hand.

Sometimes you can make a cold call work in the cutoff, but you're not looking to make the play.

You might think it would be easier to make a profit calling raises in the small blind because you already have something invested, but that doesn't seem to be the case. Analyzing data from small blind calls shows it's difficult to make a profit. You won't generally out-perform a fold.

The reason is obvious. If the small blind calls, the big blind is given a great price. They call. Now we are in a multiway pot and we are out of position. We can't bluff easily because in multiway pots it's extremely likely someone hit something. We're out of position so we have zero information on the other players.

The big blind becomes a spot you can call from. The small blind isn't one. The button is a good cold calling spot but it's even better to three-bet. The cutoff is difficult to make work as a cold calling spot. It's close to impossible to make cold calling work from the hijack and earlier positions unless you're cold calling great hands or you're in an exceptionally passive game. There are just too many people behind you who can wake up with a hand and squeeze you off your investment.

The other issue you have in cold calling situations is that, if you're lucky, the pot goes multiway. Multiway pots aren't as profitable as they used to be.

When I started playing poker, cold calling was profitable. You called with anything when you had a deep stack, you'd see the flop, and then you would bust someone who couldn't fold top pair. People don't fall for that trick anymore. Many people have been playing for decades at this point. They know that if the pot gets huge in a multiway hand, a pair probably isn't good. Your implied odds aren't as good in this game as they used to be. You also can't bluff easily in these pots because it's likely you'll run into one or more people who have hit something. You need to hit your hand and pray someone doesn't know how to read how strong your range is when you fire into multiple people repeatedly. That is a tall order.

There are times you will want to cold call more. We will discuss them in a future section. However, these situations don't come up often. You will need someone sitting behind you and giving you loose action with pairs post-flop before you start getting interested in cold calling pre-flop. If you have peo-

ple behind you who know something about poker, they will likely see a good shove spot or squeeze opportunity when a loose opener raises and you cold call. If you are the type of person who would three-bet their best hands, they know your cold calling range is mostly big cards, some pairs, and some suited connectors. They can put a lot of pressure on you in this situation.

Whenever I notice myself cold calling too much and playing too passively, I give myself this challenge: I can only three-bet or fold a hand pre-flop when facing a raise. More often than not, this means I am going to have to fold hands pre-flop that I'm worried will hit the flop. Every time I challenge myself like this, I do better at poker. I suggest you try it yourself.

In tournaments, this strategy helps a ton. Let's say you have pocket threes. UTG+2 opens. You are in the hijack with 40x. The raise was to 2.5x. It's tempting to call here, but you need to look behind you. What if there are three stacks between 10-25 big blinds? This is a spot where it's likely someone will move all-in behind you. You won't get to see the flop a large amount of the time. You're throwing away two and a half big blinds every time that happens. You need to fold.

There will be times you do this and then the button calls and the big blind calls. The board comes A-K-3. If you're a normal poker player, you will hate yourself in this situation. However, your emotions don't negate the facts.

If you are someone who follows the science, then you need to run tests in these situations. Keep track of every time you cold call in a spot earlier than the cutoff. Keep track of your profits in those hands. If you're playing online, you can get a statistic tracking software to do this.

If you catalog your results, you'll often find you're losing 50 big blinds every 100 hands or something similar. I've seen numbers worse than this. This doesn't outperform a fold, which would be neutral EV or -12.5 big blinds per 100 hands maximum if there was a decent ante in play.

If you don't have the data to prove whether a passive call with players to act behind is profitable or not, then start practicing folding and three-betting more. Your bottom line will thank you. If you think you can make the cold call work, then try to collect data to prove it. There are super passive games live where it's possible. That said, most people who cold call too much end up playing overly passive and not enjoying the mediocre results they get from no limit hold'em.

## CHAPTER 12

# NOT ENGAGING IN PROBABILISTIC THINKING

### **This Is How to View Your Decisions**

By the way, guys, you're not going to hurt my feelings if you don't take me at my word. I could show you a variety of databases right now displaying cold calling not working. I've included images like that in my training newsletters. However, all that would show you is that one guy couldn't make the cold call work over a certain sample size. I can give you my word that I've worked with thousands of poker players. I can tell you that generally when you examine their cold calls you find they're losing more money than if they just folded, but you shouldn't take anyone at their word in poker.

Something that always boggles my mind is when people say, "Wow, you're uninformed. Didn't you listen to this podcast/watch this documentary/read this article or book?"

That is one of the least scientific sentences anyone has ever uttered. It's usually uttered by people who consider themselves to be supremely informed. This doesn't pertain to just poker. This goes for everything.

Imagine a courtroom where the prosecution or defense was not allowed to speak. Imagine a courtroom where only one side could say anything to the jury. That would be extraordinarily unfair, would it not? Anyone can sound convincing if no one can challenge their arguments. That's all a podcast or book written by one person is: It's the defense or prosecution speaking with no one posing a counterargument. Great scientists want their colleagues to challenge their findings before they publish precisely so they can be more

accurate. That's the type of person we should aspire to be.

You never know anything with 100% certainty in science. You have varying degrees of certainty when it comes to anything.

When you are at the poker table you won't be allowed to confer with your friends. You need to be the person checking your own assumptions.

When you are playing poker or making financial decisions of any kind you must use probabilistic thinking. You need to ask how sure you are of anything. 90% sure? 70% sure?

I had a hand the other day where I had A-K high on a J-J-5-4-2 board. It had been checked down the entire way until the river. My opponent bet 584 into a pot of 1,956. If I call, I am risking 584 and the pot that will come back to me if I'm right is 3,124.

The way most people work through this is to ask themselves, "Is my hand good here?" Then they try to stare at their opponent and see into their soul.

That's black or white thinking. That is not probabilistic thinking. It's not 100 or 0 in this situation.

The way to do this is to realize that the pot odds price you're getting means that you need to be right 19% of the time to make the call.  $584/3124 = 0.1859$ . We're rounding up.

The question then becomes what percentage of the time do I think he's bluffing? If I think he's bluffing 30% of the time, that means I have to call. That also means seven times out of 10 I will be wrong. Obviously, if I'm paranoid about being a perfect player this is something I'm not going to like. I am going to have to abandon my fear of looking silly 7 times out of 10.

Now, let's say I think he's bluffing 25% of the time but I'm perhaps 60% sure of it. The way I've always thought of it is that I'm only sure he's bluffing 15% of the time because  $0.25 * 0.6 = 0.15$ . I'm only confident 15% of the time that he is bluffing. Therefore, I should let this go.

However, let's say I've been playing with this guy for four hours. I've noticed that he bets frequently when checked to. Let's say I'm iffy on giving him a bluffing range. I think he's bluffing half the time here because he hates checking. He might not even know that some ace highs are fine to check here. Even if I only have 50% faith in my read,  $0.5 * 0.5 = 0.25$  means I'm fairly certain he's bluffing at least a quarter of the time, which helps me make this thin call.

This is not an exact science. This is just how I think of it to make sure I'm not bullshitting myself. Even if my numbers aren't perfect, it's always good to remind yourself you're never 100% accurate on anything. You need to work a margin of error into all of your decisions.

I notice this process has kept me a careful player for a long time, but I'm still capable of making huge plays when extenuating factors are persuasive. Generally, careful attacking poker will pay the bills. However, there will be occasions you need to analyze pot odds prices and make a judgment call. Having a probabilistic framework isn't perfect but it will at least give you a starting point.

Of course, the huge problem here is the numbers we are assigning. It takes many years of experience and brutal honesty to fine tune your numbers enough to know you're not bullshitting yourself. It's easy to make up numbers when you feel like gambling or you just HAVE to bust one certain guy out of spite. It takes discipline to take a deep breath, let it go, and ask yourself what a rational person might see in the same situation.

On some occasions, the numbers are so comically good for you that you will know you're most likely right in making a play.

Let's say a loose player calls you out of the big blind with 9-9 – 2-2, A-10s – A-2s, K-Qs – K-2s, Q-Js – Q-4s, J-10s – J-6s, 10-9s – 10-6s, 9-8s – 9-6s, 8-7s – 8-5s, 7-6s – 7-4s, 6-5s – 6-3s, 5-4s – 5-3s, 4-3s, A-Jo – A-2o, K-Qo – K-7o, Q-Jo – Q-8o, J-10o – J-8o, 10-9o – 10-8o, 9-8o – 9-7o, 8-7o, 7-6o.

First off, ask yourself how sure you are of this range. If the initial range is off, the whole analysis will be off. The way I try to avoid this is by giving the player all the hands I'm positive they'd play but still making the range a little tighter than normal. Then, during the post-flop analysis I make sure none of my pre-flop ranging decisions have helped me with a bluff. Sometimes I'll play devil's advocate and try to create ranges that are uniquely designed to make my life a living hell.

Let's say the flop comes J-2-2 rainbow. He checks to you. You bet 25% pot. Your bet needs to work as a complete bluff 20% of the time here. If you bet \$25 into \$100, for example, you'd be risking \$25 to win a pot of \$125, because you get your \$25 back when the bet succeeds.  $25/125 = 0.2$ .

When you bet 25% pot, your bet needs to work 20% of the time which means your opponent has to defend 80% of the time. He has to do something other than fold eight times out of 10.

Let's say you think your opponent is a hit or miss guy. If he makes a pair, he continues. If he misses, he folds.

In the old days we would have to count the number of hand combinations this guy has in every hand category by pen and paper. Now, all you need to do is buy a copy of any hand ranging calculator.

If we put this into a calculator, we will find that of the 564 combos our opponent has here post-flop, only 128 of them are not a high card. That means 77.3% of the time, your opponent has a high card here.

Let's say you're only 30% sure your opponent folds a high card. That means you have next to zero table feel. You're not very sure of anything.

You should still bet here. Your opponent has so many hands that missed this flop. If he folds his high cards only the 30% of the time you're sure of, then he's folding 23.19% of the time. You only need your bet to work as a pure bluff 20% of the time. You have a huge margin of error here. Pull the trigger.

The opposite can happen as well. I was in a WPT years back when a young guy triple barreled me for all my chips. I was sitting there on the river with second pair and not much of a kicker. I couldn't beat anything besides a complete bluff. I did my best to count all the missed draws on the board and what percentage of his range that would be. This can be incredibly difficult to do when you're in a large tournament and the whole table is waiting for you.

After some time, I determined mathematically that his possible bluffing combinations were very few. It was only missed straight draws. There were no missed flush draws to count. He opened in early position, which made one of the ass-end straight draws less likely. It was so few combos. I needed to know he could turn some pairs into bluffs in order to call. Even then, I had to have near 100% faith in my read.

Then, the young guy gave off a tell. He had been bored the entire day in big pots when he had a solid hand. He looked at me right then and looked tense. It could have been a false tell, sure, but it looked authentic to me. Now I wasn't even sure if I could count all the set combos in my analysis. Would he look that tense with a set? I decided at that point I could count all the bluffing combos securely and make the thin call. I called off my World Poker Tour event. He was bluffing. I collected a nice pot.

Now, let's take this all back to cold calling. I am 99% secure in my analysis of cold calling because I have examined thousands of databases and hundreds of millions of hands. In some softer games I know you can make it work. I'm 90% certain I know what conditions allow you to cold call more. However, in most poker games I'm still looking to three-bet wide openers and corner them or just fold and wait until the next hand.

Does that mean you should trust me? Not really. If I tell you to "trust science" then what I'm really telling you to do is to take me at my word.

You don't have to take anyone at their word in poker. In the stock mar-



ket it can be wildly difficult to acquire the necessary information to make a systems-based decision. In poker, the math is fairly trivial. Statistic tracking software will do the work for you. If you don't believe me when it comes to cold calling, go ahead and try to make the play work for you in smaller stakes games. Isolate cold calls in your database from each position. See if you can make it work. If you can then isolate what you think you're doing differently and replicate it again and again. Make sure you're out-performing your three-bets with the same hand.

I have always done my best in my books to admit when I'm unsure of something and am basing something on a healthy suspicion instead. If I write a sentence and don't add a qualifier, then you can assume I'm 90% or more sure of something.

That doesn't mean you should take me or any poker player at our word. Get the software yourself. Come up with a hypothesis. "I think my cold calls actually are profitable." Run experiments. Collect data. Analyze. Examine results. Be methodical. Try to isolate one variable at a time and try them out.

That's the fun part about poker. I can watch Ken Griffey's swing and admire it, but no amount of practice will let me ever acquire it. However, in poker, you can see an advanced play on television and engineer it in the lab. You can execute it the next day. You're only limited by your work ethic and ability to enjoy the work.

Listen to every poker coach there is but test their methods if you can. Make sure you understand what assumptions they're making. Always ask yourself how sure you are of any play. Try to get better at counting the combinations and understanding the betting and calling math so you know what kind of margin of error you have.

Finally, if you're completely lost in numerous situations, collect more hands. Watch the hands back in your database. Isolate similar situations to one you faced that day on the felt. See if you notice any trends in the field. Try to find numbers for what they're doing. These field reads can save your ass in spots where your feel for the game might be lacking.

# CHAPTER 13

## NOT CALLING WITH BIG TEX BEHIND

### A Large Mistake Everyone Makes

I watched him shove two times the size of the pot. He got called. He tabled his hand: K-J high.

He got there.

I thanked God I didn't take the bad beat. This was the kind of action we were all facing in WPT Maryland. The action was fierce just outside of Baltimore. People showed up to gamble.

I remember the first time I played in Copenhagen. Every hand seemed to end with a desperate all-in. Faraz Jaka walked past me. He said, "Put on your helmet."

This session felt similar. All my chips could be in the middle at any time.

A great young pro opened from early position. He had won a bracelet in the previous year's WSOP. It was folded to me. I looked down at pocket nines.

Behind me, the K-J-jamming psychopath stared. He wanted to play again. He wanted to play every hand.

The young pro stared at me. I didn't want to play a pot with him period. I had position on him. He opened from UTG+1. I had the hijack. The psycho was in the big blind. I could easily three-bet and cut down the pro's post-flop options.

What would you do here?

Would you three-bet or cold call?

Generally, you want to isolate bad players with three-bets. When someone is opening too much and can't defend themselves post-flop it is a great idea to corner them.

That is not the case in this situation.

Instead, you have a player to your LEFT who is going buck wild. He shoved K-J high post-flop! You want him to see the board!

"But what if there are overcards? He could bluff me! Shouldn't I just three-bet and take this pot now?"

The best way to get better at poker and financial predictions in general is to test your assumptions. What has a higher upside? Three-betting the great pro or allowing the psycho into the pot?

If you three-bet the pro, he is going to be excellent at messing with you post-flop. He has likely drilled three-bet pots thousands of times in private. In heads-up situations, he can rely on GTO solutions to guide him. If we become unbalanced, he can exploit that.

Don't forget that the young pro still has the option to four-bet if you decide to three-bet. He is going to exercise that option with some regularity if he thinks you're putting a move on him.

Meanwhile, if you allow the nutcase into the pot behind you with a smooth call, you will have tremendous upside and not much downside.

We have already seen that he reserved his psychopathic tendencies for post-flop. This is common. Many people approach poker the same way they approach any casino table game. They want to see the three-card flop the same way they want to see what happens to the dealer in blackjack. From that point on they will play ball. Pre-flop is merely a formality. The goal is to see the flop. Any flop can hit you!

We have one of these guys at this table. At some point, he is going to be broke and, when that happens, you can go back to trading coolers with the young pro. But right now you need to give yourself the best shot of getting the dead money from this event. A cold call is appropriate in this situation.

Notice the wording of that previous paragraph: A cold call is appropriate in this situation. It doesn't read, "You can now cold call anytime there is a loose player behind you." You want to three-bet most of the time versus average players because they cannot defend themselves post-flop. If you three-bet in position with a good hand, your profits will almost always be higher than if you cold call. But this is a special situation because the initial raiser is so experienced. It's highly likely he could neutralize your positional advantage post-flop. Most of the time you will not be dealing with a player

this good so you should lean on the three-bet.

If the crazy player was not at the table, you should still three-bet. It's highly likely you'll win the pot quickly, especially if it's the first time you have three-bet the young pro.

However, with that weaker player behind, you want to invite him into the pot. Do not price him out. You want him seeing a flop with his K-Jo and putting in 100+ big blinds post-flop with weak pairs. Try value betting big post-flop. They will call down!

These kinds of situations are rare these days because most people in 2020s poker have learned that one pair is not the nuts. That said, many of these tour stops and regulated online sites will feature people playing for fun. They are blowing off steam. They are treating poker no differently than they would a bachelor party. They're supposed to lose their money getting drunk and playing blackjack. No one is supposed to win at the casino! The only difference is they prefer poker.

If you spot this rare bird in the wild you must pay attention and hunt them before another hunter finds your prey.

You should try every hand to figure out how to get this player to yourself. You should never stop paying attention to this player. This player will be broke sometime soon. Those chips will need to go to someone. That someone should be you.

Many of these players look at their cards before it is their turn to act. They can't handle the anxiety of waiting to see if they have aces! When they look at their hand and see junk, they will visibly lose interest in the hand. They'll start looking at their phone or the hockey game on TV. They won't be paying attention to the action.

Watch them for a few orbits to see if they have a glaring tell like this. It will be easy to pick up. Once you see it, it will help you play.

If you notice that the loose recreational player is unlikely to play the hand, and you have something like aces after the slick pro opens, you can lean toward three-betting as opposed to a trickier flat. In a smaller tournament, don't be afraid to try flatting with some premiums with a loose as hell player behind you. That's allowed too!

The first time I made this play was in a WSOP event, probably back in 2010. I had a guy to my left I thought of lovingly as "Big Tex." Big Tex liked his 10-gallon hat, his beer, his food, and his poker. If he had 9-4s he was cold calling, damn it. If he flopped a pair, he was not folding. He came to play!

Young pros would open ahead of me and then some other genius would

three-bet them! I wanted to ask them, “What the hell are you doing? Do you realize this table might break soon? This guy will go to another table!”

But no. They had to have their little war. They would even get mad when Big Tex would try to cold call the three-bets! They thought he wasn’t allowed to do that! They wanted to show everyone what a boss they were by three-betting the whole table. They couldn’t stand it when real equity got in their way of being such a badass. In a card game.

Big Tex was getting blocked out of pot after pot. I couldn’t stand it!

The young guys would open and I’d look down at ace-king or queens. On other days, I would almost always three-bet those hands for value, but on that particular day I smooth called. Big Tex would then flop a garbage pair and give me multiple barrels of value.

I took some money from Big Tex, but I didn’t take as much as I wanted. That hurt inside. I wasn’t out there to play with other regs. I wanted the chips.

## CHAPTER 14

# NOT USING LARGE BETS TO ISOLATE BAD PLAYERS

### Why Is This Forbidden?

This was how I made all my money back in the day.

I would be playing in a soft cash game. We would all be 100 big blinds deep. A bad player would limp in. I would look down at my hand in later position. If I had 10-10+ and A-Q+, I would raise to 20x because I was terrified of playing flops. I was terrified of playing poker if I'm being truly honest.

Everyone would laugh at how stupid my raise size was. Everyone would fold. The loose player would laugh and fold too.

A couple orbits later, I would look down at my hand again in later position. The loose player had limped once more. He was playing half of the pots, so it wasn't entirely surprising he was involved in another one.

Once again, if it was 10-10+ or A-Q+ I would raise to 20x. The laughing would start again. Everyone would fold to the loose player.

The loose player wouldn't be laughing. He'd be annoyed. Sometimes he'd even call. What do you think happened then?

Loose and passive players limp for a reason. They're not doing it to get in your way. They limp those hands because they want to play them. They limp those hands because they want to see the flop. When some punk-ass kid is denying them the right to see the flop, they don't take kindly to it.

Could you imagine finally getting to go to the casino at the end of the week only to be told you're not allowed to play? That's how this guy sees these big raises.

He doesn't make money at poker. We all know that. He can't make money when he passively limps half the pots and calls down post-flop. There's only one way for him to win when he plays that way. He needs to have the best hand and then his hand must remain the best. Since he's limping half the hands, that is incredibly unlikely. Out of the eight other people at the table, someone is going to have a better hand most of the time. That doesn't stop him though. He just keeps on calling.

Since we know he's calling down with garbage, we can reasonably surmise that he is losing money. If he's not playing poker for money, then you have to consider what his true motivations are. If you think he's there for big stacks and triumphant trips to the cage, then you're projecting your views on to him.

He is there to gamble, pure and simple. He wants to see the flop. He doesn't care about the money. This is how he blows off steam. This is his break from a boss or spouse who chews him out. He probably has enough money to blow a couple of buy-ins every Friday night and not even think about it.

In return for his dumping money at the table, he has certain expectations. He has never articulated them but subconsciously he holds them. His expectations are:

1. He will limp or raise any hand he wants to see the flop with. He's here for fun, so he has little interest in folding marginal hands. Folding means sitting there idly while everyone else has a good time. That sounds boring to him. Therefore, he is going to limp or raise with 40% or 50% of the hands he sees, depending on his mood. If you pay attention to showdowns, you might come to understand specifically what he is limping or raising with. Guys tend to have their favorite hands for each range.

2. When he limps or raises, he doesn't expect to get blown off the pot. He wants to pay a reasonable price to see flops. That's the entire point of his night. Seeing flops is fun. Seeing flops is gambling. Seeing flops allows him to relax. He's not thinking of anything when the flop gets spread out. The stress of the day dissolves as those cards are splayed. There is always potential before the flop and as it gets spread. This is a release. If you deny him this release, he will not be pleased with you.

3. Therefore, his expectation is that if he limps you will kindly only raise to five or six times the big blind. He can then call while muttering something about "implied odds," whatever the hell that means. If he raises, he expects you to just call with most of your hands. If you have a super good hand and want to reraise that's fine, but he knows that won't happen most of the time.

In his defense, he has developed these expectations because that is how people are playing against him. If you walked into a coffee shop every morning, you would be reasonably confused if one morning they offered you gnocchi and red wine.

When everybody plays this way against him, he can get a lot of play out of his two or three buy-ins. He gets to see a ton of flops. Sometimes he will hit a big hand and win a decent sized pot. He gets to hang out, be one of the boys, and lose slowly. He might even kid himself and say he makes money at poker. That's how slowly he's losing. A couple of winning sessions could allow him to kid himself.

This is all well and good until some dumbass 18-year-old who snuck into the casino starts raising to 20x pre-flop.

If he does it a couple of times in a row, it gets pretty irritating to this guy who wants to limp in all the time.

He has J-9s. He limps. The dumbass kid makes it 20x again.

He's going to muck, right?

Wrong. Sometimes he will. Sometimes he won't.

If you said, "One hundred percent, he folds" then you are claiming certainty where no certainty exists. That does not bode well for financial decisions. Claiming certainty in uncertain life situations is how humans deal with feelings of insecurity. It's a comforting hallucination. If you don't know something simply state, "I don't know" and learn to cope with the discomfort. If you want to discuss probabilistic thinking that is fine, but do not state something is a 100% lock when there is no evidence that it is.

Do not project how you think about poker on to this guy. That's not going to help you long term in poker.

He might call a 20x raise because he won a big pot with J-9s a few nights ago. He might call a 20x raise because J-9s is his favorite hand. He might call because his particular suit has been "hot" tonight. He might call just because he doesn't like the face of the kid. It's a free country. He can do whatever he wants.

No one will judge him if he calls. The kid is the one being a horse's ass. He's doing these stupid big raises. The loose player is there all the time. Everyone knows he's a good guy. Why is the kid doing this to him?

This is what would happen when I put in these big raises. At some point, the loose player would get fed up with limping and folding. He would call 20x, frequently out of position.

The pot would then be 40x+ deep. My heart would be in my throat if this



happened and I had raised my A-Q+ and 10-10+. There was more money in the middle than I made over an entire day of work at a fast-food restaurant.

But it didn't matter. What happened all the time is that I would flop an over-pair because I only raised with A-Q+ or 10-10+. That also meant on many flops I flopped a huge pair or started with a huge pair. I would bet and the loose player would call me down with whatever garbage pair he made. I'd then shove the turn and he'd call. Then I would double up.

Everybody at the table would then say, "You're an idiot, kid" as I breathed so deeply it looked like I was going to have a nervous breakdown. However, I kept consistently going home with a buy-in or two.

Sure, sometimes the guy would drill his two pair on the turn. Sometimes overcards would come to my pair and I'd call once on the turn and then fold on the river. Sometimes it didn't work out. But most of the time it did.

As I played more and more at the casino (assuming I didn't get kicked out for being underage) I would continue winning. The players at the casino would get progressively more pissed off as I kept showing up. They thought I was a black hole. No action ever came out of it. They didn't like how I never talked. They thought I was a huge dork for getting so nervous during hands.

They were making a common error of logic as well. They thought they were doing more "work" as it were. They were involved in more pots. They were grinding more turns and rivers. They deserved more money for all their work. Of course, that's not how finance, business, or poker works. You're rewarded for accuracy in gambling. You're not rewarded for trying.

If you were an investor in the 1980s and you picked Apple, then you could have conceivably done a life's worth of work in one day.

Aces, kings, queens, jacks, or 10s are your blue-chip stocks. If you can put big money on them, then you should do so.

When a guy limps and calls 15x or 20x when you're playing with 100 big blind stacks and you have one of these hands, they are headed toward a world of hurt. That's like shorting Procter & Gamble in the 90s. Given the limitations of 100 big blind stacks and the awful hands they're playing, it's going to be impossible for them to make money long term.

If you are new to poker and simply focus on these situations, then that is a perfectly logical way to get your feet wet.

People will judge you at the cardroom because it holds a mirror to them. They're trying so hard to win and some jerk is playing a dead basic strategy and out-performing them.

They are also not realizing that when they play tons of small pots with

nonexistent edges, they are just being devoured by the rake.

Now, the reason we are discussing this today is not because you should play like I did as a teenager. If you do want to try that strategy, even with a short stack, that is totally fine. However, most people reading this are more experienced poker players looking for some extra tricks to pad their stack. This section is merely a thought experiment to open our minds to the idea of large raises versus bad players.

If you saw a young guy playing the way I was playing when I started you would reasonably think, "Wow, this guy sucks at poker. He's afraid to play anything that will require him to make a real decision." Yet, again, financial decisions do not reward hard work. This is a human bias we have that has no bearing in reality. You can work extremely hard at trying to cut down an oak tree with a butter knife. That won't make you noble. That will make you an idiot.

Conversely, you can roll up to that oak tree at 2:00 PM after drinking coffee all morning and take a chainsaw to it.

If you sit there on your leather ass all day in a cash game and only play the best hands, one of a few things is going to happen.

- ◆ You will keep raising and everyone will fold. You won't lose or win much money.
- ◆ You won't get dealt anything and you'll sit there bored for hours. You'll lose little.
- ◆ You will get some takers and likely win. On occasion, you'll get busted. The wins will outnumber the losses. However, due to variance and human error, you can still lose multiple days in a row.

Most of these options are fairly easy to stomach. If you decide to play a ton of hands like everyone else in the cardroom then you can reasonably expect to not beat the rake. Most players do not beat the rake and you are now playing like most players.

If you consistently raise to large amounts with big hands and you finally get a homo sapien with their odd biases to call you, then you will have secured:

- ◆ A huge pot
- ◆ In position
- ◆ With the best hand

You would have to be making a ton of mistakes post-flop to lose with that edge.

Sometimes there are tons of limpers before you raise huge to 20x. If four people fold, along with the big blind and the small blind, then you have just made 5.5x with zero variance. If I could make five big blinds with zero variance whenever I got dealt jacks, I wouldn't be mad. If you have aces and everyone folds, that stinks but you're still pocketing something rather than getting your aces cracked, which is going to happen all the time when you raise to 7x and get four callers.

If you're afraid of flops, you can even just buy in short. Many cardrooms are trying to get rid of short-stackers, but some don't mind if you do it. A friend of mine just puts 40x in all the time and gets called by bizarre holdings from gamblers who have inferiority complexes. My friend makes a good living doing this, and he almost never has to play a flop.

Finally, if you're playing tournaments, you can use large raise sizes to take advantage of bad players.

Let's say you have Big Tex, from the previous section, at your table. Big Tex once again is being his pleasant self. He's tipping his hat to the ladies who sit down at the table, yucking it up, eating burgers, and drinking beers. He's having a great time. You're happy he's here.

It gets folded to you. You look down at A-Qo. What do you do?

Something that's fun to try in tournaments, especially live ones, is just to open to 5x here and see what happens. If Big Tex folds that sucks but it's just A-Qo. You're not losing a ton. However, what often happens is this:

Big Tex will look down at his Q-9s. He loves this hand. It's got a ton of potential. He doesn't even know how many chips he's got in his stack. He doesn't care about raise sizes. People raise to 5x all the time in his home game. He's comfortable with calling so he calls.

It then gets folded to a "sick" young reg to his left. He has 10-8s. He would have at least called the raise if you made it 2.5x. He would have considered squeezing. Now, he doesn't know what to do. When he plays online, he has rigid rules otherwise multi-tabling will get too complicated. This is not a situation he faces much. He decides to fold.

If he had called pre-flop, that creates odds for other players to call. This starts a cascading effect. You don't get Big Tex to yourself now. It is likely you'll get out-flopped. You'll need to hit something to win the pot because so many players are seeing the board. It is likely one of them will hit something.

Now instead, you're heads-up with Big Tex. He is wildly easy to deal with.

If he misses the flop, he'll just fold to the continuation bet. If he has some decent backdoors, a good high card with overs, or a pair he'll call down. If you flop a good pair, you'll be beating his flop calling range. He won't want to fold pairs. You can just ratchet up the bets on turn and river. You'll collect a ton of big blinds this way. You will be the person most likely to bust Big Tex because heads-up it's much easier for him to justify hero calls. In multiway pots, he is going to know there is likely a big hand lurking in the bushes.

At the beginning of the tournament, you cannot be texting your buddies, skimming the forums, or watching streaming videos. You need to find who is there to blow off steam and see some flops. You can always tell who the old school grinders are because they will be paying intimate attention to this recreational player while everyone else is focused on the table breaking order or how many players survived Day 1A.

If you start looking for these opportunities, you will be dumbfounded by how many times you start a tournament with a 2x stack.

Deep in tournaments, the stacks get shorter, the players get better, and the edges get smaller. Your variance will always be tremendous. Your best shot of getting more cashes than the other guy is from collecting easy chips while they're still available. That means paying attention early in the game and trying some bet sizes that make sense to gamblers but not regulars.

You're not there for anyone's approval. You're there for money. Do what needs to be done.

## CHAPTER 15

# NOT FREEZING OUT GOOD PLAYERS BEHIND

### What Are You Aiming For?

Let's continue to put you in some situations I once found myself in. You'll learn more from actual examples and quizzes than you will from abstract theoretical concepts.

You're at WPT Choctaw. After the Oklahoman Best Western coffee has burnt your stomach alive, you find yourself sitting down at the worst table in the room. Two to your left is one of the best WPT players of all time. The player on your direct left is a hyper aggressive Latino pro. You're not even sure if he's taking the tournament seriously. Is \$3,500 anything to him? He's throwing chips around left and right!

Two to your right is a young man who is vaping constantly while he raises seemingly any hand he likes. He keeps staring at you. His eyes seem open a little too wide. He's calling numerous raises out of position. When it is checked to him in multiway pots, he seems to fire constantly regardless of what he has.

Everyone else at the table is playing like a total nit. They are not putting a chip in the pot without a serious reason. There were passive players at the table earlier, but they were busted quickly.

What are you angling to do when you are in this spot? What is your goal at this table?

There isn't much going on for you here. But you're going to be at this table for 10 hours on day one. You'd better figure something out. What plays

and situations are you trying to set up?

This is what many people miss about tournament poker. Tournament poker is not cash-game poker. I have played millions of hands of both formats. They're not similar at all. In cash-game poker I have sat on my ass for years and played like a total nit. It works consistently in soft games with decent rake structures. It's not comfortable, but if you play for a living, you can travel some to find good games. You can also work to get yourself in softer online games if you're liberal with your crypto transfers, frequent cash outs, and risk tolerance.

Tournament poker is not like this. If you sit down at a \$109 tournament with 500+ runners, you will almost always have a soft enough game. It's rare to find that many good tournament players in one spot at once. The problem you face isn't necessarily the rake in tournaments. The problem you face is the variance. You can go your entire life without winning a live major, even if you're an excellent tournament player. Online there are fewer excuses. You can grind your way out of most variance. However, most people believe that you can only outrun variance through volume. That is not true. You can also outwork your competition to increase your win rate which will result in your cash rate increasing. Padding your bankroll with extra buy-ins every single day will keep you in action longer. You will eventually catch a decent score and make something out of it.

There are now some players way more talented than me who are doing incredible work with solvers in tournament poker. They have even opened up some of these tools to the public. That's one great way you can increase your win rate.

However, another excellent method is to study tournament stack dynamics every chance you get and create better attack plans.

I have friends who work with me on solver plays. That said, when I'm playing in the U.S., I end up using exploitative play a great deal of the time. This opens up an area where we can find a rare talent in poker.

Now, before we get into this, let's make one thing clear: I'm the guy who wrote a book about how most "poker talent" is imagined. There is legitimate poker talent, but most poker players worked for their understanding. Most of the poker players I've met with "talent" in the stratosphere would even tell you they busted their ass off for their mastery.

As Michelangelo is quoted as saying: "If people knew how hard I worked to get my mastery, it wouldn't seem so wonderful at all."

Most of my friends who are millionaires from poker don't exactly have

many commitments outside the game. They'll even tell you they lived with their parents as long as possible so that they didn't have to stress about finances. They didn't find a partner until they were well established in poker. They knew it would be unfair to a potential spouse while they were coming up in the game. All their waking hours were spent studying or playing.

If you're like me, you don't have that kind of time. I have dependents and bills that take hours of my time each day. I don't get to play as much as I want, and I still use poker for a large percentage of my income. Of course, this somewhat holds me back in the game.

Should I complain about that? Should you and I bemoan the fact that we don't get as much time to play and study poker as the generational talents?

We shouldn't because that is a negative freeroll. At best, it will leave us numb. At worst, it will keep us perpetually pissed off.

I didn't choose to have dependents. My mom had a stroke years back. I've been taking care of her since then. Thankfully, she's fairly autonomous now, but it was touch and go for a number of years. Money and time were disappearing at an alarming rate. I didn't have as much time to study as I'd like.

However, in every difficulty there is an opportunity. I used to hear that and laugh. Then, I actually found an opportunity in a difficulty.

Back in 2017, I was reading a book about how quarterbacks are trained. I picked it up for pennies at a used bookstore in New York. I was thumbing through it in a cafe at night while I was bored as hell on the Upper East Side, waiting for my girlfriend to come out of an event. I'm not sure I would have ever picked up this book if I hadn't been bored there at that exact moment. I'd grabbed the paperback from down the street because I realized I'd misjudged the time and I had hours to kill.

The book was dated even back then. It was referencing "up and coming" quarterbacks who had already gloriously flamed out of the NFL. But there was some fascinating stuff between the hagiographies.

Think of the best quarterbacks in the NFL. Name a position in sports where experience is rewarded more.

For those of you who do not watch American football, here is a 10-second primer. That guy who gets the ball at the beginning of the play? That's the quarterback. He runs around, hands the ball off, or throws the ball on every play. In order to score points, the quarterback has to manage the entire team down the field. When a talented quarterback gets injured, it frequently results in the team losing hope for their entire season.

Sounds like a position that would reward athleticism, correct? Except that's not true. Peyton Manning won his last Super Bowl aged 39. Tom Brady just won his seventh Super Bowl aged 43.

Year after year, supremely talented athletes become quarterbacks in the NFL and then quickly flame out. The coaches quoted in this book wanted to find out why.

What they eventually discovered was that when an experienced quarterback saw a defensive formation he knew where the play was headed in fractions of a second. Their advanced age didn't matter. They knew where a vulnerable section of the field was going to open up. They used this extra time to set up their pass more effectively and execute the play more carefully.

The young guys would look at the swarming killers on the defense and need a couple of seconds to figure out what to do. By the time they saw where they could exploit the defense, it was too late. There was a pass rusher in their face threatening to break them in half. They were scrambling all the time.

To simulate reps on the field, these coaches started showing thousands of defensive formations to quarterbacks. It turns out this was what Tom Brady and Peyton Manning were doing for much of their career. When they were in the film room, they were just seeing where plays would go.

Coaches started trying to simulate that with slides they'd put up on a projector. They would ask budding quarterbacks, "Here's a new formation, what do you see? You have two seconds." Of course, this didn't quite match the on-the-field reps, but it was a start.

Bill Belichick, one of the most successful coaches in NFL history who was behind a great deal of Tom Brady's success, took this system and developed it further. He merged it with a method of training used by Navy SEALs.

The SEALs are multilingual bomb specialists who can practically dead-lift Mack trucks. However, their commanders specifically don't overburden them with extra information when they go on a mission. Their commanders give them two or three things to notice and apply in the field. Their belief is that when the shit hits the fan no one is going to remember more than two or three things anyway.

Belichick could probably teach a 20-hour course at a college about special teams formations. However, when he sends his guys on to the field he says, "When you see this, you're going to do this." He gives them a couple things to remember and no more. He does that because once the shit hits



the fan, a 24-year-old fresh out of college in front of millions of TV viewers is probably not going to remember much else.

What does this all have to do with us? I'm glad you asked.

In tournament poker, the stack sizes change the "defensive formation" you're facing much of the time. Additionally, player tendencies and tournament stages mapped on to those stack formations will present pockets of vulnerability.

Online you will be able to see stack sizes and sometimes statistics rapidly, but if you're multi-tabling you won't have a ton of time. You will have to look at stack formations and make a call within seconds. You are very much like a quarterback staring at a defensive formation.

This is where many normal people can develop a "talent" in tournament poker. At almost every table there is going to be a weak spot. Your goal is to figure out how to get to it.

Sometimes the weak spot is always going to be one specific player. That will be your opening.

To my utter shock, sometimes I'll play for hours live and no one will be focusing on the weak player. The regs will be discussing tournaments they're planning to play, politics, sports, or anything else to pass the time. The entire time there will be a loose reg at the table who is giving away his leaks. They don't see any of it.

Sometimes the vulnerable point will change with each deal. Sometimes the player who three-bets you the most will be in the big blind where he likes to call much more. Maybe he calls down too much because he doesn't like bluffing post-flop. He might be a great player eight hands out of nine, but once an orbit he becomes a sitting duck for you to take advantage of. He is no different from any other calling station at that moment.

If you start looking for weak spots in the stack and player formations behind you, you will start finding more of them. If you're not looking for them they will escape you constantly.

Once you open the door to exploiting particular players in tournament poker, you can start focusing on developing a premium skill: Getting people to call huge bets.

This is where table sense can help develop a talent many people don't have. It's possible you already have this skill. You just haven't explored it yet.

Once you start working to get to the one weak player at the table you will start finding occasions where he doesn't want to fold. You will raise. He will call. The board will come A-2-2. He will check to you from the big blind.

You will bet with A-Qo. He will call. He checks to you on the 4 turn. Then it will hit you: He has an ace and he is not folding. You know he is not folding. That's why you have been targeting him. It's unlikely he has a two. If he has A-4 then good luck to him. You don't care. You're not trying to play perfectly anymore so no one will criticize you. You're trying to make money. So you bomb the turn and river. You get called and take most of the recreational player's chips. Meanwhile, the other local regs are talking to each other about some comedy special they saw on Netflix.

There are certain innate talents one can possess in poker. I called my first book *The Myth of Poker Talent* because for every 20 guys who claim to have one of these talents, perhaps one of them actually possesses it. Most pros need to work their ass off to gain their mastery. That's why normal people can become excellent poker players.

That said, there are poker professionals who can look at a guy and know that he's bluffing. I've seen my friends do this. There is no mathematical reason for them to make a call, but they still find their chips going into the middle. Then, they're right. A huge pot comes back to them and everyone is staring slack jawed. They're so rarely wrong when they do this that it is absurd.

I have never had that skill. I have made some sick calls in my life, but when I go home and do the math, I end up finding out I was only subconsciously combination counting. I almost never make a huge call that you at home couldn't make without some practice.

However, there is one talent you can develop later in your poker career.

Once I read that book about quarterbacks, I changed my teaching strategy completely. I started focusing on showing people table formations and giving them timers. I incrementally decreased the time they got for decisions. I made sure they remembered two or three things in every type of situation because when shit hits the fan on day four of a WSOP event you're likely not going to remember anything else.

My students loved it. The first time I made a training pack on my website based on these methods, it flew off the shelves. I got emails constantly from excited people saying they'd just won their first tournament.

To my surprise, I started getting better as well. I found that as I made quizzes based on thousands of hands my ability to surmise a situation was getting quicker and quicker.

I loved it. The more I taught, the better I got. The more I taught, the happier my students were. The more I taught, the more stable my home life became. Everything was coming together.

I found myself loving my own “film room.” When I made the quizzes for my students, I found that I had to look at a table formation and quickly tell them what I saw. If I wasn’t showing them a point of vulnerability, they didn’t see why they should be paying me. Being on the clock like that and under pressure did wonders for my game.

To my delight, some of my students started holding their own discussion groups where they would show a table formation and everyone would quickly take turns saying what they saw. They focused on exploratory thinking as opposed to confirmatory thinking. They would ask each other as many questions as possible in order to see if they missed anything. Soon they didn’t even need me and brought me in only if they needed a second opinion or some new ideas. They were well on their way to great poker careers.

The best part of all of this was that many of us were rapidly developing a hugely beneficial skill even if we could only look at quizzes and table formations for 30 minutes per day. We kept looking for ways to draw the weak players out into the open. Once we got better at doing that every hand, we were giving ourselves many more opportunities to practice extreme value betting.

This is where I found out about a talent I never knew I had: I can get huge over-bets called constantly.

Over the years, I had developed a table feel for when a guy was getting fed up with playing, one of those guys who play poker to see if they hit some flops. When they make a hand after a couple of hours, they are too tired to fold. They’re bored. They showed up to have some fun, not to sit down to do nothing.

Many of you reading this can get a sense for when a guy doesn’t want to fold. You can take a decent pair when he has a wide range and hammer him for multiple huge bets.

You don’t know if you have this ability yet because you maybe haven’t given yourself a shot. You have been trying to play perfectly. You have been worried about bluffs in softer games that rarely come.

Play fast. Throw big bets out. Even if a guy is normally wily, this will catch him off guard. Many guys will start calling you down more or folding more. It doesn’t happen 100% of the time but if you get involved regularly because you were studying at home and you’re confident in your convictions, that will catch people off guard.

Keep setting one guy up. Keep looking for that shot. Don’t give up. No matter how tough your table is, do not give up.

This WPT Choctaw table was one of the worst I'd seen in a while. I'd guess I was in one of the worst seats at the table. Yet, there was a way to play it.

The young guy two to my right was actually playing well in a number of pots, but it was fairly obvious he was stressed. Perhaps it was the buy-in. Perhaps it was the pros at the table. Who knows? That's none of our business.

It felt like he was doing something fairly logical. He was running at his stress in order to face it. He was a little keyed up, so he decided to face his challenges head on. That's actually a great way to go about life. He vaped a little, focused, and got involved. He was a little tougher to deal with.

However, he was the only guy at the table who was giving up any action and these situations don't leave us with much of a choice. We have to attack. We have to get in there and punch with him. We have to see if he can react when we put him on the back foot. If he can play back, that's fine. We'll play a tight aggressive game and hope for a table change. The WPT structures are good. There's a great chance we can make it to day two with some decent chips and get a better table draw.

Our problem is the two great players to our left. What do we do?

One thing you can try is randomly raising to a large amount when the young vaper is in the big blind. You open your range specifically for this situation because the young guy is giving up so much action. You try a larger raise to see if the great players are weirded out by it. There's a good chance this won't work, but it sometimes does in live play. These grinders can think you're a live cash player who generally plays tight. If you have been playing tight so far this isn't much of a stretch for them to believe. A 3.5x raise size will look like a cash game player who joined the tournament. Many cash game players make their money playing extremely tight. If you have the "Old Man Coffee" look, there's a greater chance this could work. If you look like someone who is enjoying their golden years and retirement, they're less likely to believe you're opening K-100 from early position.

The larger raise size can dissuade a three-bet from some opponents. If they cold call you, that's just fine. The big blind will probably still call because he loves action and he is getting a discounted price. If you get three-bet and have to fold, you can just open to 2x the next time.

The other reason you should consider this large amount is because the big blind is still likely to call you. Then, you will have a big pot, in position, with what is probably the best hand. You'll have the loosest player at the table out

of position in a big pot with a terrible range. Again, you'd have to work pretty hard to lose money in this spot.

The other move you can consider is to just keep freezing out the good players with large three-bets.

Let's say the young guy opens to 2.5x like he has frequently been doing. You know his ranges are wide. You look down at J-9s.

Normally, you're not in love with this hand, but here the situation and table formation calls for you to double down with it.

If you reraise here you're not going to get cute and make it 6x. You will make it 8.5x. This won't look like much to the loose player who is already in there and committed, but the good players behind you will know cold calling 8.5x is extremely difficult to justify.

This leaves them in an awkward situation. If you had made it 6x, they could have easily gone to 15x and watched how you reacted. But now you're sending them into 20 big blind territory. Your three-bets also again look like a cash game player. Tons of cash game players are nut peddlers who sit around all day. Plenty of good players will look at what's going on and give you the benefit of the doubt until they see something to change their mind.

If you do get four-bet, do not fold immediately. That's something that will tell the great players to your left that you were bullshitting. Take your time. Normally I play super-fast, but this is one of very few situations where I will take 30 seconds. For extra credit, slam your cards into the muck and mutter, "That's a pretty big raise. Nines. Nice bet sir. Enjoy it." Look super bitter that you folded a good hand. A lot of great pros will see right through this, but it is the only chance you have to keep this spot to yourself.

Many people don't like these big bet sizes, but I've had them work for me constantly. I wouldn't be doing my job if I didn't recommend them.

How many times have you been watching a final table and heard these words? "Joe Schmoe here is normally a cash game player. This is only his third tournament! And here he is with a shot at two bazillion dollars."

Every time I watch these cash game guys play tournaments, they're using huge raise sizes because that's what they do in cash. All I did was steal their methods.

Back to our table. If we were looking at a similar table formation with player tendencies mapped on to it in practice at home, we will know our game plan within seconds. If we didn't practice at home, we will likely never know how we should approach this situation. Over hours of play, we might feel our way to a roughly correct answer, but then if a player busts and the

table changes, we will not be prepared for it.

You don't want to be wasting time for hours wondering how to play. Practice should be difficult. The game should be enjoyable. If you're worried about what to do with the pros to your left for hours, then you won't be focused on busting this guy two to your right. You won't be able to develop your ability to get big bets called because you won't even be trying.

In the actual tournament I played, I was frequently able to box out the pros to my left when the young gun two to my right kept raising. I made sure to keep my tight image by not talking or calling attention to myself. Most players will subconsciously assume you're tight if they never notice you. If you were in every pot, they would soon learn who you were.

I kept quiet and passed on some thinner spots to earn some larger three-bets later when the blinds went up. I used a larger raise at one point to get the young guy alone in the big blind. I got him to call three streets when I had second pair with second kicker. To my delight, he paid me off on the river with a weaker hand. Success!

After that, the good players to my left had seen how wide I opened. I wasn't able to get many opens through after that, so I had to throttle back my opening range. I worked on that three-bet but didn't get dealt many hands.

Later in the tournament, I lost several big pots with big hands. I had a nightmare day. It was one of those sessions where I was positive a guy was bluffing, I called with the nut high card, and he had fifth pair. Just nothing was going right. None of my hands were hitting flops. All my big pairs went down in flames. At one point I raised, called a loose player's all-in, and got shown a great hand. I likely overplayed my suited ace in that particular situation. Before I knew it, I had 13,000 chips left. We started with 40,000.

What was fascinating was at the beginning of the day I had 40,000 chips and had run my stack up to 53,000. The 13,000 chips I made had mostly come from the young buck giving me action.

All I had left after an entire day of playing bad and running bad was 13,000 chips. If I had not been focusing on that young gun and opening K-10o from early position (a play I rarely make) then I would have been out of that tournament.

The 13,000 in chips gave me an extra life. I focused on that. I didn't bemoan my bad reads or bad luck. I told myself, "If you blow this tournament off you will regret it tomorrow morning." I pretended I was in a video game and I was given a side quest. "You have a short stack in a World Poker Tour

event in Oklahoma late into day one. Cash it to unlock a new player achievement.”

Thankfully, I was able to cash that tournament for \$6,000+. I left Oklahoma with my buy-in, gas, meals, and hotel paid off.

Do you think that cuts down your variance? Do you think being able to write off one of your worst tournaments of the year because you landed a few value bets is helpful?

It’s monstrous. This is how you stay alive in tournament poker. You kick and claw for cashes you don’t deserve. You find who is weak at the table and you take what you can from them. Sometimes that’s going to be a lot of chips. Sometimes it’s not going to be much. Whatever it is, though, you’re going to have to go get it. You’re going to have to study stack formations and hand situations before every tournament so that you’re warmed up and ready to exploit what the table gives you.

If you don’t have time for any other kind of study in poker, at least give yourself the chance to go after the loose money. Most of your profits at any table are going to come from one or two players. If you keep putting yourself at tables with loose players and other players who will get out of your way, then you will be well on your way to making a solid profit. If your time is limited, then you should focus on getting to loose and weak players exclusively. If your life ever changes in the future and you are afforded more time, then you can focus more on the nuanced plays versus regs at tougher tables.

# CHAPTER 16

## NOT BETTING BIG IN MULTIWAY POTS

### Get the Big Money Now

I can't remember the first time this dawned on me. I was playing cards somewhere. I raised before the flop. A loose player called me in middle position with 100 big blinds. A solid player with 100 big blinds called me from the big blind. We went to the flop with three players. I held A-Ko. The board came A-8-2 rainbow.

It was checked to me. I started grabbing chips to fire half the pot. Then, it hit me like a rock: "What the hell am I doing here?"

The loose player, this cardroom's Big Tex, was going to call whatever I put into the middle. If he had 8-6s he wasn't going to fold on the flop even if I bet 90% of the pot. He didn't show up to the cardroom to fold. He would feel ridiculous if he called pre-flop and then just folded a pair to a single bet on the flop. He's going to subconsciously ask himself, "What the hell am I doing here?"

The presence of the solid player in the big blind also didn't justify a half-pot bet from me. If he flopped an eight, he probably wasn't calling a bet from me regardless of its size. I had raised from early position and would be firing into two players. He would probably fold an eight. It's not impossible he would call. It's just not probable. I'd be surprised if he gave me a call 40% of the time with 8-7s. If the loose player flatted my continuation bet I thought it was less likely he'd give me action with an eight.

However, things get interesting if he has an ace.



I remember once years ago I was in the big blind in a similar situation. An exceptionally tight player raised from early position. A loose player cold called. I called out of the big blind with A-5s. I checked on an A-8-2 rainbow board. The tight player made a fairly large continuation bet. The loose player called. I folded my hand without much thought.

I was teaching my students later and this hand came up. Their eyes popped out of their head when I showed them my A-5 fold. I was confused. "How could you fold there?" they asked me.

I asked them a question, puzzled. "What is this tight player betting here into multiple players that we beat? A-4? A-3? I'm not even sure he opens those hands, much less fires them into two players. I'm drawing to three outs here if I call this sizeable bet."

They pushed back. "You can't just fold top pair on the flop!"

"Look, I understand you can't see the world without generalizations. That's human," I said. "But the generalization doesn't always hold. Yes, sometimes the exception proves the rule, but that still means there is an exception. Not every 7'3" college basketball player is going to make it to the NBA. Not every single top pair is worth calling a continuation bet."

To my utter confusion, they kept pushing back on me. I kept asking questions. I didn't get great responses. The consensus seemed to be you can't fold top pair to one bet ever. Your friends in your poker group might make fun of you and that's bad.

Over the next year or so I started making a mental note whenever these hands came up. Literally, 95% of the time or more the big blind player would call the flop continuation bet with top pair and then happily fold it on the turn.

Why would you put your money in when 19 times out of 20 you're just going to lose it?

Those flop continuation bets were huge too! Four or five big blinds is not chump change. If you piss that away, that can cut your win rate in half over 100 hands.

Now, once you have this kind of information you can make some adjustments.

One adjustment I see people make at the table all the time is they will continuation bet bluff into multiple opponents because the big blind should fold weak top pairs. The big blind would three-bet big aces, so they mostly have weak pairs. The loose player is such a bad player that at some point he will become overwhelmed by how good we are and fold on later streets.

That is an excellent example of projecting how we feel about the world on to other people and then being angry when they turn out to be different from us.

That is also super entitled. Everyone is just supposed to do what you want them to do when you want them to do it because you said so.

You can learn a lot about a man at a poker table. If he sees the world for what it is and then works to profit from it, he is probably rational. If he keeps bemoaning the fact that other people won't do his bidding because he wants them to, then he's not realistic.

The adjustment we should make here is based on what the reality is.

Theoretically, the solid player should be folding most aces there because if we're a solid player we're unlikely to be betting large into two players with anything less than a good ace.

In the real world, that's not how people behave. An AI doesn't have emotions and might make that fold. A human is going to be worried they're getting massively exploited. If they call you on the flop and then fold the turn, they can go to bed that night knowing there are no monsters under the bed. After all, you definitely have the hand when you bet the turn.

This brings us back to my A-Ko on the A-8-2 flop. Why would I bet half-pot there?

If the cold caller or big blind missed this flop, they're not calling any bet we put out there. They know in a multiway pot it is likely someone has something. They can't even have overcards to draw to on this board.

If they do have a pair, we have good reason to believe that they are not folding regardless of what we bet. The cold caller who plays for fun probably isn't even aware of how big the bets are in relation to the pot. If he has a pair, he is going to continue because he plays for fun. Hitting flops is what he came to the cardroom for. He's not going to stop playing for fun just because we want him to.

If the big blind has an eight, he was probably not giving us much action to begin with. If he has an ace, he likely won't fold to the first bet regardless of what bet we put out. Why would we load up our bet size on the turn when it's more likely that's where he's going to fold?

In the actual hand, I bet 90% of the pot and got called by the loose player. Sometimes this will happen, and the big blind will have a weak ace and they'll fold to the large bet and the call, but it happens less often than you'd expect. You would think that it would be blindingly obvious that this is a bad situation for a weak ace, but humans have that bias towards top pairs facing

a single bet on the flop.

I ended up firing on the turn and river versus the weak player and winning a much larger pot than I normally would. Ever since then, I have been looking for spots to bet larger multiway.

Another factor that makes this hand easier to play is that both these players are unlikely to raise with a hand that is worse than ours. The big blind player is solid, so he probably isn't in the habit of check-raise bluffing on ace-high boards with nothing when a player bets into multiple players. The loose player is likely to call down with his pairs to see if they're good. If you get raised in this spot after making a massive bet, it's likely someone flopped a set or two pair. It happens rarely so you shouldn't worry too much about folding. I'm still waiting for the day someone shows me a bluff there or clearly looks gleeful as I muck.

"Isn't that horribly exploitable?" you're asking. Yes. It is. If you throw a 104mph fastball in the middle of the strike zone, some of the world's best hitters can hit the pitch out of the park. However, versus the ball boy, a 104mph fastball is probably not going to get hit. If you are playing in games that 99% of people play, with recreational players or regulars who have other streams of income, many of them will fall for this play. If you get raised and you think it was a bluff, take a note and then adjust. It's unlikely to happen, but you can look out for it.

When you are setting up this play, you need to look for players who are unlikely to raise multiway as a bluff. In my experience, that means you need to look out for great cash game regs and some tournament warhorses, but few other players. You need to find players who can't fold one pair to the first bet. Those players are plentiful. It's more difficult to find a reg who will fold a pair to the first bet than a reg who won't.

# CHAPTER 17

## NOT CHECK/FOLDING TO REGS WHO CALL

### This One Can Get Tricky

Let's put you in a common situation.

You have 50 big blinds in a tournament. You are in the big blind. Someone solid raises from early position. Another very solid player cold calls from the cutoff. It's folded to you. You look down at K-10s. You call.

The board comes K-8-4 rainbow. You check. The initial raiser goes ahead and bets 50% of the pot. The solid reg then calls. What should you do here?

You have probably guessed what you should do here in this hypothetical situation, but do you fold in real life?

It's tempting to call. You do have top pair. But let's try to drill this down.

If the initial raiser made it 2.5x, that means that three people put in 2.5x pre-flop. That's 7.5x, plus the small blind. For now, let's assume there are no antes, so we'll just call it eight big blinds. The initial raiser bet four big blinds into that and the pre-flop cold caller called again. That's 16 big blinds in the pot. You're getting a great price, but once you call there will be 20 big blinds in the middle.

Have you ever called a flop bet and then been shocked by how big the turn bet is? This is what is going to happen here. You must see it before it happens.

It's very likely there will be another bet too. You have a solid player who opened from early position. The other solid player cold called with three people to act behind. The solid player from early position continuation bet into multiple players, including one tighter player in the cutoff. That player called.

There is certainly an argument for calling here. You could believe the solid player in early position is testing the water and the cutoff is simply trying to

get to the turn with pocket tens. But at the very least you need to consider a fold here.

There will be times you play with the same guy for weeks or months. You will begin noticing patterns. It's common that you'll notice a player doesn't continuation bet when he misses. This comes up especially when people are playing multiway pots. With more players involved, they assume that someone must have something. Tight players get suspicious at that point.

There will be many occasions when a solid player continuation bets from early position and you should start thinking, "I'm out of here."

There are many people who will not bet there with a backdoor flush draw or a high card as a bluff. They won't bet Q-Q to see if anyone has a king. They check everything but their kings and better to see how everyone else will react. After the flop gets checked around, they will consider whether to bet or not.

With these players, you need to ask yourself some serious questions if they bet on the flop. Did this person open K-9s from early position? If they're a tighter player, the answer is probably no. If they're betting a king or better, what do we beat at this point? Are we drawing to three outs? Do we want to face the probable 10x bet on the turn with a hand we hate this much? We only had 50 big blinds to start the hand.

Calling 4x on the flop is no joke either. We will often have to call here because we are unsure of our read. There's a decent chance the action will shut down on the turn after we call. However, if we know for a fact that the initial raiser is only betting into multiple players with a solid hand that beats ours, we can start considering a fold.

I once heard a player say to an opponent, "You're a great player, but you're overestimating your abilities. You always miss the opportunities to fold." He was talking to a young gun who had become much better post-flop. The only issue was the young buck had become infatuated with his power. He never wanted to fold. He always assumed he could find a way to win.

I loved how the veteran framed it. Folding is an opportunity. If your opponent makes it glaringly obvious that they're coming in with a big hand, you can get out of the way and give them nothing. That is immensely frustrating for them.

Have you ever flopped a set, bet into multiple players, and had everyone fold? It felt awful, right? People can exploit you with a fold. It's not discussed much, but veterans look for those opportunities.

This is a basic opportunity to fold and save four big blinds – and it comes

up frequently. Many recreational players aren't even looking for it. They assume that they're doing something wrong if they fold top pair to a single bet. If your opponent is so tight that they only continuation bet in multiway pots with the goods, then you can pick up on that. Four blinds means a lot to your bottom line. If you're making 10 big blinds per 100 hands in tournament poker, then you don't want to throw 40% of your win rate away for one mediocre call. Keep your eyes peeled and look for the opportunities to fold.

## CHAPTER 18

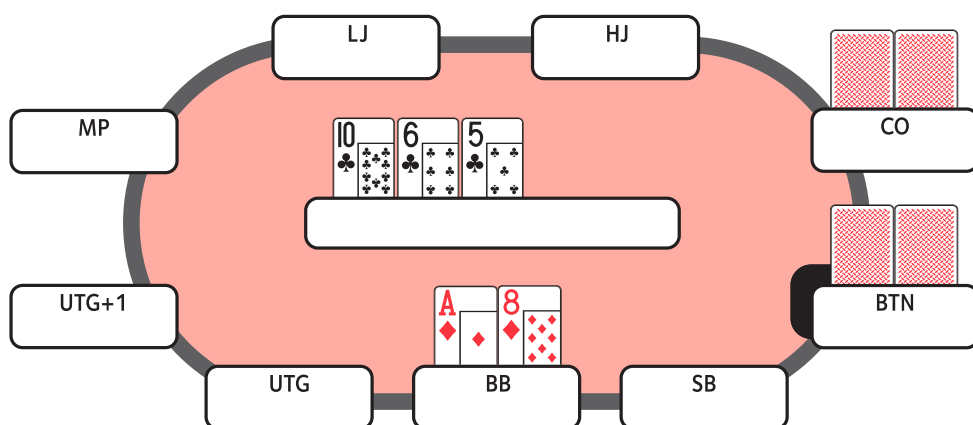
# NOT CHECK-RAISING VERSUS COLD CALLERS

### Keep Going, Keep Thinking

I was in Los Angeles the first time I made this play.

It was folded around to an aggressive, thinking reg in the cutoff. He opened. The button was another aggressive and intelligent reg. He cold called. I called from the big blind with A♦-8♦.

The board came 10♣-6♣-5♣. I checked (*Diagram 1*).



*Diagram 1*

I was 23 at the time. The buy-in for this tournament was \$10,000. I didn't have that kind of money, but that didn't stop me from playing. I had

been fairly nitty so far at this particular table.

The first aggressive reg bet. The second one called fairly quickly.

The thought flitted through my head, "I wish I had A♣-8♣ and not A♦-8♦."

The action was back on me. For some reason I was still holding on to my cards.

I thought, "But if I had A♣-8♣, I wouldn't get action if I check-raised here."

The two regulars stared at me. For some reason, they weren't hiding the fact that they didn't want me to raise.

"I wouldn't get action," I kept thinking, "because whenever someone check-raises here they have a made flush."

I grabbed one of my stacks of chips and fired in a nearly pot-sized raise.

We were deep stacked. They had room to maneuver. But they didn't.

The first player folded quickly. The second player followed suit.

It wasn't until I was in my motel room later that night that I realized why that play worked.

Let's think of the ranges two aggressive regs will have in that situation.

The cutoff is opening a large percentage of hands. The button is not the kind of guy to have a disciplined cold calling range. He wants to get in there and mix it up.

When the cutoff continuation bets on that board, that doesn't mean a whole lot. He could have a club in his hand or a weak pair. He doesn't need much.

The button would consider raising with a made flush or set for value or just because the board is so coordinated. When he calls without much thought, he is likely to have a pair or a decent club.

This all raises the question, "What hands do they have that want me check-raising here?"

It's possible the cutoff flopped a flush and continuation bet it, but that is going to make up a small percentage of his range. Every made flush combination you can think of is exactly one combo. There are far more pairs and missed high cards in his range, combination wise.

If I check-raise around the size of the pot, my bluff needs to work 50% of the time. That means I need to know they are folding more than half the time. The only way I can be reasonably sure of that is if I am convinced they fold pairs most of the time.

That doesn't seem like much of a stretch. If we are targeting this play



correctly then we are selecting good regulars who can fold a pair. We are only launching this play when we have a tighter image. If the whole table already knows that we're there to gamble, it is unlikely this play is going to work. We should fold in that instance.

But in this particular situation, I would not be surprised if either player folded a 10. How good would you feel with Q-10 and no club if a tighter player put in a huge check-raise on that board?

I've made that fold before. There are players I've played with for more than a decade who have never check-raised that board without a flush.

This is what you are trying to avoid. In multiway pots, many players play exactly the same way. With two pair or better, they start ramming and jamming because they assume somebody has something. With one pair, they call most bets because they don't want to build a huge pot multiway, but they also don't want to fold. With a high card, they fold to any bet.

Most players will not notice if you're this predictable. You'll get away with this strategy in most games. The problems will arise when you move up. I am a moderately successful pro. I've made good money for years exploiting players who are predictable post-flop in multiway pots. If you deal with the guys above my pay grade in higher buy-ins, then you're going to get fleeced even faster.

All you need to do to muddy the waters versus regs is throw in some change-ups.

For you poor souls who didn't get to watch baseball growing up, a change-up is when the pitcher throws the ball like it is going to be a fastball but then it comes across the plate 15mph slower than usual. The batter gets revved up and swings at the "fastball" before the pitch actually crosses the plate. They doubt their timing from that point forward. They can't feel secure swinging like they did before.

In poker, you need to throw in some reversals and counters. You can't only check-raise multiple players in a multiway pot with made hands. If you play with the same guys in a cash game every day, that will get predictable.

If you're playing complete strangers, bet big in multiway pots with a hand and bet small without one. They call with most of their calling range (pairs) regardless of what bet you use. Buy extra cards and bluff with cheap bets when you don't have much of the board. Bomb it when you do have the best hand. Most random recreational players won't adjust, especially if you're playing on anonymous sites without HUDs that invite recreational players.

If you play against the same players every day online and live then you

need to pay attention to what hands you show down when your varied bet sizes get exposed. If everyone is watching hockey on TV, you don't have to change much. If everyone is paying attention, then you can consider betting large as a bluff in a future multiway pot. If you have solid regs in the pot, it's likely they'll fold mediocre pairs (most of their calling range) when they've only seen you bet large with top pairs.

To be honest, if I'm ever in a cash game where a guy can make that fold, I'll change tables. There are enough loose games out there that I know I don't need to deal with those good players. But you will have no choice in tournaments. If they've seen you do something comically exploitative, ask yourself if you can use that against them in a future hand. Keep them guessing.

## CHAPTER 19

# NOT USING SMALL BETS MULTIWAY

### Try This Sometime

You open 5♣-4♣ from the cutoff. The button cold calls you. The big blind calls you as well. You are deep stacked at the beginning of a session. Your opponents have large stacks too.

The board comes A♣-5♥-2♠. The big blind checks to you. What do you do here? Do you check? Do you bet?

Many players check. Others bet half pot. Both options pose problems.

Do either of these players know you well? Have they seen you make a large bet in a similar situation with an ace? If they did see that, are they the types of players to remember it?

None of these questions gets to the heart of the matter, however. The true question we should be asking ourselves is can anyone raise with an ace here?

If the answer is, “No, they would need two pair or better before they raise” then the right play is to bet small. You should bet 25% of the pot.

If you bet 25% of the pot your bet will need to work 20% of the time as a bluff to be immediately profitable. Your opponents will both need to defend collectively 80% of the time.

If they call or raise 75% of the time, that means your bet is going to fail three times out of four. However, you will still be making money.

You’re not betting with nothing. You have a gutshot, a pair, and a back-door flush draw. You want to see turn cards.

If your opponents can't raise with A-10 here, then betting larger makes little sense. There are only a couple of hands your opponent can have here.

By the way, whenever someone asks me how to hand range, I always tell them to start this way. "Ask yourself about two pair or better hands, one pairs, high cards, and draws. Just remember the pre-flop action and ask yourself what hands he has in those categories. Add the post-flop deductions to your analysis to narrow down those categories or even eliminate them."

If you start with those categories, you'll be able to deal with many basic regs and recreational players. The problem most new players have is they try to think about every possible individual hand any opponent could have and they get lost in the stress of the moment. Just start with those categories and you'll be well on your way to learning hand reading.

Let's go through those categories in this example. Your opponents can't have draws because there are no flush or straight draws on this board. They would have a straight with 3-4, but that seems an unlikely hand for either player to have.

Two pair or better? Yes, either player could have A-5 or A-2. The button likely would have A-5s and A-2s. He might not cold call with the unsuited hands. Pocket twos and pocket fives make perfect sense for both players as well.

How about one pair combinations?

How about aces? Yes, they have aces a large percentage of the time. Those are popular hands to play pre-flop.

5-x and 2-x seem less likely because those are terrible pre-flop hands. They're less likely to be in the cold caller's range than the big blind. They're not impossible for either player to have, but we'll discount them.

High cards? Yes, a number of suited connectors and broadways missed this board.

This is an example of the kind of hand reading you can do at the table. It gives you a much better focus as you continue to play. As you can see, anyone can do this kind of work. It's not perfect and it's certainly not exact, but even basic hand reading will put you ahead of 99% of opponents in looser recreational games.

Of course, if you practice this kind of work in private, you will become much better at doing it on the fly when you're on the felt. That's why you need to study whenever you can find some spare minutes. Even if you commit 15 minutes a day that will help you tremendously over years and years.

Let's return to the situation at hand. If you normally bet half the pot here, look at the ranges we're considering and ask how that bet interacts with them.

If you usually check here, ask what your opponents will do with their ranges.

There are numerous reasons we can consider a small bet here. If your opponents have two pair or better, they're likely raising regardless of what you bet. You're folding to a raise anyway. If you bet smaller and then fold, you will save a big blind or two. That adds up to a ton of money over the years.

If your opponents have an ace, are they going to raise it? They should raise with aces to get more value, but the average player struggles to do that. If they get three-bet on this board after raising with A-10, they get furious with themselves. They opt for a call to avoid this fate.

It's difficult for either player to have a good ace. Did that thought already go through your head? The big blind probably would have squeezed with A-K and A-Q. It's possible the button would have three-bet A-K, A-Q, A-J, and even A-10.

That makes a continuation bet here more desirable.

If you bet small are either of these players going to raise A-9? If they're not going to raise that hand, are they going to raise any of the weaker aces?

If they have high cards, they are going to fold to any bet you put out there. It's a multiway pot and the board came ace high. They assume somebody has something.

They can't have draws because no draws are available.

If you bet more than a quarter of the pot, what hand is going to fold that wasn't folding to our smaller bet? It's possible you could fold out 5-6s to a larger bet, but not likely. People don't like folding pairs to a single flop bet.

When you think through the ranges like this, the smaller bet makes more sense. Additionally, if the big blind is the only one to call, we just effectively purchased a turn and river. Most of our opponents will not lead the turn once they call our flop bet. And we can check back to see the river for free if we want. This is attractive when we have a gutshot, pair, and backdoor flush draw.

We shouldn't make this small bet with zero equity. Our bet only needs to succeed 20% of the time, but our opponents are going to have a ton of aces. We do want to make this bet when we have a hand that doesn't exactly work as a check-calling, check-folding, or check-raising hand.

The button will likely bet the flop with all his aces. If you allow him to se-

lect the sizing, you might not like what he puts out there. If you check-raise, it's unlikely any good ace is going to fold. Check-folding is too tight given all your draws.

Again, this play rests on a couple of questions. If we change around the positions but not the board, we can ask ourselves the same questions. How good are his top pairs? Is he raising any of them?

If we raise from under the gun and UTG+1 cold calls, it's much more likely that A-K or A-Q is in his range. If we try this cute bet, we will get raised a larger percentage of the time. We should consider checking there.

Some of you at this point might be asking yourself, "Wait, you're saying bomb the pot there with a good ace, but bet small when you want to see the turn? Won't that become wildly obvious to our opponents?"

No. No it won't.

You are someone who reads poker books. Your opponents probably do not work on their game. They are on their cellphones during every deal. They might buy poker books, but they don't read them. They might learn poker buzzwords, but they don't understand them.

Most people play poker to enjoy themselves. When the flop is coming out, they are not thinking about their day at work. When they call a river and get to see your hand, it is a thrill. They don't work on their game. It's no different than a group of guys going to play a round of golf. Sure, they will talk technique sometimes, but they don't know what they're doing.

Most opponents don't pay much attention during live games. Whenever you show down a hand, pay attention to who is looking at the cards.

I don't know why people do this, but some people will flat out broadcast the fact they are paying attention. Perhaps they think it is an intimidation tactic? I couldn't tell you.

Make a note of who saw you do what play and try to change it up on them. If you are paying attention to other people's showdowns, don't let anyone know you're paying attention. Look at the cards then look at the TV. Have the board already in mind when the showdown comes out.

Online fewer people are paying attention than you think. If you're playing anonymous poker, people don't get enough hands with you to make a read.

If you are playing in tougher games, then you will need to pay attention to what pots you've played with a person. That is where note taking will come in.

## CHAPTER 20

# BALANCING WHEN THERE'S NO NEED

### The Cat and Mouse Game

That last section brings us right into this one.

How much should you balance at a poker table? *Should* you balance at a poker table at all?

Let me preface this section with a statement: There is not a single GTO practitioner alive who doesn't exploit their opponents.

Let me say that again. No one ever hears me when I say it the first time. There is not a single GTO practitioner alive who doesn't exploit their opponents.

GTO is created when two opponents are maximally exploiting each other, as Michael Acevedo so eloquently put it. I'm the guy who wrote a book about exploiting live poker players. Half my friends in poker never shut up about solvers and new solutions. When I'm studying on my workdays, I work with these guys.

There is no debate between us. When we play against great players we balance as much as possible so that we don't get taken advantage of. We pay attention to our opponents and see if they might have a weakness in some area we haven't identified. If we're playing weak opponents, we just go ahead and exploit them.

My friends who work with technology to improve their game have helped me immensely. They have made some incredible advances over the past couple of years. Where they have helped the most is dealing with nut-

case Brazilians and Eastern Europeans. When people are capable of turning hands into a bluff and taking a run at you, it's good to know what you're minimally supposed to be defending with.

That said, let's pretend you're playing cash in Las Vegas. It's late at night. The game is decent but not amazing. You're considering leaving. Then, "the man" sits down.

"The man" is, of course, not The Man™. He's not the actual guy who walks in the poker room and gets everyone's attention. But this guy sure would like to think he is that guy. He is willing to pay for the privilege of maybe feeling like that person for a time.

He sits down after striking out at the clubs. He is dressed garishly. He reeks of sweat, beer, and Red Bull. Within 30 minutes you find out this guy is playing to either get a big stack or get out of there. If you raise to any amount, he is going to call and see the flop. If you limp, he will raise.

He is clearly inebriated. He's mad about something. Perhaps he talked to the same girl at the club for hours and she ended up not being interested.

Whatever raise goes in, he calls. He's taking every flop.

There is not a GTO practitioner alive who wouldn't adjust in this game. There is a basic way to play against this player. If you have aces, make it 9x. Once he calls, he will be committed and you can go for stacks. If you want to see the flop with 5-4s, make it 2x. Case closed.

Sometimes a younger player will stick to their exact opening charts in this game. They might even get mad that "the man" is calling all their raises. This player will learn within a few years that recreational players are what create all their earnings in cash games. If they don't adjust to them while they are around, they are not going to make money.

Balancing and keeping your defense airtight is fantastic when you are eventually forced to play in the same game as a reg. You can then neutralize his ability to make profit while continuing to study him for weaknesses. That is about the best you can do versus a good pro.

Believe it or not, pros make mistakes all the time. They don't have Jedi blood running through their veins. Sometimes a guy will overcommit because he thinks he sees a spot where he can exploit you. If you can identify where he is doing this then you can counter what he's doing.

This cat and mouse game exists in all sports. I consider it a separate salary from the money in poker. The fact I get to wake up each day and work to outwit someone on the other end of an internet line is a huge rush for me.

Every wealthy poker player I have ever met loves this game. They want



to know what they are theoretically supposed to do in a situation, sure. They need that information. When they see someone deviating from what the computer models are saying, however, that's when the real fun begins.

Years ago, I had a friend of mine do some work on big blind defense. You have to pay the big blind every orbit. If you look at your win rate from every position, you will see the lion's share of your money is disappearing when you're forced to put one big blind in the pot out of position without looking at your cards. If you can neutralize this issue, you will go far towards making more money playing poker.

What was fascinating as we looked at the models was that you could call extremely wide when someone made it 2x, but your ranges significantly shrank when someone made it 3x or 3.5x. Post-flop, you were supposed to defend wide as well. Gutshots and backdoor flush draws had to be check-raised routinely. Some absolute bluffs with short stacks had to be thrown in as well. Many weak pairs had to be played fast.

The specifics aren't important for this anecdote. What is important is that theoretically and mathematically people are supposed to defend extremely wide versus a 2x raise and then get short stacks in frequently post-flop. If they had more chips, they were frequently supposed to be check-raising versus a high continuation betting range.

No one was doing any of that. We confirmed that going through databases. People called out of the big blind with whatever the hell they wanted. Many people call 3.5x raises just like they're 2x raises. Once they are post-flop, they either hit the board and continue or fold. They hardly ever bluff. If they do flop a mediocre pair, they check and call with it. This gives the player in position extra equity because they get two additional cards to hit their hand.

Looking at this we decided upon a simple exploitative line. "Shouldn't we just raise big all the time in later position versus weaker players and continuation bet most boards?"

Sure enough, our win rates started going up when we adopted some bigger raises. For one blessed year this seemed to work well versus pros. They'd be weirded out by the larger raise size but they'd still call pre-flop. Post-flop, they had nowhere near the check-raising range they were theoretically supposed to have.

Of course, that window of opportunity has shrunk somewhat with more experienced players, but you can still use this line against recreational players all the time. That is a great example of an exploitative line that was created

based on an understanding of what players should theoretically be doing. If we didn't understand that there's a difference between what players should be doing and what they are actually doing we couldn't play that spot to the best of our abilities.

That's why exploitative poker and balanced poker are two sides of the same coin. If you face someone who knows their stuff, it's hugely valuable to know how you should theoretically play in any given situation. If you're playing someone who doesn't study, then knowing theoretically correct poker will allow you to exploit a player more efficiently.

Some of the best exploitative plays I have were taught to me by my GTO-obsessed friends. If I were to swear off any facet of poker because it was new and different to me then I wouldn't be able to complete my game.

The cat and mouse game of balancing and exploiting players is addictive. I would never want any of my students to deny themselves that rush.

You can see this cat and mouse game in sports. This game of "exploit or randomize" is not exclusive to poker.

Theoretically, you could balance your range in baseball. You could adjust whether you swing or not based on the frequencies a pitcher uses. If you want to be a bit more exploitative, you could tailor your ranges to the count. But that's not why people watch baseball.

In the immortal words of baseball commentator Paul Francis Sullivan, nobody goes to a *Fast & Furious* movie saying to themselves, "I hope everybody wears their seatbelts and drives the speed limit."

Risk is what makes life worth living. Risk is what makes the game fulfilling to our soul. A man needs to test himself. He doesn't feel alive until he does.

I don't know when it happened, but safety has become our God here in the United States. If you take a risk in your professional life, you will be derided for not going to college and getting a "good job." Parents are criticized for letting their kids walk to the park across the street.

This culture pervades poker too. "Don't do anything that will get you criticized. Just flat raises and hope to the hit the flop until the day you die!"

Forget that. I don't watch *Fast & Furious* for the seatbelts. And I don't watch baseball for the balanced play.

In the 2016 World Series, the world got to see one of the greatest examples of exploitative batting. David Ross was at bat after a disastrous inning. The Cubs were careening off the road in game seven. They had not won a World Series in over a century. Cubs fans around the world were watching their TV screens feeling as if they were destined to lose in the most

heart-wrenching way possible. Maybe another 100 years would pass before they got another shot.

The veteran Ross changed all of that. He knew he was most likely playing the last game of his life. He wasn't going to leave anything on the field.

He was facing Cleveland's Andrew Miller. Miller was a struggling pitcher who had turned into a gunslinger. He had developed a slider that was close to impossible to hit.

Ross watched Miller as he got the pitch signal from his catcher. He noticed that Miller shook his head "no" at the first pitch the catcher suggested to him.

At that moment, Ross decided to go for broke. He had watched film on Miller. He knew that Miller's catcher would frequently call for the slider and Miller would say no. The catcher wanted his best pitch repeatedly, but Miller would insist on throwing his fastball. His fastball was nowhere near as good as his slider.

Miller wound up and threw the pitch. Ross guessed correctly. The catcher had called for a slider. Miller had shaken his head. The catcher then called for a fastball. Miller had thrown the fastball. Ross saw it coming from a mile away and slammed the ball over the fence. The entire tide of the game changed. The Cubs ended up winning their first World Series Championship in over a century. And it was all because Ross took a risk based on good information.

It was possible that Ross could have guessed incorrectly. He might have assumed he would be right 70% of the time, but that means he would have been wrong 30% of the time, and he would have whiffed. But he took that risk. He was willing to make a huge mistake in the most important game of his life. He cared more about winning than looking stupid.

Very few of us will ever get to race cars or play professional sports, but the great thing about poker is that we can find a game every day of our lives. In these games we can balance while we're working to understand our opponents, but we can also be willing to take a chance once we feel we understand our opponent's weaknesses. If you get out there every day and you find a way to hit your exploitative home runs, you will make significant money at poker in your lifetime.

# CHAPTER 21

## NOT DOING ENOUGH EXPERIMENTS

### Your Poker Is Not Your Personality

Your poker is not your personality.

The way you play poker does not define who you are.

Poker is merely a game.

Much of life is a game.

I have always been attracted to experiments. The great thing about experiments is they don't need to succeed. The goal of an experiment is to learn something. The goal of an experiment is to get closer to the truth. The goal of an experiment is not necessarily success.

I've also often been bored, ever since my earliest memories. Doing an experiment is not boring. Win, lose, or draw you will at the very least be entertained.

Most people assume that what they do with their life says a lot about them. This is a natural conclusion to make. If you spend most of your day commercial fishing, I will assume you're a fisherman. However, this doesn't apply to everything.

I've lost count of the number of people I know who go on a diet for two weeks and talk about it constantly. They get locked in a trap. They can't give up the diet if it's not working because they've talked about it so much.

Just do everything as an experiment.

If that diet stops working after a month, ask yourself why and make adjustments. Winners make adjustments. Losers make excuses.

I could write an entire book about the experiments I've done and the fun things they've taught me, but for today's purposes let's discuss poker.

When I started playing poker, I was a huge nit. I made enough money to pay my bills and take care of my family, so I didn't mind being a nit. However, it became clear to me at a certain point that I needed to evolve to survive.

I didn't know how to do that. So I started doing some experiments. One day a week I would try something new at the table. I'd usually move way down in stakes to try these experiments. The only qualifying factor was that the other players had to be taking the game somewhat seriously. I couldn't run these experiments in play money games because that wouldn't teach me anything.

Here are some of the experiments I tried:

1) Try to triple-barrel bluff versus "thinking" players in situations where no sane person would ever bluff.

2) Play only aces, kings, queens, jacks, 10s, and ace-king for an entire session in cash.

3) Keep a three-bet percentage of 20% at \$1/\$2 no limit hold'em and still make a profit.

4) Over-bet every river when value betting for an entire session.

5) Bet 1/3rd pot every river when value betting for an entire session.

6) Call down every time someone raised me post-flop.

7) Fold every time someone raised me post-flop (unless I had the certain nuts).

8) Bluff every time I got suspicious of someone.

9) Check-raise versus every c-bet when I called a raise out of the big blind.

10) Raise top pairs for value in spots where I was supposed to call with them.

And the list goes on.

Did all these experiments succeed? Hell no, but that wasn't the point. I learned a huge amount from them. I can teach players other coaches can't reach because I got out of line and learned from the experience.

Triple-barreling used to work much more. That's what I learned from that first experiment. If a guy was a thinking player, he would often fold too many top pairs on the river. If he was raising two pair or better on the flop, that meant I could triple-barrel constantly.

When I played only aces, kings, queens, jacks, 10s, and ace-king for sev-

eral cash sessions, I was dumbfounded by how few people noticed my strategy. That experiment taught me that no one is paying attention to you.

When people did finally figure out my strategy, it didn't even matter. They still couldn't help themselves from calling down.

Experiment #2 taught me a ton about human nature.

The three-bet percentage experiment failed miserably, except versus one type of opponent. If a guy opened too much and wasn't capable of four-betting, then that constant three-bet counter just gave him fits. To my shock, this repeated three-bet made money versus that type of opponent. This experiment allowed me to obliterate certain weak MTT regs for years before they learned to tighten up pre-flop. You can still play against plenty of these guys live because they haven't adjusted.

Experiment #4 taught me at the time that most people fold too much to over-bets. I started using over-bets much more as a bluff. However, there was one specific type of ego-driven player who never folded top pair to any bet on the turn or river. When these players appeared more frequently in my online games in 2020 and 2021, I was able to make a necessary exploitative over-bet adjustment.

Experiment #5 taught me that people could not possibly fold to a river bet that small. From that point on, if I needed some chips dearly in a tournament, I would just use the small river bet.

Experiment #6 taught me that weak regs are almost never bluffing enough. I got shown the nuts every time I called them down. I could fold too much versus them and get away unscathed.

Experiment #7 was a joke I made for myself after experiment #6. To my utter embarrassment, once I started nitting it up and never trusting my reads, I started making money hand over fist. When I taught my students to never give bad regs credit for a bluff, they started making more money. We've had to adjust this strategy as people have gotten better, but if you're playing an American reg who doesn't seem to have much gamble, the exploitative fold still works well.

When I tried to bluff someone whenever I got suspicious, I found out that I wasn't right a large percentage of the time. I was dealing with entitlement tilt. I learned I shouldn't trust that instinct without other supporting data.

Check-raising out of the big blind worked shockingly often for a long time. That play helped me make a ton of money.

Raising top pair for value in spots where I was supposed to just call helped me make a ton of money versus thinking players who assumed I must

have been on a tilting bluff. They couldn't fold against me with a pair on dry boards, where I wasn't supposed to be raising anything!

As you can see, all these experiments taught me something valuable. Even if they cost me money and had me looking like a horse's ass in the short term, they helped me make much more money in the long term.

I will discuss some other experiments in future sections of this book. Until then, I'll ask you to think up some ways you can stress test your own game.

Putting yourself in messy situations you are not comfortable with will help you expand your abilities. You will be forced to rely on other factors: timing tells, verbal tells, physical tells, etc.

Don't be afraid to make mistakes you will learn from.

What are some experiments you could do in a future session that will help teach you about the game? How can you track your results to learn more from them?

Is there a way to acquire data without paying for it on the felt with your time and money? (Hint: There is. Every time you're hanging out with a friend who plays poker ask to see their database. Learn how to read databases. Go through it with them and see the results of their own unintentional experiments.)

Have fun with this process. It can take you places.

## CHAPTER 22

# NOT LOOKING FOR LIVE TELLS

### Live Tells Do Exist

This is not a book about live tells.

This is a book that will tell you to look for live tells.

If you're not looking for live tells you're leaving a lot of money on the table.

I get it. There are days you don't want to look for live tells. There are days you're playing with players you don't know very well. Perhaps it's a tournament. Perhaps the table is going to break soon anyway. Perhaps you're not feeling well.

On those days, it's fine to wear a baseball cap and look down during the hands. Eliminating your own live tells goes much further than people realize.

But if you have the time and energy (and you should on most of the days you play) then you should look for live tells.

This is how you start:

The next time you play cash in your local cardroom, bring your cellphone with you. Download a note-taking app that will help you save notes to the cloud. Watch the regulars in every hand they play. Pretend that you're watching television. There's no pressure. You don't need to adjust your game right away. Take your time. Watch. What do you see? If you see anything peculiar write it down. You don't have to act on it at that exact moment.

When you get home read your notes. Do this for a couple of sessions. Read all the notes together.

You will be stunned at what stares at you if you do this. The number of tells people give off can be breathtaking.

It's difficult to get a guy dead to rights in the first session. Over time,



however, patterns will start to emerge. As you pay attention to more show-downs, you will gather more evidence for what you're looking for.

I will give you some examples of live tells I've gathered that have helped me tremendously. These will provide a starting point for you. I don't want you to just steal these reads. I want you to be better than me.

I don't consider myself that great at reading live tells. That's why it's wild to me that I can teach this subject. The fact I can help people with live tells just proves that most people are not even looking for them.

This is especially bewildering when their local cardroom has a live stream. I'm too comfortable now in my ivory tower to have time to watch a local cardroom's live stream, but when I was coming up? Oh, my Lord. I would have been watching those live streams day and night. I would have paid a remote assistant on Upwork to splice together all the footage of specific players. I'd have played those videos back and forth until I found something.

If you're given enough time, you will find something.

I was playing a World Poker Tour event a couple years ago. At my table there was an excellent GTO-centric player. Two to his left was an old live veteran who got involved in every pot and subjected everyone to big bet poker.

The GTO player was on his phone between hands. I was watching the other players. I didn't expect to gather much information. I usually don't get much from any player in any single day, but I'd be kicking myself for weeks if I missed something glaringly obvious.

As we've discussed before, whenever you sit down at a table, you want to pay attention to the players to your left, primarily the first two. After that, you should be paying attention to the most active player at the table. You want to pay attention to these players because these are the folks you're most likely to play a huge pot with.

To my surprise, the players to my left kept giving clear indications as to when they were going to fold pre-flop. I moved up in position frequently at the table. I was gifted multiple buttons per orbit.

After that, I paid attention to the loose aggressive live vet.

Over and over, he'd fire huge bets on the river. And he kept getting looked up.

That's when I saw it. Wow, he has a tell!

This guy would stare right at you when he was bluffing. When he had a big hand, he'd stare into the pot!

This could have been a total coincidence, but it was something. I would

normally want to play with the same player for days before I was positive about this read. However, if I was on the fence about a river call this small bit of information would likely tip the scales.

Later that day, the GTO-centric player got into a huge pot with the live vet. He was staring at a large bet on the river from the veteran. He was on the fence.

I looked at the old school live veteran. He was doing it again! He was staring right into the pot! He wasn't staring at the player!

I looked over at the GTO pro. He wasn't noticing any of this.

"Come on man, look at him!" I thought to myself.

I'm going to admit something strange to you guys. I root for the players at my table in hands when I'm not playing. If you ever see me wish a person nice hand genuinely after losing a big pot, it's because I've been rooting for them in my head for hours.

Bill Russell, the Celtics legend with 11 Championship rings, used to discuss this zone.

"Every so often a Celtics game would heat up so that it became more than a physical or even mental game, and would be magical," Russell said. "To me, the key was that both teams had to be playing at their peaks, and they had to be competitive ... It usually began when three or four of the 10 guys on the floor would heat up ... we'd all levitate ... and there'd be a natural ebb and flow that reminded you of how rhythmic and musical basketball is supposed to be ... I'd actually be rooting for the other team. When their players made spectacular moves, I wanted their shots to go into the bucket; that's how pumped up I'd be."

I guess it's akin to being a boxer. You go in and spar with a new guy who gives you angles and makes you think? That's going to be exciting if you love your craft.

This young guy was giving me a lot of trouble throughout the day. I was having fun playing with him. He made me work.

I love grinding out soft cash games, but that doesn't exactly challenge me intellectually. That kind of work is more like data entry. I've been playing bad players for so long. Most of my job is sitting there and not going nuts. Playing a talented player isn't the greatest thing for my bank account but it is much more engaging. In tournaments you're going to be forced to play against talented players all the time anyway. If you have a good attitude, you'll have a much better chance of battling them successfully.

There was a time I was a much more negative young man. The problem

with assuming every other player is terrible and lucky is that you can't learn anything from them. It might help you in the short term to think of yourself as uniquely unlucky. It might help you justify your failures, but that is cold comfort when you are not getting the results you want for years on end. It's much easier to appreciate the mental warfare in this game and actually pick up some tricks from your competition.

I kept looking at the kid. "You're not going to look at him?" I thought.

He didn't. He made the call. The live veteran had the nuts. The GTO pro lost a huge pot.

That was when I realized there would always be money in this game. The human element is always what causes players to fail. This player played amazing every time we played a pot together. I loved his game. But he blinked. And that cost him.

My GTO coach would have noticed that tell because his brain works like a supercomputer that loves to see everything in the game. But not every poker player is built the same. All of us get bored, including me. Some of us get bored at the table at the exact wrong time and we miss things. This can lead us to miss opportunities. If a player is showing he's going to fold then we can move up in position. If a player is showing they are weak we can hero call them.

Just start with the fundamentals. There are tons of physical tells if you pay attention.

What I get the most mileage out of is general comfort levels. There are some guys who get jacked up with a premium hand. Other guys look like they are waiting for their oil to get changed. If you pay attention to them and take notes, you'll be able to classify which is which.

I had one hand come up in Montreal years back. A young online pro looked bored out of his mind when he was trapping with an over-pair. I noted the hand at showdown and didn't think anything more of it.

Hours later the same pro triple-barrel jammed on me. I was sitting there holding a weak second pair wondering what to do. I looked up at the young man. I smiled at him as a joke to see if he would react. I wanted to talk to him, but I hadn't heard him speak English all day. If I spoke to him and he didn't understand, I'd lose the element of surprise. If I tried to wake him up unexpectedly, I might see something.

Sure enough, I did one of those cheeky smiles friends do when they're sharing a secret. He tried to smile back. It was forced. He was tense. I knew he was calm when he had a hand earlier. I called. He had a busted straight

draw. I doubled up and later ran deep in the tournament for a nice cash.

These are extreme examples, but they come up all the time if you pay attention.

Another live tell I look for all the time is someone who throws their raises in with a flourish. Zachary Elwood taught me this one, and it's paid me a lot of money over the years. It's astonishing how often this one is accurate.

If you pay attention, most stylish pre-flop raisers won't be nearly as ostentatious with aces or kings. It's the weirdest thing. When people get dealt a huge hand, they quiet their body language. They're like a tiger in the weeds waiting to pounce.

Have you ever looked down at your hand before it was your turn to act and seen aces? Did you start talking to everyone when you saw them? Did you draw attention to yourself? Or were you as quiet as a church mouse?

If you have a guy at your table opening any hand, you can make a ton of money just three-betting your ass off versus him. The only times you're going to lose significant money is when he four-bets and you're forced to fold. Losing nine big blinds or something similar with zero equity is a huge dent to your bottom line if you run this situation hundreds of times. But you can save thousands of dollars over the years by not three-betting when you see this player put his chips in quietly, signaling a likely premium hand.

These are some of the larger live tells I pick up on constantly. Most people who came from the online poker world don't even bother to try to learn live tells, so if you can spot something basic, you'll go much further than the average person transitioning from online to live. Since many players now cut their teeth online, this means you'll have an edge on a significant percentage of the field.

As I said, always pay attention to general comfort levels. In a conversation with a stranger you can usually tell if someone is uncomfortable or not. It's no different in a poker game. Just take your time and figure out what that means for that specific person.

I'm going to reiterate this as well: If you're not feeling great on a particular day, just eliminate your own live tells. If you don't like your poker face, wear a baseball cap and look down at the same point during every hand. Motion "check" the same way in every hand. Take the same amount of time on each decision, whether that's half a second or 10 seconds. Don't give away anything after the hand. Don't talk about the hand. Keep them guessing.

If you want to practice picking up live tells, I suggest consistently watching the players you play against the most in your local poker room. Con-

sciously list to yourself all their behaviors. In your head say to yourself, “Cuts chips in calmly. Looks at the player for a second. Looks back at their stack. Holds their hand closer. Stares at the chips in the middle.” We don’t realize this as humans, but we’re designed to take in body language subconsciously. We will sometimes meet a stranger who immediately makes us uneasy, but we will draw a blank when quizzed later as to what behavior was making us nervous. We were trusting our subconscious.

To overcome our autopilot, we need to deliberately list a person’s behaviors. We can do this by writing down what we saw in our cellphone. Again, we’re not trying to hit the ball out of the park our first time at the plate. We’ll get to see this pitcher and their pitches again and again throughout the years. We’re preparing for the long run. We’ll go home and read our notes and watch the footage. We’re patient like snipers. We’re not rushing anything. We live for the hunt.

## CHAPTER 23

# NOT STUDYING THE RIGHT WAY

### How to Get Ahead in Poker

“I don’t have time to study poker.”

“But you’ve got time to play poker?” I say to my student. “You’ve got all the time in the world to play the game, but you don’t have time to improve it?”

I’ve had a version of this exchange hundreds of times with my students and friends. I don’t understand how someone never works on their game and then expects to make money at poker.

However, I can now add a caveat to this exchange.

When I was in high school, I was already renting my own place. I went pro aged 18. I was taking care of my family as a teenager while working as a professional gambler. You would think I was the last person who could study the game. I was playing constantly to pay the bills. When would a normal person find time to study?

It didn’t matter. When you’re a teenager with no significant other or set calendar, it is much easier to find time to play or study the game. I got to spend a ton of time around players who were better than me.

Some of these players had more time than I had. Their parents allowed them to keep living in their house. They didn’t pay rent. They didn’t buy groceries. Their full-time job was getting better at poker.

You might think this was an example of a parent coddling a child, but it ended up working for several of my friends. They had no stress when they were at the table. They had endless time to study. They got much better at poker than I ever did while constantly worrying about family bills.

Many people we compete with in poker are in similar situations. Even if

someone is a working pro with dependents, like I was, they might have more free time just because of their age and marital status. If someone comes from a family that supports them 100%, it is even more difficult to rock them.

Many of our opponents seemingly have unlimited time. They don't need to worry about resources because they will just rebuild their small roll in their parents' place. How do you take a crack at these people?

That's a trick question. Whenever you get stuck on one problem, you need to ask yourself, "Why am I even accepting this?" If you can make it someone else's problem, go ahead and do so. If you can accept an easier and more profitable challenge, then do so.

You need to clarify the statement that began this chapter. "I don't have time to study poker." What does that really mean?

I believe most people are implying something else. They're saying: "I don't have time to study poker to the extent that I'll one day be able to play super high rollers and the largest cash games in the world."

Why is that your goal? That's the most difficult money to win in the world. Wouldn't you rather learn how to make hundreds of thousands from private home games with fish who barely know the hand rankings?

Many people feel shame that they won't one day be playing super high rollers! Think of how crazy that is!

Anytime you are feeling guilty you should ask yourself what unspoken standard you're violating. So many poker players feel perpetual guilt because they feel if they studied every day then they too could be playing super high rollers.

Let me tell you guys something. I've probably made more money from poker than 99.999% of you reading this. This has been my job my entire adult life. I'll never play a super high roller either. I have many friends who play that high. They're built different. They have more horsepower than I have. They also have an insane work ethic and an ability to crack the game at a molecular level. I don't envy them. They work hard for their money. They go through insane swings. It plays on their emotions.

Again, we need to ask ourselves the question: What are we trying to accomplish here?

Are we trying to quit our day job?

Most professional poker players I know end up going back to their day job. They make more money at their day job. The stability is a salary unto itself. They can be more present with their families because they never have

to worry about where the next paycheck will come from.

Our real goal is almost always, “Make as much money as possible while risking the least amount of money and time and making the least effort.”

That’s a straightforward goal. I like that one.

It sounds silly to drill down so hard on this, but my entire life changed once I started asking myself these critical questions. I didn’t achieve my goals or potential for years because I was unclear as to what I was trying to do. I was unfocused. I was working long hours and going nowhere. I can spend 10 minutes talking with you right now and make sure you don’t make the same mistakes.

If we’re being honest, most of us have the same goal in poker, the one about making as much money as possible with the least effort. It almost feels dirty to read those words, right? We’ve been taught hard working people are noble. But that’s the truth. Most of us play poker instead of studying poker because it’s more fun to play poker. Studying poker is difficult. It’s draining. We don’t want to do that.

Most poker trainers will tell you this goal is immoral. You need to work hard and train, damn it! Hell, I used to be one of those trainers. I changed my tune because I don’t believe in that anymore.

No one learns anything unless they’re having fun while doing so. Do you remember a word any of your boring teachers ever said to you in high school? Of course not. But you remember every word your fun teachers said, right?

Why do you think so many people learn how to play the guitar versus every other instrument? It’s more fun to learn the guitar. You learn anything at home then play the guitar in your dorm and women are going to find you. You don’t get quite the same reinforcement if you’re busting out your tuba nightly.

We all say, “I don’t have time to study poker” but then we go down these wormholes on YouTube for hours at a time on random subjects. Why? Because YouTube is fun. The videos are 10 minutes long. They can be played at 2x speed. They’re entertaining. They’re out of your life after a couple of minutes. They don’t string you along or bore you. That’s the kind of studying we like.

Now, let’s return to our goal and tie everything together.

“In poker I want to make the most money possible in the least amount of time with the least amount of effort.”

If you think about this goal, it makes even more sense if we have a normal job and kids or elderly parents. We have a responsibility to them. It’s fine



for us to have an enjoyable hobby outside of our family obligations, but we must make sure this hobby isn't draining time or money away from the family unit. The way we will accomplish this is by making as much money at poker in the least amount of time.

How do we do that?

First, I will refer you to the early chapters. I remind you that game selection is 90% of a poker player's job. If you're playing nosebleed stakes with business owners who don't know anything about the game, then you will make a ton of money very quickly without much effort or poker smarts.

Notice how our goal isn't to be a respected poker player. It would be nice to rock the poker world and have everyone know how good we are. No one's ego is immune to wanting that, but we shouldn't chase it as a goal. Some of the biggest winners I know are HATED in their poker room. No one wants to admit to themselves they're an inferior poker player. When the same guy keeps kicking their asses night after night they have to come up with excuses for why he's doing so. They complain how lucky winners are or how the floor favors them and helps them. They complain about how he always gets the good seats. The one thing they won't do is respect the big winner because inwardly the winner makes them feel inferior.

You don't want to chase people's adoration. There are many poker players the public believes are great players who are actually struggling financially. To get the attention of the poker world, many players will put their roll at great risk to enter games they have no business being in.

You're not looking for respect. You're looking for money. I'll say it again: 90% of making money is good game selection.

What is the other 10% you can control? It's actually playing poker well. This will require poker study. This will require time.

The most frustrating thing about trying to get better at poker is that you can't do it just by playing. You can't see the other player's cards. You have no idea whether you made a good fold or not. Without that kind of direct feedback, it's hard to know if you're getting better or not.

What is more frustrating is that 99% of what you'll study in poker is not applicable to your situation. Many of you have already learned this the hard way. Listening to high stakes players talk shop about high stakes poker hands hasn't helped you crush the micro-stakes.

Are the solvers the answer to everything? I have GTO coaches. I spend half my sessions with them discussing what exactly a certain solution means and how it applies to real world poker players. When you're dealing with fal-

libly balanced humans, you want to make sure you're exploiting them based on what you learn from correct theoretical play. This takes a great deal of work.

So how do you get better?

Find one coach you get a lot out of. One.

None of us sees reality correctly. If you don't believe me, go search for the double slit experiment on YouTube and try to explain it. Einstein didn't see reality correctly. We are all picking our perspectives and models. Your perspective or filter on life is literally one out of more than 7 billion. It is unlikely to be the most accurate. You are bullshitting yourself somewhere.

"All models are wrong, but some are useful." – George E.P. Box

The model or perspective through which you view the world has holes. None of us sees the world impartially. Some say we don't see people as they are. We see people as we are.

Since even Einstein couldn't see reality correctly, we must understand that no poker coach is perfect. None of them is going to perfect your game and make you a billionaire overnight. Some of them will give you perspectives and ideas that make you money. That's all that matters. If they give you an idea that makes you money, keep it. If an idea of theirs doesn't help you, throw it out.

Also, don't be immature and only study poker players you like as a personality. I highly doubt Bill Gates liked every person he took an idea from. Some of the guys who taught me poker would readily admit to you that they are assholes. It doesn't matter. We are stealing ideas here. We're not here to make friends.

Find one person who says things about poker that make you money. Then tap that gold mine for all it's worth.

Some of these people are geniuses who are hard to understand. They didn't grow up being taught how to be entertainers. It will be on you to make their lectures fun.

Take out a notebook, get index cards, or get an index card app. On one side of the paper or index card put a question. On the other side put the answer. Get all your questions and answers from the coach's theoretical material. Pause every 10 minutes or so during a lecture and review the content. Make it a trivia game for yourself like you're at a pub. If you nail all the questions, give yourself some kind of reward. If this same coach provides quizzes or hand history replay videos, devour them. Pause while you're watching them play hands and ask yourself what you think they are going to do next

and why. Do all their quizzes. Make this fun. Challenge yourself like you're watching *Jeopardy* at home and trying to outperform the contestants.

You can either try to study everything there is in poker and get nowhere or study 30 minutes a day with a coach who actually helps you get results. The choice is yours.

Nassim Nicholas Taleb once said something like, "It's better to read a good book twice than two different books once."

The older I get, the more I understand what he's saying.

Certain coaches have completely changed everything about my life. They have helped me rehaul my finances, health, and relationships. The other 90% of coaches have actually subtracted from my life. They have slowed me down. They have given me ideas that fail in the field. It literally would have been better for me to have never heard of them.

"In poker I want to make the most money possible in the least amount of time with the least amount of effort." Does that sound right to you now? Can we admit we want to make as much money as possible with the least amount of exertion and time invested?

Good. Then this is how we will do it.

We will find games played for a lot of money that we can crush.

We will study one coach who actually helps us make money as opposed to dozens of coaches who might only help us make money down the line if we ever play games similar to theirs.

We will do our best to make studying fun.

We will take our time studying the one coach who is helping us. We don't need to panic and cram one night and then flame out the next. We found the coach who is actually helping us. Their materials aren't going anywhere. We will take our time and make sure we actually understand what they're saying. We're not going to waste our time half-assing studying so we can forget everything within a couple of weeks.

If we follow this process, we will make more money at poker in less time. We will achieve our goal.

"In poker I want to make the most money possible in the least amount of time with the least amount of effort."

In the next section, we will discuss another way you can make sure you're studying and playing enough to get the results you want.

## CHAPTER 24

# NOT TRACKING THEIR TIME

### Where Does Your Time Go?

“I don’t have time to study poker.”

“But you’ve got time to play poker?” I say to my student. “You’ve got all the time in the world to play the game, but you don’t have time to improve it? Let’s find out what you’re actually spending your time on.”

Have you ever heard of these apps that track what you do with your time? The one I use is called aTimeLogger. There are others that people swear by. You open these apps on your cellphone and click a button for a certain activity before you start doing it. Once you’re done doing that activity, you turn the time tracker off and select another button. The app comes with some basic buttons: Sleep, work, shopping, reading, television, exercise, etc. You can add your own buttons. It takes maybe 30 seconds to create a new category.

If you use one of these apps for a week it will put together a pie chart for you. It will tell you exactly what you’re spending your time on. You can send reports to your email if you want a detailed breakdown.

We all have our frustrations with time management. None of us feels like we get enough time. I think that humans were not meant to be in a world this complex and our brains haven’t caught up. If we can find any way to make things more manageable, we should do so.

When I started using one of these apps, I was frustrated that I didn’t get enough time to read or study poker. I’m obsessed with the idea of residual effects and compound interest when it comes to life. Effective education is an investment that compounds over time. The sum of what you learn can be greater than its parts. If you can make a connection that others have

not made, it can change your life. That connection is probably not going to occur unless you expose yourself to new ideas from different fields. It's unlikely you'll ever come up with a truly unique idea, but people often become successful in life from applying an idea from one industry in another, newer industry. People become successful by combining ideas that have never been combined before. You're not going to get to that breakthrough moment without study, however.

Poker education is similar. The more you learn, the more your unconscious competence grows. Your knowledge compounds. You will be playing in a game and you'll finally have acquired the wisdom to take on a different play. You will have seen so many angles that you will know subconsciously where a play is going. That will only happen if you have exposed yourself to different fields of poker study and have played a considerable amount.

To get to this point, you must log hours. Unfortunately there are only so many hours in the day.

Have you ever heard this bullshit? "Everyone gets the same 24 hours in a day."

That is not true. I have more hours than many of you because I can pay people to work for me. It would be disingenuous for me to tell you we have the same 24 hours in the day. If you have children to take care of, an elderly parent to check in on, or a draining day job, then you absolutely do not have the same number of hours to apply to the game as some kid hanging out in his mother's basement.

But guess what? Our game doesn't care about what difficulties we're having. We need to find the time somewhere.

Luckily for us, most of us in the first world can find time somewhere. We don't realize it, but we waste a lot of time during our normal days. It's not until we start tracking it that we realize where our time is going.

For one, people constantly overestimate how much time they're working. If they turn off their work timer when someone walks into their office to talk to them, they find out they're not working as much as they think they are. They might be in the office for eight hours because their boss demands it, but they're actually only working a few hours. The rest of the time is spent scanning social media, talking around the water cooler, and going to get coffee. At some point, everyone panics and wants to justify their existence, so they set up a meeting where everyone covers their ass. No executive ever got fired for something they didn't commit to. The reason most people feel they're working more hours than they actually are at their office job is be-

cause their work never ends. When they go home their boss can still text them at any hour and demand work from them. This gives them the illusion of always being on the clock even when they're supposed to be enjoying their life.

Many office workers find they can actually study poker if they just get off social media at work and use their breaks to go through training videos. The time adds up. They also learn they can train their boss not to expect immediate responses if they wait a few hours to respond to a text instead of answering it immediately. This gives them more time in their evenings.

Another huge time drain is watching television. Let's get one thing clear here. I'm not going to tell you not to watch television. We all watch TV for a very good reason: it's easy and enjoyable. I hate reading self-help books that say, "Don't watch television, you'll have more free time." Yeah, no shit, Sherlock. I would love to study French and learn to play the saxophone at 10:00 PM every night but I'm so tired I'm close to passing out.

That said, most of us could curb our television use or use our television time more effectively.

For example, when I started using these time tracking apps, I was stunned at how much time I spent watching football. There are few things in life that can make my mind completely turn off like NFL RedZone. When I saw the hours add up on my app, however, I knew something needed to change.

For one, if I'm ever watching football and my girlfriend asks if we can do something else, I make it a habit to say yes. If the Seahawks are playing, I'm going to finish the game, but otherwise she usually wants to do something more valuable.

Secondly, I try to batch activities as much as possible. When I'm in front of the TV, I'll bring my laptop with me. I'll play with solvers and simulators between serious football plays. I like playing against digital poker opposition that makes me think. If the computer does something that makes me think critically then I'll open my notetaking app and write down what I saw. I'll make sure I revisit it later at least once to make sure I remember it.

If I need some time to do absolutely nothing, I won't bring the laptop. But if I'm just wasting time in front of the TV, I'll try to get something out of it.

I also couldn't figure out how to read more. I do a lot of my poker study through books, but it's difficult to find time to sit down and read a book cover to cover. I needed a better system.

I found one. Audiobooks are a gift from God. I was never able to speed read before, but I can easily turn the player speed up on Audible and still

understand what the narrator is saying. Audiobooks allow anyone to finish a poker book in half the time it would have taken them before.

I also started listening to poker audiobooks when I went on my jogs since I was going to jog anyway. Instead of spending one hour jogging and one hour reading, I just cut my working hours in half and combined the two into one hour. I got into the routine of always starting my jog with a poker book. That tends to be when I'm the most focused. When I get through a couple of chapters I can click over to something more recreational to get through the tougher points of the jog. Until that moment, however, I'm on the clock.

I've been finishing poker books left and right doing this. Of course, listening to an audiobook on 2x speed is not conducive to remembering 100% of what is in it, but it gives you a great overview. Often, I will listen to a certain chapter and think, "I have to learn more about that. That's what my game is missing. I'll reread this chapter in text later and highlight it." This gives me a direction when I'm studying in other formats. It's not the hours you put in. It's what you put in the hours. Having clear direction and ideas of what you want to pursue in poker allows you to put more in the hours.

Finally, one of the best ways to save time on poker study is to outsource. I typically don't recommend this solution to beginners because it's expensive, but it can become invaluable down the line.

I don't have as much time now as I did when I went pro at 18. I have employees to manage and investments to oversee. I am not unique. There are many small business owners who enjoy playing cards. They are constantly working because they love it. They might lack time, but they do not lack money. This is how they can leverage that.

Hire someone who is excellent at condensing concepts in poker. I have one coach who is fantastic at working on GTO solutions for me. He does work for me when I'm working on other things, and then he presents his findings when we meet up. He's not cheap, but honestly, he should be charging more. He saves me a ton of time and helps me fix a ton of leaks.

I am working with three coaches. One is a cash game coach who also works as a GTO coach. He helps me find practical ways to fix my game with the work he's doing on the solvers, and he's also excellent at telling me when to pursue exploitative plays because they would be the better option. I also have an exploitative poker coach who specializes in making tons of money from bad players. He's got the recent results to prove he knows what he's doing. His stats on sites with recreational players are astounding. I also have another coach who specializes in major tournaments. He has a number of

major tournament wins. He's great at telling me how to combine everything I'm learning into a deep run. He's also a talented mental-game coach who knows what it takes to win major events. He's been paying his bills for so long playing solely major tournaments. I'm looking to work with more coaches as I write this. The investment almost always pays for itself within the year.

These coaches and I will meet for an hour, and they will help me with something that would have taken me 10 hours to solve on my own. It's a great use of time. They're only effective, however, if I know what line of inquiry I'm pursuing. It's my responsibility to ask myself where I'm deficient in my game. That's why I like testing myself against solvers, simulators, and hand histories from other players. It's most exciting when I'm wildly off on something. That's an opportunity for growth.

Track your time. Everyone has ways they can get more out of their hours or find hours in the day. You will be shocked about what you actually spend your time on.



## CHAPTER 25

# NOT INVESTING IN THE INTANGIBLES

### Where the Money Is Made

We will discuss more poker strategy in the next section. Poker strategy is fun to discuss, and it's easier for me to write poker strategy that will be entertaining and educational.

Why do I not solely write about it? Because that's not what is going to make you money. I assume you picked up this book because you want to make more money at poker. If you don't make more money, then I haven't done my job. You likely won't pick up a book from me again. That's not good for me. I like my job.

Poker strategy is important, and we will discuss it extensively. However, we must also discuss other factors that make you money. That's why in this short section, we will discuss the intangibles and how you can invest in them.

The word "intangible" is an adjective. It means something that is unable to be touched or grasped. In sports, scouts often refer to the "intangibles" when they're evaluating an athlete and discussing factors that won't necessarily be obvious to the naked eye.

Take a major league pitcher. Velocity? That's easy to see. If a guy is throwing 103mph, that is not an intangible. Everyone can see that.

But what if a guy throws 92mph but can't be hit? Batter after batter goes up to the plate and leaves dejected. You observe this pitcher frustrating batters week after week. You don't know what he's doing, but he's getting the results.

This pitcher likely possesses some intangibles. He has a work ethic. He prepared for specific batters. He knows the batters' weak points and how they can be fooled. A pitcher's exploitative pitch selection will toy with the bad habits of batters. This pitcher is staying cool under pressure when he walks a couple of batters. He's a technician. He's using what's between his ears to compensate for his weaker arm strength.

There is something akin to athletic ability in poker. Your brain has a certain amount of horsepower. Those kids you see on TV who can multiply long chains of numbers? They've got some real horsepower. That helps a lot in no limit hold'em.

Much of poker is rote memorization. You can't just see a situation in practice with coaches telling you what to look for. You need to remember that lesson at the appropriate time the next time you're in that situation. You need to apply that lesson.

My rote memory is terrible, but that's fine. It turns out having a smaller prefrontal cortex can make a person less susceptible to cognitive biases. To learn more about the neuroscience behind this, I'd recommend reading the book *Forgetting: The Benefits of Not Remembering* by Scott A. Small.

How can a weaker memory actually help you at the poker table? I'm going to give you the layman's version of how that could work. This explanation is not meant to be 100% perfect.

Imagine a person sees two car ads one day. One ad has a cute dog in it and the other does not. The person is a dog lover.

A couple of weeks later their spouse asks what car they're considering buying. Apparently, the average human being is more likely to say, "I want to buy Car X" if that was the car ad with the dog and they happen to be a dog lover. That's their memory making a connection to the positive association they made when they first saw the ad. They might not know they are creating that positive association due to the dog, but apparently the association exists in the mind all the same.

Apparently, some people with weaker memorization skills will not remember that initial positive association. They might not even remember what the cars looked like or anything else. Those people are likely to develop systems that allow them to compensate for their poor memory. When the two cars come up again, they will possibly say, "I haven't made a decision. I need to recheck the specifications for each car." This will lead them to a more logical decision.

This leaves poker players in a quandary. We need to study and prepare

ahead of time to ready ourselves for the countless situations we encounter when we're playing. However, if we have fantastic memories, it's possible we will make connections that aren't there and will hold on to them. What are we supposed to do?

This is where the intangible comes in. The intangible is how well we compensate for our weaknesses.

If you ever spend time in boxing gyms, you'll meet different kinds of trainers. One trainer will get a talented guy when he's 29 and say, "I'm going to completely rehaul his defense. His defense is awful." Another trainer will see the same guy and say, "If he hasn't developed his defense by this age it's likely never going to happen. I'm going to increase how frustrating his punch selection is and I'm going to increase his output. This will hide his weaknesses."

The second trainer routinely gets better results out of his guys because he is being realistic. He is training human beings and not super computers. They cannot learn perfectly.

In poker, we are both the trainer and the fighter. We need to train ourselves. Sadly, many of us are awful trainers.

Many poker players approach their study as if they believe they can suddenly turn into a supercomputer and remember everything perfectly. That's never going to happen.

What we need to do is get the maximum from our strengths as quickly as possible because that will not take much time. We're already fluent in those languages, so adding some vocabulary to our repertoire won't be any trouble. It will certainly be much easier than learning a new language overnight.

It's a skill to maximize what you can maximize.

This is the other thing poker players often miss. There is a huge difference between talent and skill. Talent is something you're born with. Skill is something you develop through study, while everyone else is partying. Skill is something you cultivate over years of hard, deliberate practice. Anyone can be born with talent. The greats develop skills.

What skills can you develop? What strengths can you maximize? Let's look at your strengths.

My girlfriend frequently jokes about how bad my memory is. That's fine. From a young age I had an okay ability to spot bullshit. I assume that's related to my inability to create some associations.

To maximize my ability to see through cognitive traps, I have studied my ass off in this area. Whenever a book comes out about thinking in systems,

I buy it immediately. I routinely seek out analysts with whom I disagree so I can be exposed to my cognitive biases again and again.

A friend of mine is the complete opposite. He's a much better poker player than I'll ever hope to be. We talk poker frequently because we can expose each other's weaknesses in the game. He has an immaculate memory and has incredible mathematical prowess. However, he coincidentally gets caught up in biases from time to time. He sees things that aren't there at the table when he needs to remain impartial.

Most of my coaches have a GTO background for a reason. I am not saying GTO players have more cognitive bias or any cognitive bias. I'm saying there are intelligent people who double down on their initial gut feelings, and some of them happen to be talented at the game thanks to their excellent memories. These players can memorize solutions and stay away from their faults.

How do my friend and I accentuate our strengths in poker? We focus on what we're good at. We both train on a steady diet of ICM quizzes, GTO quizzes, and exploitative quizzes. He remembers what he learns very quickly. He primarily focuses on cash games with rakeback and bonuses where he can frequently apply the GTO solutions he's memorized. He keeps the pros away from him with his airtight game and waits for the fish to show up. He's careful when he wants to try an exploitative play against a pro he loathes because he knows that could just be his emotions talking.

By contrast, I still play a ton of tournaments. I played cash games for much of my life, but I've learned my skills apply well to tournaments. Tournament poker isn't necessarily about who is the best player. Tournament poker is about who can play the best poker the longest. It's an endurance test. You're going to get delirious at some point.

I've learned over the years that when I get fatigued, I can still execute exploitative plays in tournaments. This year, I won \$50,000 the same night I had a root canal blow out. I had no idea what happened. I had been playing for 12 hours and the damn tooth started throbbing. It turns out 2% of all root canals fail. Who knew?

How did I still win the tournament while I could barely see straight? Well, I can tell you one thing: I didn't win because I was a better player than everyone else. I maximized opportunities when they came to me and I got handed some gifts. That's all. I can see where the dam is going to break at a table. Guys get fatigued all the time in tournaments and do make plays they regret. You don't need the most horsepower to see that. You need an ability

to see through the bullshit. That skill can be developed.

The intangibles are these factors you can control. With my skill set, I need to be playing live cash games at 4:00 AM because that's when players of all stripes lose their minds. If you can see when it's going to happen, through a combination of tells and changing play styles, you will make money. You can't hold on to your previous emotional attachments. "Bill always plays tight" might not apply at 4:00 AM.

What should my friend be maximizing? He should be playing rake races and multi-tabling on good cash sites as much as possible and letting bad regs fail versus his balanced strategies. His consistency is impeccable as long as he doesn't deviate with anyone but obvious fish.

The intangibles are what you can do with your strengths. Everyone can see a poker player who can make occasional sick reads. No one can see how he eats in the morning. No one can see if he shows up on time to train.

If my friend only played emotional heads-up matches versus players he had a grudge against, he would be rendered neutral. Similarly, if I tried to be a GTO robot at 24 tables every night, I'd get killed as well. We'd be the same poker players. We would have all the same skills and talents we presently have. And we both would be broke within a couple of months.

A great practice for poker players is to brainstorm some factors they can control that they haven't been controlling before. What are your strengths? How can you maximize them? What games do you always feel great in? How can you crush them more? What can you study to accelerate that process? What poker trainer seems tailored for these games? How can you mask your weaknesses? How can you execute better than your opponents?

Think of the intangibles as ROI percentages if you're a tournament player and an increased hourly rate if you're a cash player.

We'll use ROI for the following examples.

Fix your sleep? Your ROI is going up at least 2%, I guarantee that. Start exercising regularly? There's 1%. Eat some more protein-packed salads when you're hungry and take your vitamins? There's another 1%. Study for an hour? There's 0.01%.

Start brainstorming how you can monstrously improve that ROI. A couple years back I started realizing nobody ever folded to me. I took that and ran with it. I focused on manufacturing huge exploitative pots with top pair. If I was making 60 BBs with top pair while others were making 18 BBs then my ROI was quickly going to jump percentage points. Focusing on catching players when they made huge blunders also accelerated my ROI increases.

If your memory and attention span at the table are not great, make a small note in your phone after each hand. It can just be, "4 is pissed", meaning the player in seat four. The notes are not important. The fact you can write a note after a hand is what's important. If you watched seat four instead of the football game on TV, you'll know seat four is more likely to be bluffing later. If you see anything interesting, write it down and read it later. You'll be amazed what jumps out at you about the regulars in your local cash game. This process has increased my hourly rate by more than 5%.

Have fun with this. Did you play video games as a kid? Didn't you want to maximize those character's stats? Why are you any different?

Brainstorm the intangibles you need and stick to them. Your game will improve dramatically.

## CHAPTER 26

# NOT PLAYING BACK AT THREE-BETTERS

### Give Them Something to Think About

You are playing a \$10 million guaranteed tournament online. Everyone folds to you. You raise to 6,400 from the hijack with  $K\clubsuit-10\spadesuit$ . You have 211,663 chips in your stack. The cutoff folds. The action comes around to the button. The button is an aggressive regular you have played with for years. He has seen you open quite a bit in this tournament. Unsurprisingly, he makes it 19,200 from the button. He has 140,926 chips. Is he testing you? He should test you if you have been opening frequently and taking away his button.

You should already be seeing something here based on the information available. There's a play available to you. What do you think it is?

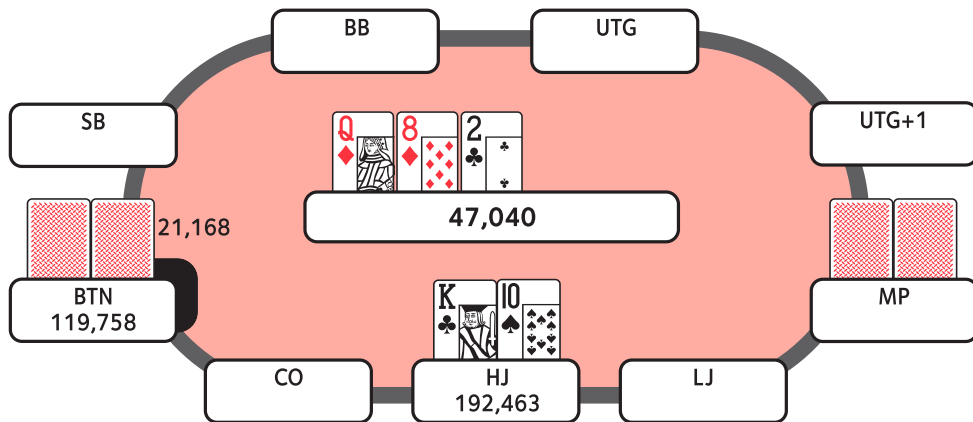
The blinds fold. The action is back on you. You flat the three-bet. There's now 47,040 in the middle, including the blinds and antes. You two are heads-up. The board comes  $Q\diamond-8\diamond-2\clubsuit$ . It's on you. What do you do here normally?

You check. The button bets 21,168 chips. He has 119,758 left (*Diagram 2*). What is your move?

You should have had this planned already. You should not be opening here unless you saw this play first.

That button is a problem.  $K-10o$  is not always an open here. If there is a talented player with a ton of chips on the button, and you have a stack that can't defend versus a three-bet, you need to think about what you're doing. If you have 30 or 40 big blinds, are you prepared to raise and move all-in? What's your plan post-flop if you flat? What boards will you continue on?

What does that look like?



**Diagram 2**

I had a play ready here. I made it 48,736.

Notice that my raise is not that large. I made it 48,736 to win 116,944. The way we figure out how often this play needs to work as an absolute bluff is to divide 48,726 (what we are risking) by 116,944 (what we stand to win). This is correct because we get our bet back when the play succeeds).

$$48,726 / 116,944 = 0.4166.$$

Our bluff needs to work 41.7% of the time. It could fail half the time and still print money. People don't make this play because they feel embarrassed when it fails. This is why poker is not like real life. If you fail 55% of the time in the real world, you're likely completely failing at something. In this situation, even if you fail 55% of the time, which is most of the time, you're still making money.

Does this play succeed 41.7% of the time? Absolutely.

If our opponent is three-betting all broadways and 9-9+ that would be a scary range. That's a 13% three-betting range that isn't composed of suited gappers that missed this board. That would give him as many queens as possible. But even that range misses 47% of the time. (You can learn how ranges interact with different boards by grabbing a copy of Flopzilla Pro.)

Is this play balanced? Absolutely not. I'm gambling on something here. That's the name of the game. Controlled aggression and tactical assertion will get us the chips we want.

If my opponent was three-betting a controlled three-betting range, I couldn't exploit him this way. I could probably call pre-flop, but I'd have to



leave this flop alone. I'm gambling on him doing something exploitable here. Did you see what it was? What crucial assumption did I make that could be wrong?

You always need to check my assumptions. You need to check every poker coach's assumptions. Many poker coaches create great training material for their own games based on assumptions that would never apply to your games. The assumption I'm making is that he is continuation betting 100% of the time. That is, of course, wildly unbalanced if I have this check-raise in my back pocket.

However, this aggressive regular might assume I don't have a good check-raising game. He would be right versus 99% of tournament regulars and he could exploit their lack of a check-raising game by continuation betting more than optimal here. He would pick up the pot all the times the hijack missed the flop.

Unluckily for him, I spotted what he was doing and made a check-raise that only needed to work 41.7% of the time. This is a great inflection point because my bet doesn't need to work that often, but look at what he has to do to defend versus my play. He bet 21,168 and is facing a raise to 48,736. He has 119,758 behind. He is practically going to have to move all-in as a bluff if he wants to test me. If he flats, I can bet close to anything on the turn and put all his chips at risk.

You need to see this play before you open. If you are constantly opening with an aggressive regular behind, then at some point he is not going to be happy. He wants to open himself. You keep taking that play away. He needs to three-bet you with a wider range to exploit your wider opening ranges. Your job is to make sure he thinks twice about that. If you can do that, you can be the person at the table no one wants to play with.

There's a reason they keep old quarterbacks in the NFL. They might not have the arm strength they once had, but they can read a defense and see an opening developing. I looked at this table before I opened and saw this play was going to be available on the flop. The stacks were perfect for it. I made the judgment call on his frequencies and was rewarded.

Here's the tough part about poker. Do you like my play? Was it correct?

Hypothetically, given these specific ranges, yes, it is correct. But we need to ask ourselves about the practical application of our theoretical answers. This is where the game becomes infinite.

Do you like my play? Was it correctly applied in this instance?

There's no right answer to that question. We can't know if it was the

right play. It's possible this reg never changes his three-betting ranges for anyone when he's multi-tabling. It's possible we did something wildly unbalanced and ran into the bottom of his range. He folded in this particular hand when I check-raised, but that doesn't prove anything. We can't know if we were right. If he had shoved on us, that would also have proven nothing. We can't see or confirm his range there. We are always guessing in this game. We often can't tell whether we are lucky, unlucky, skilled, or dumb. That's why no limit hold'em drives grown men mad.

## CHAPTER 27

# NOT PAYING ATTENTION TO THE PLAYERS BEHIND YOU

### What Do You Need to See?

If you have 10-9s UTG+2 at a nine-handed tournament table, do you open?

Most people say, "Yes, I do."

Some people say, "It depends."

What does it depend on?

Take a moment to answer for yourself.

This is the problem. Most people play hands the same way every time. They always open suited connectors regardless of situation and table. They always open small pairs. They never open A-Jo in early position. The list goes on.

None of these absolutes are correct. Poker is not that simple. You can't do anything 100% of the time. The conditions are constantly changing.

In a tournament, stack sizes change everything. When I play tournaments, I make myself write down the stack sizes around the table every hour or so. I need to see how they're shifting. The stack size formation is like a defensive formation in American football. You need to read it and see where the play is going to open up. If you don't do that, you are likely to botch a key play.

I can't tell you how many times I've seen a guy look down at 10-9s and open into seven players who have 15 big blinds and want to move all-in. One of them inevitably does move all-in and the opener folds. The open was a complete waste of time and chips. Your hand has post-flop value but you're never going to see the flop. Your opponents are going to jam and you will fold,

or they will all fold pre-flop. They're not all going to fold that often. Your hand has become a complete pre-flop bluff that is failing regularly. You could have opened 9-2o in the same situation and the hand would have played the same.

That is the simplest example of reading the table and creating a play. There are many others.

If there's a recreational player at your table who is calling three streets with any pair, he is the opening at the table. You must get to exploit that opportunity before it disappears. Raise 5x pre-flop if the recreational player loves calling huge raises but the regulars don't. Cold call raises from regulars instead of three-betting so you don't freeze out the recreational player behind you.

If a player is frequently three-betting and now has a stack that can't stand a small check-raise, that is an opportunity as well. We saw how that play worked in the last section.

Sometimes a satellite winner will be at your table in a major live tournament. At the beginning of the day, they will call three streets with pretty much anything because the stacks are so deep. Then the blinds go up and you notice they have a stack that is going to be all-in by the river bet. They are in the big blind. You have an opportunity there. You raise. They call from the big blind with anything and they call flop and turn with anything. Then on the river you shove all-in and they only call with their best top pairs and rivered two pairs. At this point, the end of their vacation and huge tournament dream is staring them in the face and they have a bunch of fourth pairs they hate. They would have to table their hand if their hero call is wrong. They are likely to fold.

If you see that play available to you before you open pre-flop, you will be miles ahead of most tournament regulars who play on their cellphones and never pay attention to the players around them.

When there are short-stacked players behind you who are dying to move all-in, be more careful with your cold calls.

If someone is three-betting you constantly, wait for the stack sizes to be perfect for a four-bet bluff. You want to be four-betting small, but they will need to move all-in if they want to test what you're doing.

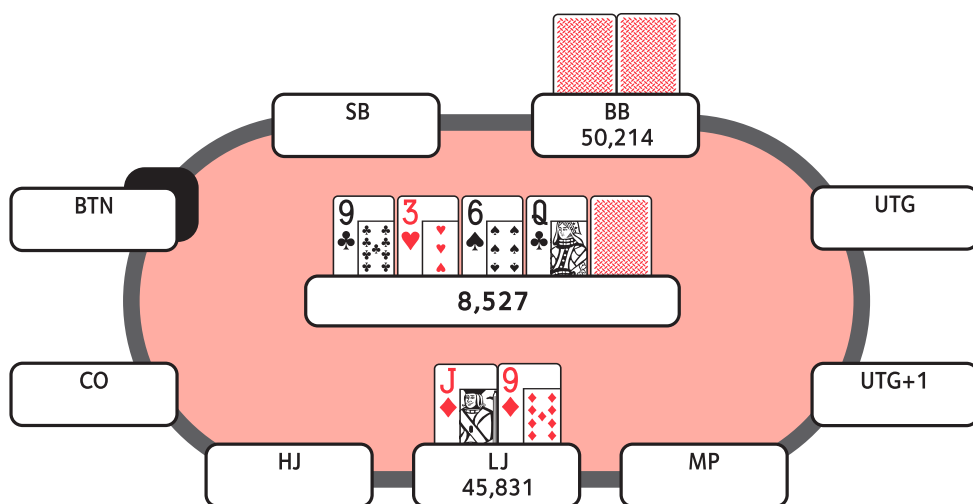
You're the quarterback reading the defense. You might not be a computer scientist who has all the GTO ranges tattooed on his brain, but you might be the old vet who sees an exploitative play no one else is seeing. Take what the table will give you. Get everybody's chips before the others wake up. Pay attention.

# CHAPTER 28

## NOT BUYING THE SHOWDOWN

### Basic Play Versus Bad Regs

You have J-9s in the lojack. You have 49,352 chips in a Sunday \$109 tournament online on a softer American site. The blinds are 450/900 with a 115 ante. You raise to 1,800. Everyone folds to the big blind who has 53,735 chips. He calls. The board comes 9♣-3♥-6♠. He checks to you. There is 5,085 in the pot. You bet 1,721 chips. He calls. There is now 8,527 in the pot. The turn is the Q♣. He checks to you. What do you do? (*Diagram 3*).



*Diagram 3*

If you're like many of my students, you check here. The river comes a club, 10, eight, king, or ace. The big blind leads because people like to do that

randomly. My student stares at the screen thinking they will get some kind of read by looking at the blinking icon. They don't get one. They call.

There is a good argument for checking that turn. The argument is that if you bet too thinly here, it means that whenever you check back the turn you have nothing. Theoretically, your opponents could then float out of position and lead the river every time you check the turn knowing you have nothing.

But the number of players who will execute this play in a large, soft \$109 field is small. We shouldn't expect this play. What percentage of players do you think could perform that way? 20%? It's no higher than that.

We need a plan for when we're facing the other 80%, which is the clear majority. What do those players do?

If you look at any database of online poker players, you will find the same details always jump out at you. The field calls too much and folds too little. They never bluff enough. This means you should value bet more thinly. Your opponent should fold their ace highs, sixes, and threes in this situation, but they are unlikely to do so. You are getting good value out of your hand. You are also making the river much easier to play. After they checked and called you on the turn, most players will check to you on the river 99% of the time. When they do lead, they'll almost always have made the hand. During the 99% of the times they check the river, you can choose to accept the showdown and the smaller pot. If the river is good for your hand, you can bet again.

Your bet doesn't have to be large. Theoretically they're supposed to raise for value with one good pair if you bet 25% pot on the turn, but in practice almost no player does that. You can bet what you think a six, three, or ace high will continue calling.

If you check on that turn, you're going to call the river anyway. Instead of letting him value bet whenever he wants, you can get your own value from his weaker hands while you still can. You'll keep the option open on the river for a cheap showdown or another bet depending on if the river is good for you.

## CHAPTER 29

# NOT GOING FOR THIN VALUE

### Where All the Money Comes From

Let's revisit the last hand and continue with it.

You have J-9s in the lojack. You have 49,352 chips in a Sunday \$109 tournament online on a softer American site. The blinds are 450/900 with a 115 ante. You raise to 1,800. Everyone folds to the big blind who has 53,735 chips. He calls. The board comes 9♣-3♥-6♠. He checks to you. There is 5,085 in the pot. You bet 1,721. He calls. There is now 8,527 in the pot. The turn is the Q♣. He checks to you. You bet 2,132 chips. Your opponent calls. The river is the A♥. He checks to you again. You have 43,699 chips back. Your opponent has 48,982.

You know what I am about to advocate. You read the title of this chapter. You know what is coming. But ask yourself an honest question: How often do you bet here? Do you ever even consider the play?

I have had students swear to me up and down that they love betting here. Then we apply filters to their poker database. We filter for second pair or worse on the river and triple barrels. We find nothing. We remove triple barrels and just see if they river bet. At that point, we find next to nothing.

If you're an online player, it's good practice to put the condition in your database for "top pair, triple barrel." If you don't see more than five hands then you're not making as much money as you could. Pairs are the most likely value hand you will possess. Two pair or better comes around rarely. Everybody is waiting for those hands. If you are waiting for those hands to play a huge pot, then you're playing like everyone else. Those players don't beat the rake for a reason. Do not play like them.

In this hand, you are afforded an opportunity. Your opponent called out

of the big blind. That is the widest calling range you'll see at a traditional no limit hold'em table. This wide range will make a ton of mediocre pairs. Your opponent could have several inferior nines and sixes. They are willing to pay you off because of the deep stacks. Why would you check here?

In the actual hand, I bet 3,198 into 12,791. Many poker fans don't like this bet. They feel it is too obviously a value bet. "It would be so easy to raise you off the hand!"

I can tell you don't value bet enough when I hear you say that. Any value-bet addict will tell you the number of times they get check-raised on the river is vanishingly small. Humans hate getting caught bluffing. It makes them feel bad about themselves.

In the actual hand, my opponent called and I won. He mucked, and on this site that meant that I couldn't see his hand. I like this feature. It makes people call more knowing they won't have to expose the junk they called with.

My career changed when I started doing one thing differently. When I checked back the best hand on the river, I always asked myself, "What the hell are you doing?"

It is mind blowing to see players check back a great hand on the river and look proud of themselves for picking up a small pot. There seems to be a large number of poker players who feel they're morally superior for possessing better hands on the river. They seem infatuated with showing them down.

If you're always showing down better hands than your opponent after checking the river, then you are developing a serious leak. Look at this pot. It doesn't seem like I'm betting much. The bets were small the entire way through, but it was free money. Big blind flatters hate folding their pairs. The final pot was 19,187. That's a 20 big blind pot we earned. A typical win rate in online tournaments is 10 big blinds per 100 hands. That's an excellent win rate. We just got that in one hand if we only count the chips our opponent put into the pot.

The entire point of no limit hold'em is to get the other player's chips. If you make a great hand and your first thought is, "Okay, let's make this pot as small as possible" then you're never going to make the money you want to make.

Prey on big blind flatters first for thin value bets. They call the most. As you keep learning, you can expand into other spots.



## CHAPTER 30

# NOT SHOWING THEM DIFFERENT BETS

### When Did You Last Do This?

You are playing in a private cash game with executives at a large software company. They're playing \$20/\$40 blinds. You have no idea why they don't just do \$25/\$50, because you've never asked them that question.

The big blind just lost a big bet on a basketball game. He looks visibly heated.

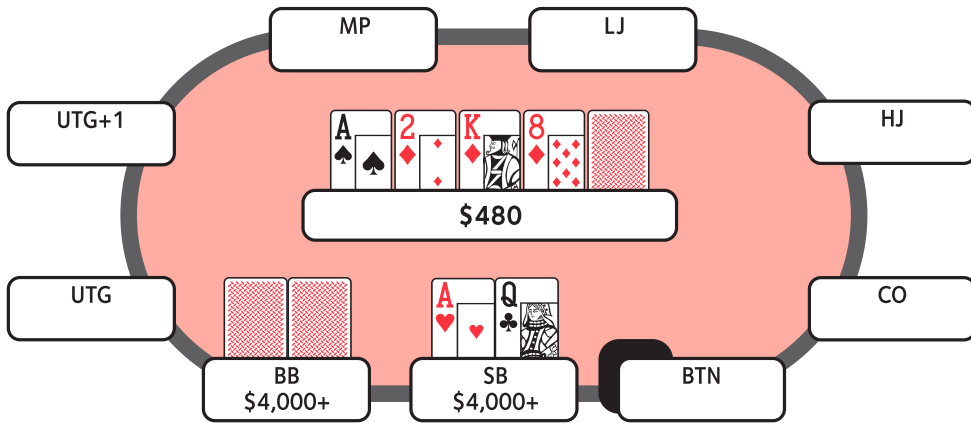
For the first time that night, the action is folded to you in the small blind. You raise to \$120 with A♥-Q♣. The big blind looks annoyed as he still stares at the TV screen. He quickly throws in a call. He keeps staring off into the distance.

The board comes A♠-2♦-K♦. You bet \$120 again. Your opponent calls.

The turn is the 8♦. What do you do here? (*Diagram 4*).

If you're like many of my students, you check and pray for the best. The tilted big blind starts firing huge shells at the pot. You have no idea if he is tilt bluffing or not. You're guessing and clueless. He's got you murdered.

Make your life easier. Bet 33% to 50% of the pot on the turn. Bet 33% to 50% of the pot on the river. Theoretically, he's supposed to raise with a bunch of bluffs versus those bet sizes. He's also supposed to raise for thin value with A-8 if he turned the hand. Most players won't do that, however, because they don't want to play a big pot with a mediocre hand. Those are the pots that stick in your mind late at night. Most poker players will pay cash money to avoid that rumination ruining their night.



**Diagram 4**

They are supposed to fold some weak aces and kings by the river if you fire twice, but many tilted guys won't do that. Theoretically, he should be turning weaker hands into bluffs, but again it's hard to find players who will do that. Theoretically, they should know when you bet smaller that you capped your range, because most players would bet bigger if they made the flush on the turn. Most players won't call you out on this though. It's especially unlikely to happen in a cash game.

This is a highly exploitative play, triple barreling this thin with smaller bets. Since it is an exploitative play, it means your opponent can exploit it themselves because you are unbalanced. That said, you need this play in your back pocket versus weak opposition when you're out of position with decent pairs on coordinated boards. If you check and play the guessing game, you're unlikely to look into his eyes and know what's in his soul. You'll often be calling too much against a player who never bluffs or not calling enough against a player who always chooses to bluff on scary turns. Until you know specifically which player you're dealing with, you should use the blunt instrument of the thin triple barrel with smaller bets.

## CHAPTER 31

# NOT SCHMOOZING TO FIND HOME GAMES

### How To Make Real Money

The real money in poker is made in private games. You only go to the casino to make connections.

That's not entirely true, of course, but it's a useful line to remember. Many casino cash games are raked to death. You can get better conditions in a home game. If you choose them wisely, you'll also find the loosest money.

Of course, there is the question of safety. No police officer is going to shed a tear if you get robbed at an underground card game. That is why you need to choose wisely.

Certain games have certain reputations. Some have been safe for years. Some are just a bunch of dork guys who wouldn't hurt a fly. Those are my favorite.

The question becomes how do you get into these games?

Many of the better games are run by older professionals in other fields. They want a safe space where they are away from "poker pros" who treat them terribly. They might not care if you're a pro as long as you're a mature adult.

You can get into many games by becoming a pseudo celebrity in poker. Many home-game players want to test their skills against the latest big video blogger. The problem is that you open yourself up to exploitation. Some unsavory characters will come knocking.

The right way to do this is to be polite and network without any expect-

tation. If you genuinely want to learn about people and their day, the connections will start developing.

It's good if you can offer something. I've actually been invited to private poker tournaments thanks to my expertise. I helped the guy running the tournament with his game and he wanted to invite me.

Many private-game players are interested in the same kind of thing as most male poker players: cryptocurrency, poker, dating, exercise, stocks, business, and so on. If you can help them in any of these fields, you will find yourself with an in.

The one that always gets me in, for example, is poker. A guy will tell me about an issue he's having in his game and I'll say, "Have you tried this?" In 30 seconds, I'll try to offer some advice that has no judgment attached to it. Of course, I can only do this if I don't play the person every day.

This is how I got into poker coaching. I got better and better at this skill. If something about poker has been irritating a guy for a long time and you give him a work-around, he'll remember you positively. You will catch up with him down the line. You'll be in his good graces.

Friends of mine are always helping guys with crypto. They know much more about that field than I do. I can help more guys with online businesses, although they always want to discuss dropshipping, which has never been my field.

A lot of this requires falling in love with the world of working for yourself. If you spend time around people who do things on their own, you'll get better with networking. I worked out for years in a gym in New York City just to be around guys who were a hundred times more successful than me. The more comfortable you get in this world, the more you will realize everybody has the same issues and wants the same friends.

Many of the more successful guys who run games are family oriented. When they were younger, they did all the drugs, chased all the girls, and got it out of their system. If you ask how their family is doing and genuinely listen, you'll be ahead of the game. Most people want to talk about some funny or serious thing going on with their family without someone judging them.

Most of the networking game falls into the "No shit, Sherlock" territory. All those books they recommend to you when you're young are right. The lessons from *How To Win Friends And Influence People* still apply. Don't be interesting. Be interested. There's a big difference. Even if you're contributing something, it should just be a fun prompt or idea to get the other person talking again. Look people in the eye. Ask follow-up questions. Remember

names. I've always been socially awkward, but if I can pull this off, you have no excuse.

When I was a kid, I was a huge buzzkill to be around. I was struggling with mental health issues and I didn't know how to deal with them. Once I got my life together, I found I didn't know how to relate to others. That's when someone taught me the key. "Whenever you're talking, try to say three positive or neutral comments for every negative comment you make. People don't want to be around someone who brings them down. It's like a bad drug. If you say anything negative, try to make it a joke or tie it to a positive comment. That will help you a lot." Sure enough, it worked. I later found out this is a technique Scott Adams teaches. You should follow him if you want more life advice that actually works.

The easiest way to begin talking with anybody is to discuss their favorite sports team. Men love talking about their hometown team. You should be following the major sports in your country just so you can say something positive about their team.

As a kid, I never watched sports on television. My friends and I liked playing pick-up sports without rules. We didn't watch them on TV. When I went pro at 18, I was playing so much I never watched TV. When I turned 25, I started having an issue. I didn't know anything about the sports world from 2006 to 2015. I'd been playing cards. This held me back when it came to networking. Men want to talk sports nonstop. I started paying attention to sports for the first time in my life. To my surprise, now that I wasn't as young anymore, I found watching sports to be as enjoyable as playing them. I learned that if you can watch the game without too much attachment to either team you can usually highlight something positive some fan will enjoy. It helps to break the ice.

## CHAPTER 32

# NOT PLAYING MORE HOME GAME POTS

### Don't Get Kicked Out!

Home games are different from casino poker. You can't play 10% of the hands and expect to get invited back. The people at home games are there for an experience. They're letting off steam before they get back to their families.

Many budding poker players are scared to play big home-game pots with weak hands. They need to get over this as soon as possible. If you can't lose five buy-ins at the beginning of your home game cash session without blinking an eye, you're in the wrong business. A lot of casual players in home games are there for enjoyment. They're not there to make your nitty ass comfortable.

Get your money together and get to the game. Consider it an investment. Pretend you just blew the money on a tournament you didn't cash. Have fun with this.

Many cash games feature six or seven players in every pot. My students tell me this as if it's bad. This is amazing! Get in there!

At the beginning of the session, pay attention to who the suckers are. They have telltale signs. They can never fold pre-flop to any reraising action. They are always time-banking and not folding on later streets. They show down weak hands.

Now, get involved in a bunch of pots. If everyone is 200x deep and you legitimately have whales ready to go broke with any pair, you are getting theoretically 1000-to-1 implied odds if multiple whales are in a pot pre-flop.

Start getting in there with some suited gappers and unsuited connectors.

If you see a raise late in a hand and the guy hasn't been aggressive previously, then understand your pair isn't worth a tin shit anymore. Yes. Aces are pretty pre-flop. Yes. They are so much better than the garbage hands these guys are playing. Yes. You're a more moral human being because you waited for aces and you deserve this oh so much. But gravity doesn't care what you think about it. It just is. Look at a poker hand ranking chart sometime. One pair isn't high on that list. God doesn't care that you had a pair in your hand pre-flop. The world isn't fair.

Whenever I'm in a wilder game, I play "two pair or better" poker. I start thinking about big pots only when I secure two pair or better. I start paying attention at the table to who might be able to bluff raise me later in a pot. You can identify those players by how much they hem and haw later in the hand. If they're constantly talking out loud when they are considering a thin river call, that means they're not considering turning that hand into a bluff. That lets you know you can fire with impunity when it comes to value betting because they'll only raise you with the lock.

Some guys get emotional. They don't think they're turning a pair into a bluff. They're just sick of how bad they're running. They want to see what happens. Look for them too. Watch how much a guy mutters, paces, and disgustedly mucks his cards. Try to time him.

Get involved in a bunch of pots. Call raises with hands you would never normally play. If you bust, laugh and slap the guy on the back. If you can't do that genuinely it means you're worried you won't beat them in the long run. You're playing too high. They're allowed to have their game. It's your job to work with it and beat it. Don't get mad that reality isn't what you want it to be. Accept reality on reality's terms and work with it.

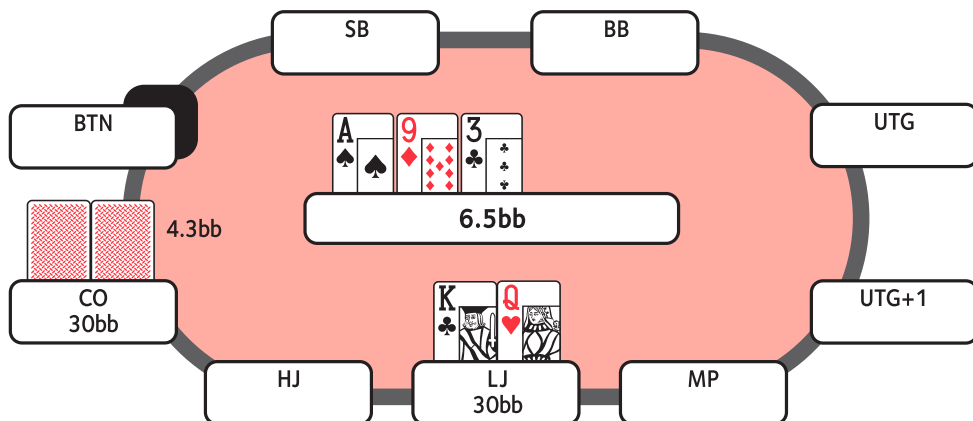
# CHAPTER 33

## CALLING WITH HIGH CARDS ONLY TO FOLD THE TURN

### So Many Players Do This

You have 30 big blinds in a large live event. You raise pre-flop from the lojack with K-Qo. The cutoff cold calls you. He also has 30 big blinds. He's a talented solid pro who often plays big live events.

The board comes A♠-9♦-3♣. You check. The pot is 6.5 big blinds. Your opponent bets 4.3 big blinds. It's on you (*Diagram 5*). What do you do? What would you do if a weak recreational player did the same thing?



*Diagram 5*

Many players call 100% of the time versus the pro because they have



the best high card possible and they feel weak when they fold it on the flop. They feel like they are being exploited by a pro. Is this you?

This hand must be check-folded. Your opponent is a solid player. He is not cold calling from that size stack without a carefully selected range. He is primarily going to have aces and pairs. He's probably folding a number of unsuited broadways pre-flop that you would be beating.

Many players call with any good high card on any flop in any heads-up situation versus a pro because they feel weak when they fold it. They act as if the turn and river don't even exist. If you're dealing with a talented regular, how often are the turn and river going to get checked through? 20% of the time? 30% of the time? No one can know that number for sure, but most people would assume they are facing another bet most of the time. That means we are calling a 2/3 pot-sized bet here with the intention of just folding later most of the time. This type of opponent is going to be able to unload the clip if you cap your range later in the hand.

He has a strong range and multiple shells left in the clip. You're going to need to fold here.

You would have more of a case for calling versus a weak recreational player, although that doesn't necessarily mean you should call. A recreational player will call with more garbage suited-gappers and unsuited broadways that you're beating. It's possible he would have bet smaller with an ace to get you involved in the pot. He's less likely to fire on later streets with his short stack if he gets called here. That said, you should probably still fold.

Most players treat all high-card flop calls the same. I will go through their database and highlight how they call literally 100% of the time with this hand. They'll then cry when they see how much money they're losing overall.

It's a completely different situation if you call out of the big blind and face a very small bet from the pre-flop raiser. If that player is opening from later position, they could have 30-50% of the hands. You're getting better pot odds. You should routinely call there with ace high.

But when you raise pre-flop and get cold called, that is different. Many solid regulars will only cold call with a disciplined range.

King-highs are different from ace-highs as well. On ace-high boards, you are facing many made top pairs because A-x hands are both the most popular hands to play and the likeliest hand to occur in a person's range. You have no overcards to draw to in this situation. With an ace high, you will have more equity and can consider a call more seriously.

## CHAPTER 34

# NOT VALUE-BETTING VERSUS HIGH CARDS

### What Do You Do Here?

You are playing a tournament in Las Vegas. You are deep stacked at the beginning of a \$1,500 event. It is folded to you. You raise from the hijack to 2.5x with J♦-9♦. The cutoff, a man in his 40s who has been playing aggressively, makes it 7.5 big blinds to go. You are 100 big blinds deep so you decide to call once it gets folded back to you.

The board comes 10♠-8♠-7♦. The pot is now 16.5 big blinds. You have flopped the nut straight but there is a flush draw out there.

You check to the three-bettor. He checks back.

The turn is the 8♣. Once again you check hoping he will bet. He checks.

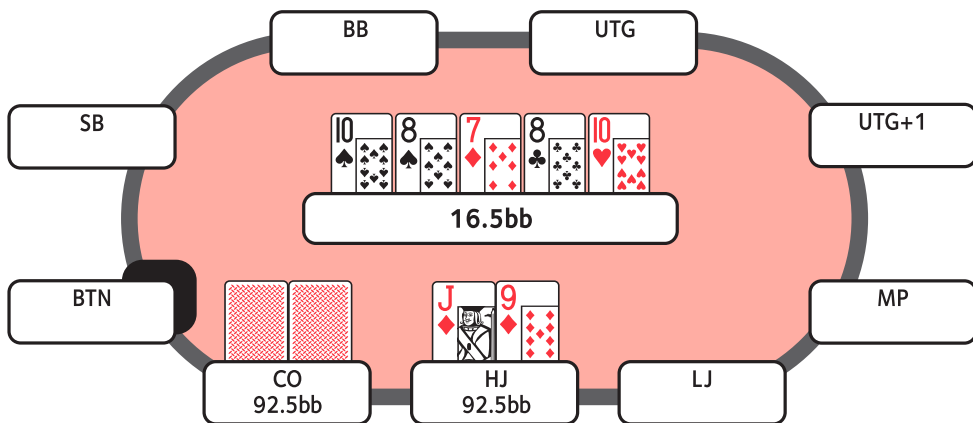
The river is the 10♥ and the final board is 10♠-8♠-7♦-8♣-10♥. (*Diagram 6*). The flop and turn have been checked through after you flatted a three-bet out of position. The pot is still 16.5 big blinds. You are first to act. You and your opponent both have around 92.5 big blinds. (You're not sure of the exact counts because you're playing live and you have to eyeball it.)

What would you generally do in this situation?

If you want to bet, how much will you make it?

Think of your answers before we continue. You'll retain more information if you do so.

Let me ask you something. If you had Q-Jo and had missed everything, would you bet here and think you would get a fold? How much do you think you would have to bet to get a fold?



**Diagram 6**

What should you do here with the straight? You should bet 33 big blinds into the 16.5 big blind pot.

Think about it. There is no way in hell he has an eight or a 10. He is an aggressive player. He would have bet earlier in the hand with those holdings to get value from you. He would have likely value bet over-pairs as well after you check twice. If you count the combinations, most of his range is ace highs that are desperately trying to get to showdown. You should disappoint him.

It's amazing how many players won't bet anything here, much less bet for true value.

I asked you how much you should bet with Q-Jo to get him to fold because the response 99% of people have is, "You can't bet anything to get him to fold. He has so many ace highs he's not folding. The pot is too small."

If that's true, you should bet two times the size of the pot. I love doing this against male players especially because they get angry when they feel you're trying to use a stupid move to buy a pot. They feel as if you just called them stupid. They're not going to stand for that! Interestingly, women won't fall for the same ego move.

Versus some of my favorite American regs, you can call once they shove here with their counterfeited pairs and missed draws.

## CHAPTER 35

# NOT VALUE-BETTING WITH A HIGH CARD

### Have You Ever Done This?

You are playing a \$55 tournament online on a soft American site. It is folded to you. You raise with A♠-K♦ from the lojack. You have 98,394 chips to start the hand. Blinds are 2,500/5,000 with a 625 ante. You make it 10,000. It's folded around to the big blind. He calls your raise from a stack of 110,094.

The board comes J♣-2♠-4♥. He checks to you. There is 28,125 in the heads-up pot. You have 88,394 chips. He has you covered with 105,094 chips back. What would you do here?

In this particular hand, we bet 9,531 chips into the 28,125-chip pot. Our opponent calls.

The turn is the 3♥. Our opponent checks from the big blind. We look down at the J♣-2♠-4♥-3♥ board. There is 47,187 in the middle. We have 78,863 chips in our stack. What should we do here?

At some point most people will check with their ace high. Then they call down future bets because they assume their opponent is bluffing with a correct frequency. Does that sound right to you?

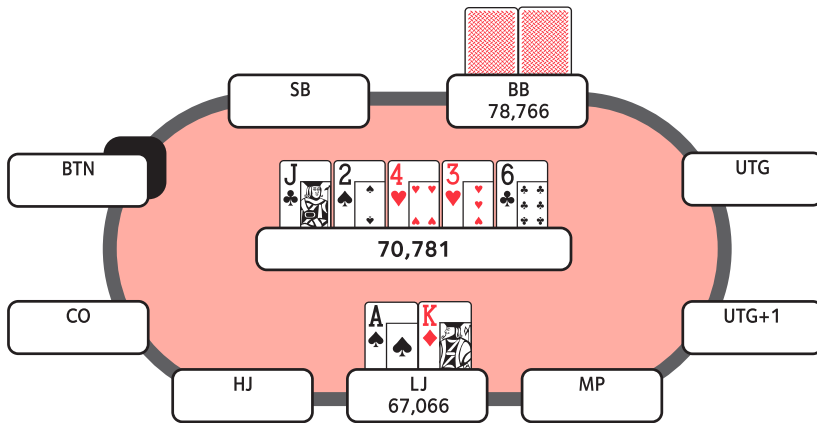
But what we should do is bet something small.

We bet 11,797 chips into the 47,187-chip pot. Our opponent calls.

The river is the 6♣. He checks to us.

We have 67,066 chips in our stack. There's 70,781 in the middle.

What should we do now? (*Diagram 7*).



**Diagram 7**

This is a great hand to illustrate the differences between buy-in levels along with exploitative and balanced poker.

If this was a major tournament, I'd seriously consider a jam on this river. If the opponent is squeamish about losing his buy-in of thousands of dollars, he might even fold a jack to our jam. A jack is likely the top of his range because most players will check-raise at some point with a set to start making money.

It's a completely different ball game in a \$55 tournament versus a punter. You should value bet thinly twice and be done with the hand. Your opponent is calling that turn with Q-10o on occasion, just because he likes how pretty the face cards look. He isn't folding any pairs on the river. He might have not noticed that a five makes a straight. Even if he did, he would likely dream up a way you could never have a five, so he has license to call with his pair that he doesn't want to fold. Folding is boring. Folding is a guaranteed loss. No one wants to fold.

On the turn, he will still call you with any ace high because he is developing a wheel draw. We can't say for certain he's folding some big card combinations when you bet so small. He never thinks to turn his hand into a bluff. You got two thin streets of value and now you can't bluff on this river. Move on.

In the actual hand, the opponent had A-10. I took in a nice pot after I checked back the river.

## CHAPTER 36

# FAILING TO USE BASIC C-BETTING THEORY

### Let's Discuss Some Fundamentals

In the last two sections we discussed some more fundamentals. I am doing my best to keep hitting on the concepts that will make you the most money for the rest of your life. My job isn't just to write down what is going to help you. My job is also to keep hitting the material in a way that will stick with you. A youth football coach wouldn't be good at his job if he just showed you a play on his sketch pad and told you to get to work.

In all forms of poker, we are firstly trying to exploit wide ranges. Wide ranges miss the flop the most. This allows us to pick up a ton of money with our continuation bets. Wide ranges also make the worst pairs. This allows us to collect money by value betting viciously. We are always starting our games by looking for who plays too many hands. Who opens too much? Who calls out of the big blind too much?

We have also discussed why balance isn't practical in many situations if we're looking to optimize profits. Our opponents just won't be able to handle certain plays of ours, whereas they have a fighting chance versus other plays we could throw at them.

If you've ever watched a high school pitching prospect, you'll know they have a hard time developing a changeup. For those of you who do not follow baseball: You understand the hitter is trying to hit the ball right? The pitcher doesn't want that to happen. One way a pitcher can fool a great batter is by suddenly throwing a pitch that looks like a fastball when it comes out

of the pitcher's hand but actually goes 20 mph slower. The batter swings wildly ahead of time and misses the pitch. It keeps the batter off balance and makes things difficult.

You see the changeup often in major league games. Pitchers use it to keep hitters honest. If a pitcher never uses that pitch, the batter can wait for a fastball he likes and crank it out of the park.

High school pitchers almost never develop a changeup, however. Why? If you're a 16-year-old kid and can throw a 93mph fastball then no teenager is going to hit your pitch. If you suddenly throw a 79mph changeup to "stay balanced", you're just giving these poor kids a chance to hit something.

Why can't the high school kids hit the 93mph pitch? It's not their eyesight that's the issue. Hand-eye coordination actually gets worse with age, often beginning to atrophy when a person is 18. That's why professional gamers tend to be so young. No, the problem with these young baseball players is many of them don't have a body capable of turning on a ball that fast.

When we consider poker, there are a lot of players whose minds simply aren't wired to combat good players making the right plays. No one wants to talk about it, but poker acuity is something many people simply don't possess.

Notice how I didn't refer to raw intelligence. Intelligence is hard to drill down. You can be at a cocktail party with a bunch of academics who have brilliant IQs. Then a pipe bursts and the multimillion-dollar home starts flooding. A plumber gets there in 20 minutes to save the day. She can charge these people any price she wants. Who is suddenly the smartest person in that room?

All of us in poker are infatuated with short-term results, even though they could be the result of positive variance. We overestimate how much talent there is in this game. However, there are some who are born with table feel. Others are born with an ability to crunch numbers in their head. Some are born with an insatiable work ethic and will to succeed. Many of these qualities can't be taught.

Your opponents don't see poker as a profession, or often even as a way to make money. They are not working on their games nor are they motivated to. The naturals can develop the work ethic because it gets addictive to see how much it pays off for them. But the punters? They might kid themselves that they win more than they lose, but if you put a gun to their head and told them it was going to go off if they didn't answer accurately, they would tell

you they're small losers.

They might be brilliant plumbers or lawyers, but they don't have the natural grit or insanity required to sit in a cardroom for decades. And that's fine. That just means they are going to be like those high school kids who can't hit basic pitches because they lack the ability to even try. It won't help us prepare for the major leagues, but if we're looking to win games versus these amateurs then we should keep showing them the pitch they can't hit.

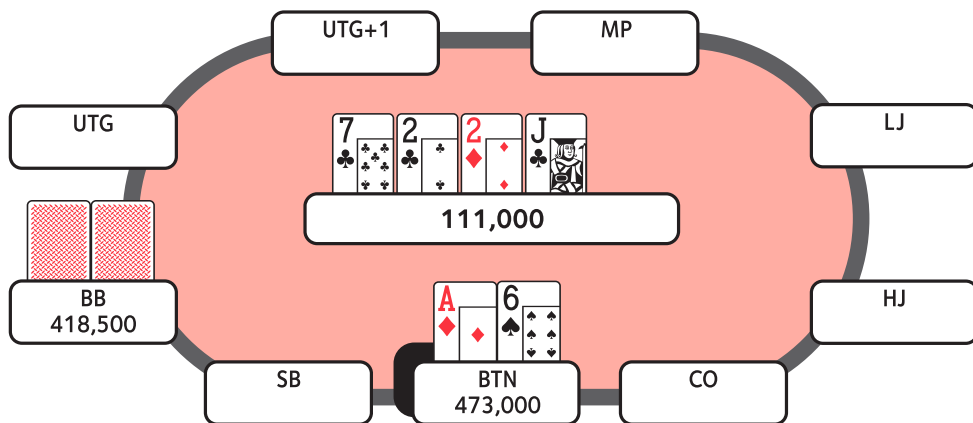
Let's use a hand example to illustrate this.

You are deep in a live tournament at your local small-town casino. This is the major event they throw once a year. It's only a \$1,000 entry, but first prize is more than \$100,000 most years. Most of the cardroom regulars are on their best behavior in this one.

You have 519,000 chips. The blinds are 6,000/12,000. You are on the button with  $A\heartsuit-6\spadesuit$  and it's folded to you. You make it 24,000. The small blind folds. Rich in the big blind calls. He has 453,000 chips behind.

The board comes  $7\clubsuit-2\clubsuit-2\heartsuit$ . Rich checks. You bet 22,500 into the 66,000 pot. He calls.

The pot is now 111,000. The turn is the  $J\clubsuit$ . The board now is  $7\clubsuit-2\heartsuit-2\clubsuit-J\clubsuit$ . He checks to you. You have 473,000 left in your stack. He has 418,500 in his stack. What do you do here? (*Diagram 8*).



**Diagram 8**

Pause and think about it. What do you normally do? Do you like betting this card? Do you typically bet this card in this situation? Or do you like checking?

We should check here. Let's discuss why.



You hear this logic come from beginner players all the time. “That jack of clubs is terrible for his range! He would have check-raised with flush draws on this board! That’s an awful card for a seven and we can get him to fold the better high cards that called us on the board.”

This is how you think about poker. This is known as projecting.

If you are in a small market and the stacks are this deep, there is no way in hell your opponent is folding a seven. He’s going to call one more bet because folding here makes him feel stupid. The end. He plays emotionally just like all of us do. You make 80% of your decisions emotionally every day. He doesn’t bother to study so he’s playing emotionally. He likes his seven. He likes his pocket fours with a club. He likes his pocket threes without a club. He thinks you’re trying to bluff that card. It doesn’t cost much to see what you’ll do on the river. Let’s gamble!

When I play major tournaments versus scared satellite-winning competition I will fire this turn constantly to set up a river bluff. In a smaller market with stacks this deep I don’t even bother trying. Why?

Most recreational players make the same emotion-driven plays consistently. These plays are hardwired into humans. If I pretend to throw a basketball at you, you will flinch because it is a deep survival instinct. It doesn’t matter if your logical brain knows I would never throw a basketball at you for no reason. If you read *Thinking Fast And Slow* you will learn that humans have flinch biases as well when it comes to financial decisions.

Most players want to see too many flops. The flop is rife with opportunity. It’s so many cards!

Once they get to the flop, they more or less know what direction their hand is going. If they have high cards, they fold too much because it’s a hard hand to win with. Their curiosity has been satiated. They saw the flop. They can move on now.

If they have a draw or a pair, they will call too many bets because consenting to a loss is not something humans are wired to do. That’s why every sale on Earth says “Save \$50 today!” as opposed to “Gain \$50 today!” If we are framing financial decisions within the context of loss, we are likely to make a bad decision to prevent us from losing. This has been well documented. If you want to learn more, you can read *Influence* by Robert Cialdini or *The Undoing Project* by Michael Lewis. They are both easy reads that will help you see financial matters through the common person’s viewpoint.

How does this translate to your game? If you can isolate a wide range in a heads-up pot, you will be betting the flop a ton only to give up on the turn.

Yes, your game will be insanely exploitable and boring. You will never play this strategy and feel like a badass. However, until you have evidence that your opponents are paying attention, you shouldn't deviate. Most of your opponents will fold too much with their high cards and stick around too often with any pair or draw. Your job is to exploit this.

If you start becoming suspicious that everyone knows what you are doing and is exploiting you: Stop. You're not that special. None of us is. Most people want to see the flop and sleep well at night knowing they didn't fold a winner. Take advantage of them until you see a showdown that proves otherwise.

## CHAPTER 37

# BELIEVING THE BAD REGS CAN PLAY

### New Plays for the 2020s

You're playing \$1 NL cash on a large international poker site. You're playing on 6-max software that gives you an entirely new table every time you fold.

You have 127.1 big blinds and raise to 2.5 big blinds with Q♥-10♦ after it is folded to you in the cutoff. Only the big blind calls. He's a reg who massively multi-tables. He lives in a country where the USD is strong. He plays for a living. He plays all day. He has exactly 100 big blinds to start the hand.

The board comes 5♣-2♦-4♠. He checks and you check back. The turn is the J♠. He checks again. You bet 2.09 big blinds. He calls.

The river is the 8♦. The final board now is 5♣-2♦-4♠-J♠-8♦. The flop was checked through. On the turn, he check-called out of position from the big blind. There are 9.68 big blinds in the pot.

He checks again.

You bet seven big blinds into the pot. You think he called on the turn with a number of high cards and draws that have completely bricked this river. Since you do not beat them at showdown, you want him to fold them.

He raises to 21 big blinds almost instantly. What is your move? (*Diagram 9*).

Take some time on this quiz. You always want to take time with these quizzes. You'll retain much more if you take your time.

Ask yourself what his range is here. Many of us get a gut instinct in an hand and follow that. That doesn't help us in professional gambling.

A mentor of mine once told me, “You’re a bad pattern recognition machine or you’re dead. There are no other options for humans.” We are all skilled at seeing patterns that may or may not be there. Our basic pattern recognition helps us when it comes to avoiding drowning in freezing water but it’s not terrific when it comes to complex interpersonal games of financial risk.



**Diagram 9**

Do you have your answer yet? Good.

We should move all-in here. We should raise to 122.51 big blinds and put the reg all-in.

Why do you think we should do that?

If you guessed the answer because of the way it was phrased and the tone of this book, that is not going to help you at the table. It is possible to be right for the wrong reasons.

I know someone who grew up with news reporters as parents. She never believes anything that is on the news. She’s seen how the sausage is made and she is not impressed. Her parents were disillusioned so they would tell her all the dirt about the industry. For logical reasons, she doesn’t believe much of anything that gets blathered on TV now. None of us would likely be any different if we grew up like she did.

Hilariously, her success rate for identifying bullshit seems to be over 50%. Her strategy doesn’t exactly reek of finesse. “Oh it’s on the news? It’s horseshit.” Then she goes about her day. She doesn’t bother herself for another second about what the news told her to freak out about. In her defense, she is great at achieving her goals and perhaps this is a way of not

getting slowed down by what she can't control.

Now, she would even admit to you that she has been right about some serious news stories over the last five years, but not for the right reasons. She is a perfect example of a fixed perspective being appropriate at just the right time. If the news were ever to shift direction her algorithm is not going to adjust itself.

This is something that doesn't get discussed much in poker. There are many people who let their personality dictate their poker game. They have a specific poker game that is perfect for one era but not for the one after that. I was super loose aggressive as a teenager because that style of play was fun for me to play. I didn't have any reasoning behind it. I thought triple-barrel bluffing was funny. It just so happened that in the 2000s everyone was a huge nit that folded constantly. If I still played that style in the 2020s, I'd get smoked.

We don't want to pick our plays based on personality. We don't want to pick our plays based on a lucky guess as to what the teacher is driving at. Neither of those will help us at the table.

What logic is going to be used in this hand? There is a clear tell that the reg is lying with his river raise here.

This is one of the most common bluffs you will be making in low limit cash games online if you play against bad regs. Many of them have one specific bias. When they have a larger hand, they will always fast play it with draws on the board.

He likely would have led 7-6 on the turn. Our opponent instead check-called the turn when flush draws and wheel draws were out there. Many regs are unwilling to do that with a set or even a good jack. He has capped his range at mediocre pairs. Why is he suddenly raising on the river with such a weak range? This line reeks of a missed draw and a player who got annoyed by it. Bad regs let their emotions dictate their play constantly. He isn't thinking at all about what he is representing. The fact he was able to make the play quickly doesn't mean anything. Many American regs will only know what they're going to do when they're fast playing a big hand, because they've never even considered raise bluffing this river before. That isn't the case when you're dealing with South Americans, Asians, Eastern Europeans, etc. Give credit where credit is due. They are not afraid to bluff and play for the win.

The only hand he could have here that would make sense is J-8, but that is not many combinations when you're assembling a value raising range.

Did you notice he had exactly 100 big blinds to start the hand? That typically means he just reloaded. Some guys love to go balls to the wall right after busting a stack. That's not to say that's what was happening here, but I wouldn't be doing my job if I didn't mention it.

To put a bow on this section, I'm using this hand to illustrate a common misconception among new players. The regs do not get a third hole card. They play two cards just like you. They're fallible. They make mistakes you can pick up on. Regs at lower limits develop bad habits all the time. One example you often see is a reg who always raises his good hands on a coordinated board. This leaves him hilariously capped on rivers. His bluffs should get no credibility, but he survives because most of the recreational players at his limit are too scared to test his jaw. Don't be like these recreational players. Slow the hand down, take notes, and execute. Win.

## CHAPTER 38

# LETTING OPPONENTS DICTATE POT SIZE

### Where Would You Play This Hand Differently?

Let's try something different in this section. I am going to explain a hand my student played. I want you to see where they're making a mistake. There will be multiple correct answers for this hand, but that's not the point. See if you can determine the logical explanation for where we could make a different play. If we can open our mind to this idea, we can win more money in the future.

We are playing a smaller stakes tournament versus a solid reg who massively multi-tables. The reg is good. He plays closer to GTO poker than most opponents at this level.

We start the hand effectively 40 big blinds deep. Villain opens pre-flop and we three-bet from the big blind with J♣-10♦. Our opponent calls us in position.

The pot is now 19.9 big blinds. The board comes A♠-K♠-6♣. Not exactly our flop. We check. Our opponent bets two big blinds. We call.

The turn is the 5♥. We check. Our opponent now bets six big blinds into the 23.9 big blind pot. We fold. We turned nothing. We feel we have no play here.

Where did we make a mistake? What would you have done differently? Why?

There is actually a fairly major error here. I didn't think it was that bad until I started working with a new coach who opened my eyes.

If you're playing a casino tournament in the States, then what does this guy have?

If you're playing online versus a GTO-focused reg, then what does this guy have?

They're different answers. Both deserve inspection. If you're playing a casino tournament with a bad reg, or you're playing low stakes on an American-focused site, then this bet represents absolutely nothing a large percentage of the time and a king some of the time.

If you're playing a GTO-focused reg, the range is a little harder to pin down. GTO training helps players make excellent exploitative plays, so it's not impossible he's trying something here. If he does want to give you work, he has a great reason to do so. When you check-call a 10% pot-sized bet on this flop, what do you have? You likely didn't check and then call such a small bet with any kind of ace. You should be raising most of them versus such a small bet. Even weak players with no understanding of theoretically correct poker will raise most aces on this flop because the pot feels too small otherwise. Once you check-call this flop, you have told your opponent that your range is very weak. You can be check-calling some mediocre aces but that's your best hand. He's well within his rights to start barreling this turn.

How do we deal with both players at the same time? What could we have done differently in this hand?

We could have bet small on the flop. That play is fine. He likely shoves pre-flop at this stack depth with many of his better aces. What else could we have done?

If we did check and call on the flop, then on the turn, we could have led 1/3 pot. Why?

Does he bet that small with an ace on this board after we check to him on the flop? Most well-trained poker players know that they make more money from their aces here if they beef up the continuation bet. They might not fire huge, but they certainly would consider betting 25% to 33% of the pot with an ace once we check. The 10% pot-sized bet caps their range somewhat. It's a good play if he has some hands that completely missed the flop, because his bet only needs to work 9.1% of the time. If you had a hand that completely bricked this board, you are probably willing to fold more than one time out of 10.

Since his range is limited, we can lead the turn. Our bet only needs to succeed 25% of the time to be profitable. He likely tried a cheap bluff more often than not. Additionally, if he does call, we have some equity going to



the river. It's not a ton but it's just enough to tilt us toward betting this turn.

If we're playing an unbalanced live reg, we need to be more careful about firing this turn. We can still do it, but we need to remember that many regs will do this with a mediocre king to get to a cheap showdown. We need to disappoint them regularly on turn and river by leading and making the pot too big for their liking.

Against either player type, the key error we are making is letting them cap *our* range and dictate the pot size. We are allowed to lead the turn after we check-call the flop. There is no law against it. We need to remember to think actively when we play. We can't get into an autopilot rhythm. Just because we checked and called the flop doesn't mean we need to check the turn 100% of the time. If we were thinking about our opponent's range here, the turn lead seems obvious. If we didn't consider that play, it means we are playing without thinking actively.

## CHAPTER 39

# NOT HIRING POKER COACHES

### Why Wouldn't You Want More Firepower?

Let's discuss something I mentioned in the last chapter. Aspiring poker players are often surprised when I mention I still have poker coaches. This floors me.

Do you think Steph Curry doesn't have an entourage of advisers and coaches who go with him to each game? How do you think he got to that position in the NBA? Do you think he doesn't have dieticians, trainers, and coaches he works with every single day?

Poker is a strange game. On one hand, it's beautiful because anyone can play it. The cards don't care who you are. There are 52 cards in a deck for everyone. On the other hand, people seem resistant to the fact that anyone can get into poker and learn something. We act as if you're nothing unless you've been born as a reincarnated Stu Ungar.

Do you watch NFL football? I love the game because it's like two armies going against each other. The head coaches look like commanders. Just like any army commander, they always have advisers near them. They make the final call in the end and they live with the consequences, but they want to hear what you're thinking and seeing before it comes to that.

I struggled for years when it came to my business endeavors because I tried to do everything myself. It wasn't until I learned how to accept help from others that I started doing better.

Hiring never felt like a skill I could master. I always felt that the hiring process was essentially guessing. There are plenty of people with incredible qualifications who are horrible once you get them in your place of business. The real skill comes in developing the ability to move people around. Not ev-

everyone is a quarterback or wide receiver. Some people are better at playing left tackle. Sometimes you need to let a guy go despite all his potential. He's just not right for your team.

What I've noticed about many of my students is that they grew up as the smart kids in school. I don't mean that as a compliment. I think being branded "the smart kid" in school is one of the worst things we do to people in American culture.

When I was in third grade, my teacher thought I was a genius because I could do mental math faster than the other kids. I felt mighty good about myself when the teacher talked about how smart I was. She didn't even require me to show my work on math worksheets. I just did the answers in my head and wrote them down. I laughed at all the other suckers in my class who were forced to do hard work while I sat around reading *Goosebumps* books. Look at these idiots working hard! If they had been born as smart as me, they would be done by now!

By sixth grade, none of my teachers cared about my math abilities anymore. The rest of the class had caught up. I happened to be a couple of years ahead of my peers in one subject. Once their brains caught up to mine, I wasn't special anymore.

One of the most annoying things I see on social media are posts in which people say, "Were you a talented and gifted kid who is now lost in life? Were you supposed to be the future of the universe and now you can't get out of bed? Yeah, me too."

I was once told, "Show me what you hate and I'll show you what you are." That never feels more true than when I see those posts.

Yes, your parents lied to you and made you think you'd be the next astronaut president. No, that's not your fault. Yes, it's still your responsibility to deal with it.

Most of the kids I know who were lauded as a genius in public school were simply a couple of grades ahead of their peers. Once they got to college, they realized there are tens of thousands of people who are just like them. Furthermore, the people they were ahead of in high school were often able to catch up in college.

Why do I bring up all of this? Because these are the people who will never admit they're wrong in poker or hire a coach. I can identify them because I used to be one of them.

It feels so good to prove everyone wrong. "I actually was special despite what you all thought of me! Yes, you all caught up to me eventually and that

made it difficult for me to hold on to my identity of being the kid who was better than everyone else, but now I'm making money at a card game so I'm awesome! It was true!"

The problem with this line of thinking is it makes us go back to old habits. Remember in primary school when you were excused from work because you were so much further ahead than the other students? That's what makes you feel stupid now when you need to study and work hard. Remember how you never had to ask the teacher for help because you instantly understood everything? That's what makes you feel like you failed now when you need to ask for help from someone.

The truth is we all have our strengths and weaknesses. Personally, I have maybe two or three skills that are highly marketable, and then I suck at everything else. I'm not athletically or musically gifted. I'm not great at math. My friends always beat me at video games. The list goes on.

It's important to remain humble and remember no one is good at everything. It pays to remind yourself of that every now and again. I had a mentor who told me to constantly learn things as a beginner again. It worked. It opens your mind to new possibilities.

For example, I used to goof off all the time and play pickleball with my friends. We had a blast. I thought I was decent. Then, I took one class from an instructor at the YMCA. Wow. The amount I didn't understand about the game was staggering. It's true what they say: You don't know what you don't know.

The problem many smart people have is they want to do everything on their own, because when they were a kid that's how they got through school. If they had to ask for the teacher's help, or if they had to work hard, that meant they weren't gifted anymore. These same people get into poker and they can easily fail. When they run up against a guy who has been studying constantly with different poker coaches, they are put in quite a predicament. They are not playing against one man anymore. They are playing against his entire squad. It's one man versus a football team. They're about to get their ass stomped into the turf.

You can overcome this instinct to do everything alone by taking on new hobbies that require you to consult an expert. If you take a cooking class, for example, you will get some big wins early as you go from a beginner cook to an intermediate one. That will motivate you and make you realize learning from others can lead to big life changes.

I tried to do everything alone for most of my 20s. The rocket fuel that

ignited my life and quadrupled my income was hiring the right people.

You don't need to rely on just one coach or mentor. You can keep a diversified portfolio. That will take the pressure off you. You won't have to be immaculate in your hiring decisions if you keep your financial investments small with each mentor. You can weigh each person's advice and make the final decision yourself.

If one person's training consistently gets you results, go back to them. No one is perfect as a coach. No one sees the world with complete impartiality. We all choose our perspective. The only way we can know if our mentor's perspective is close to correct is if it consistently predicts the right results for us.

A great coach doesn't need to be a great friend. Hopefully, your home life provides you that kind of connection. Your coach or mentor is supposed to get you results. Sometimes what they tell you won't be pleasant. I've had multiple mentors rip into me. They were right every single time. That doesn't mean it hurt any less.

If a mentor is cruel, that is a different matter, but if they truly care they will sometimes get heated, especially if you do the same stupid things repeatedly. Swallow your ego and listen to them. If they're right, they're right.

Who exactly should you hire to help you succeed in your poker journey? That is different for each person. I don't know anyone else's coaching portfolio, so I'll use mine as an example. Hopefully you can steal an idea from this.

If you're looking to get into the business side of the game, I recommend getting a mentor from another industry. There's a ton of bad business advice in the poker world. I paid one business mentor for years. He charged me less than he should have because he took pity on me. That's how many mistakes I was making at the time. If I had paid him 10 times what I paid him it would have been worth it. That's how much he helped my bottom line.

I've worked with multiple sports psychologists and mental coaches over the years. All of them have been valuable. We will discuss them more later. I hired one former marine who pushed me mentally in a great way. I hired other clinicians who had a more calming influence. Tricia Cardner was there for me when I was struggling badly years back. Her fixes were clinical and effective. I'm not sure I'd be writing these pages if she hadn't fixed things.

I've worked with the same therapist for years. Going to therapy is like going to the gym. You rewire your brain by discussing how to deal with different issues. Unloading your baggage and stress in a safe setting does wonders for your mental health.

I've had the same fitness advisor for years. He's the guy who helped get

me get lean again after I became obese. He's the guy who got me from 248 pounds to 190. He then helped me put on muscle until I got back to 210. For reference, I am six feet tall and built like a cruiserweight, which is to say I'm broad. He's done all my gym routines since 2017. He has helped me do everything from boring mobility work to setting deadlifting personal records.

I've worked remotely in a group setting with many different mentors, because they're wildly expensive if you try to get them one-on-one. To my surprise, getting into many inner circles is not that expensive if you use information in the field to pay for courses.

My poker coaches are too numerous to list here. I am a slow learner when it comes to playing cards. I need all the help I can get. I have one coach who works exclusively on exploitative plays to use on soft networks. I have multiple GTO coaches. Interestingly, it's my GTO coaches who help me design some of my best exploitative plays. I have a cash game coach. I have one coach who has a ton of big tournament final table experience. I'm in contact with these guys constantly. I play poker or study with my coaches almost every single day. I love it.

If you want me to put you in touch with any of the coaches I use, feel free to write me at [alex@pokerheadrush.com](mailto:alex@pokerheadrush.com).

Don't be afraid to ask for help. All the greats had coaches. It's unlikely you'll get anywhere if you try to do everything yourself. This game is infinitely complex. You'll never know what angle will open up next year. You always have a chance in poker if you keep your eyes open.

## CHAPTER 40

# NOT ANALYZING WHAT OPPONENTS DO WITH PAIRS

### Do You Do This?

You're playing a live tournament in Las Vegas. It's a \$1,000 buy-in. To your left is a young guy who is a solid pro. He has been playing for a living for years. He doesn't talk much. He's on the tighter side. There are always jokes in this cardroom about how tight he is. That said, whenever he is involved in a big pot, he tends to win it.

It is folded to you. You have J-10o and raise to 2.5x from the cutoff. The tournament has just started. You have more than 100 big blinds.

The young, solid pro makes it 7.5x on the button. This doesn't have to be a tight range. People joke about how tight he is, but he understands position. He knows he has to three-bet often versus the cutoff when he is on the button.

You call. The board comes A-Q-2, with two spades. You don't have a spade in your hand.

We check to the young gun. He stares at the flop for a few seconds. He doesn't normally do that. He then goes to his chips and bets 1/3 pot.

What do you do here?

You know the drill. Test yourself. Ask yourself what you would actually do at the table rather than trying to guess what I'm about to say. Look inside yourself. What do you normally do here?

Most players call in this spot. Some players fold. I like to raise big. I like to raise the size of the pot here. Why?

For one, let me tell you a secret. I was a nut-peddling bum for years.

That's how I paid my bills. The only talent I had was that I could play all day and all night without getting tired. I played a basic style and I got paid. That was all I ever did. Many young pros play this style because it keeps them out of trouble and helps them make money while they are learning. It looks a lot like this player is one of these guys.

Many of these younger pros grow up on online play. They are volume hounds. They play tons of tables for hours at a time. When they are playing that many tables, they need to focus on bad players, so they tend to play lower limit games. In those games, the recreational players call too much. They don't fold enough or raise as a bluff enough. Because of this, most young pros who massively multi-table get good at folding whenever a recreational player suddenly wakes up and decides they want to play a big pot.

In a previous section, we discussed how people play pairs. Most recreational players make a pair and they do not want to fold it. They don't care what comes. Folding a pair feels awful and guarantees a loss. It's more fun to gamble.

Solid grinders do not play this way. Again, pairs here are the key. If you wait until you have two pair or better to value bet, you are going to play just like everyone else. You will not be working to get value. If you can learn to land bombs when you have the best pair, you will make real money at this game.

Conversely, you need to know how your opponents approach pairs. Some people never fold them because it makes them feel bad about themselves. Believe it or not, some pros are like this. They take pot-control lines on seemingly every hand because they want to call down with their pair and show it down. They feel awful if they are forced to fold a pair.

Some pros are clearly solid attacking players. Tight-aggressive players like our opponent here make money for a reason. They're like old fighters with an educated jab. They might not be much fun to watch but tight-aggressive players see their openings, get in, get their money, and get out. They make a living from never being reckless. They're good players.

These players can fold pairs. They are completely different from the bad regs and recreational players who do not want to fold pairs. These disciplined players know how to read hands. They know that if they get in the habit of hero calling without a good reason, they will be going broke sometime soon, because most players don't bluff enough. You need to exploit this weakness.

In this hand, your opponent gave off a boatload of tells. For one, many young guys will bet bigger on this flop when they have a big ace. With A-Ko or A-Qo, they bet half-pot or more. It's not a bad play. In live poker no one is paying attention anyway. They're not going to notice anything different



about the bet size. Most of the time, the solid player will get away with squeezing out a bit more value from their solid ace.

The other issue your villain has here is he stared at the flop. I'm not sure why people do this, but when they hit the flop, they tend to just go about their business. They don't want to alarm you. When they don't want you playing back at them, some players will stare at the flop as if they hit something huge and they just want to keep staring at it. I don't understand it either, but I've seen it in a lot of players. That one physical tell is not much on its own, but it's interesting as part of the picture we're putting together here.

Finally, there's a flush draw on the board. It's possible your opponent has flopped a small flush draw and is betting small in the hope you will call, allowing him to take the turn and river for free. It's not a bad play. Their bet as a total bluff only needs to work 25% of the time. If they get two shots at a flush draw on top of that, their bet rarely needs to work.

Our opponent's most likely range is weak aces, mediocre flush draws, and the occasional complete bluff. He has capped his range if he is the type of player who is normally not worried about playing big pots. There's a great chance he'll fold all these hands to a large raise.

You're not looking to raise here against insecure grinders who hate being bluffed. But if a guy seems comfortable with his game, you should consider raising. I can't tell you how many times I've run a similar line and had the guy show me an ace and fold.

Do you make this play against every player in Las Vegas? Hell no. You shouldn't do this against 95% of them, but you still need to consider it.

The problem with humans when they play no limit hold'em is they want to find hard and fast rules they can apply every time. This isn't a bad instinct for life away from the poker table. If you made your coffee a different way every morning, you'd probably go batty. The problem is this kind of automatic thinking doesn't apply to no limit hold'em.

You see players always playing the same way when it comes to their pairs and their opponents' pairs. Some players always assume their opponents will never fold a pair. This is true with most recreational players but not all players. Some players always want to pot control a pair. This does not lead to the most profit.

Keep your eyes open and ask yourself what biases you may have when you believe your opponent has a pair. Do you always give up and assume he's not folding? You will be right most of the time in smaller games, but that doesn't change the fact that you're excusing yourself from the hard work of identifying who is different than the norm at your table.

# CHAPTER 41

## ALWAYS PLAYING A HAND IN DIRECT FASHION

### Get Out of Autopilot

You are playing a \$1,000 buy-in tournament in a Caribbean locale. All your opponents are cash game regulars from Eastern Europe and Brazil.

It gets folded to you. It's still early in the event so you and all the other players have more than 100 big blinds.

You raise 2.5x on the button with A-Qo. Your opponent in the big blind calls.

The board comes A-2-2 rainbow. Your opponent checks to you. You bet 1/3 pot. He calls without much thought.

The turn is an offsuit eight. There are no flush draws on the board. Your opponent in the big blind checks to you again. What do you normally do here? Do you make the same play 100% of the time?

Let's try something different. I want to see how you handle it. Let's say you check this time instead of betting the turn for value.

The river is an offsuit five. Your opponent bets 1/3 pot. What is your move?

Have you ever tried raising to 300% the size of the pot? Why would you do that?

This is a play that works well versus cash game pros who play a lot. Brazil and Eastern Europe have a ton of those players. That's the only reason I selected these regions.

If you play against lower limit cash game pros, many of them get into the

same rhythm. They make assumptions that are correct most of the time but not all the time. To be fair, when they are playing so many tables, they don't always have the time to fine tune as much as they'd like. They make money playing an aggressive GTO-powered style with some exploitation, but you can hit them upside the head if you're looking for the spots.

This is one example of that. Here we have a player who is not going to fold a pair if you take a weird line. Why? Because in cash games people freak out all the time and take bizarre lines with bluffs. Many people play cash games like they're playing with confetti. It's an arcade game to them. If they lose a game, they fire in another quarter. This is hard for some people to believe but \$100 is like a quarter to many people around the world.

Cash game regs from these parts of the world will play \$0.50/\$1.00 cash games and wait for the punters to get pissed off and take a line that makes no sense. The \$100 goes into the poker account, the punter fires another quarter into the machine, and everyone continues to go about their day. That's how these guys make their money. They work to a stalemate with good regs, they try to win occasional pots with bad regs, and they slaughter the recreational punter who wants to play the arcade cash game.

It means that if you take a strange line against them, they are trained to call down. Tournament regulars aren't always like this. Tournament regulars who play online nonstop get more rewarded for solid play. They can fold, lose some chips in the hand, cash a tournament, and instantly have their chips be worth more real money. That obviously never happens in a cash game. Therefore, tournament players who are constantly rewarded with min-cashes for their solid play can get better at folding in mediocre spots. This has become truer as sites pay more and more of the field. Our player from the last section probably has that sort of training.

In this hand, we are dealing with a completely different animal. Cash game guys see awful punting all the time. They never get rewarded for folding a hand. When they fold, they lose the money in the pot. End of story. They have been trained to not let that happen when it's probable their opponent just got pissed off and tried a dumb bluff.

Our line makes zero sense here as a value raise. It looks like we're sick of playing live poker. This happens all the time. People are not computers. People get bored. People will do stupid things to alleviate the boredom. Office workers have affairs, teenagers jump from bridges into rivers, and the list goes on.

The only hand we might have is 5-5. Many players wouldn't raise this

much with A-5. Our opponent is stuck because he is assuming we value bet most of our good aces on the turn. If we checked them back, it was to induce a bluff on the river that we could smooth call.

There's a good chance our villain would have led more on the river with A-8 or A-5. He knows we're likely pot-controlling a number of aces which aren't folding to one river bet. Why would he only make such a small value bet? It's an exploitative play, but it's a good one versus an average player in a \$1,000 tournament.

Our villain is also unlikely to have A-Ko because they would have three-bet that hand pre-flop.

What happens in this spot most of the time is that the villain timebanks for three minutes. He gets angry. He shakes his head. Then he mumbles, "You just can't have anything" and calls. That's when you show him the bad news and he mucks.

Don't be afraid to try something new at the table. It's especially effective versus players who are used to calling when an opponent caps their range and takes a strange line.

## CHAPTER 42

# NOT TAKING CARE OF YOUR PITCHING ARM

### Your Brain Is the Moneymaker

I was recently hanging out with some friends overseas. We decided to rent some bikes one day and take in some historic sites near the city we were in. At the bike rental shop, the kind store owner offered all of us helmets. Everybody but me turned him down. I said, "Hand me that, please." I put the helmet on. It was the dorkiest and bulkiest helmet I'd seen in my entire life. It looked like I was wearing a white marshmallow on my head. "Good," I thought.

My girlfriend kidded me about the helmet. "Why are you wearing that honey? We're riding so slowly on country streets."

I knocked on the helmet gently with my fist. "This is our moneymaker, dear," I said with a wink. She rolled her eyes.

I wasn't kidding.

In my profession, my brain is my pitching arm. If I was a major league pitcher, I would never use my pitching arm for anything other than pitching.

I think of my brain often. I can't break this damn thing. I only have one of them. I don't have a degree. I haven't held a real job in 15 years. If I break this mind of mine, I've got nothing else.

For years, I worried about my mental health. I had been knocked out multiple times while playing youth football. I got fouled hard once in basketball and hit the hardwood hard with my head. I did a bunch of other stupid stuff as a teenager. I didn't exactly take great care of myself.

My other worry was that for years my edge came from my work ethic. I could stay up for days at a time playing cash games. If someone was giving away money, I wasn't above pulling an all-nighter to get it.

As I got older, I felt foggier and foggier. I kept wondering if this was just a sign of aging. I kept losing my place at work and when I was speaking. Intrusive, debilitating thoughts started coming out of nowhere. They made zero sense and I knew that, but still they came all day and night. It was hard to ignore them. I got worried.

Luckily for me and for everyone else living in this era, neuroscience has come a long way. There are ways to heal your brain now. I will go through some of them. Keep in mind, I am a poker player. Please do not take medical advice from a poker player. Talk to your doctor about all of this. I just wouldn't be doing my job if I didn't tell you about these little tips and tricks. They've dramatically improved my game and mental health. I feel more clear-headed and mentally healthy now than I've ever felt in my life. I'm in the best physical shape of my life heading into my mid-30s. I didn't see that coming five years ago. All of this is easily attainable too. My income has quadrupled since I implemented all these simple systems.

This is a laundry list of things to investigate, so forgive me if I don't expand on each item extensively.

For one, fixing my sleep helped clear brain fog. Of course, we always read that we are supposed to go to bed at the same time every night and sleep at least seven hours, but it's not until you do just that for a couple of months that you feel the extensive improvement it makes. Don't drink caffeine after 2:00 PM. I used to be an afternoon coffee drinker for years, but my life dramatically improved once I dropped that. Get a sleep mask and ear plugs. Set your bedroom to the temperature you prefer. Invest in a quality mattress. I spent a stupid amount on mine and it was worth every cent. Turn off your devices before bed. Use blue light glasses throughout the day so you're not jacked up on blue light before going to bed. Don't watch TV in the bedroom. Read a fiction book before bed to lull yourself to sleep.

Diet and exercise play a huge role in mental health and moneymaking ability in poker. Unfortunately, I have never read more bullshit in my life than when it comes to diet and exercise.

Look, I read every single nutrition book I could find for years. You know what I learned? Vegetables are good for you. That was literally the only thing anyone agreed on. Also, sugar and grains are not good for mental health. Protein, vegetables, and fruits are.

The one book that did change my life was *The Hacking of the American Mind*. That book is worth the read, but what I got out of it was the quickest hack to better neurological health was through cooking and avoiding processed foods. If you eat home-cooked meals every night, without garbage ingredients, you will feel the difference after a couple of months. Cooking can also be easy if you pick the right meals. Caprese takes about three minutes to do. Roasting potatoes or asparagus also takes minutes. You can get thin slices of chicken at the grocery store and be done cooking it on a pan in minutes. Cook enough chicken and add the vegetables? You'll always be full. Also, baking fish in the oven is the easiest thing I've ever cooked. For instance, with salmon you can dice up some garlic and throw it on top with some salt and pepper. Put it in the oven at 375 for 20 minutes. Some people put it at 450 for 15 minutes. Once you can take a fork and press the salmon down to watch it flake off you know you're done. Heat up some frozen peas on the side and you have a meal.

Exercise is difficult because there is so much bullshit out there. You've likely not gotten the results you've wanted because someone has lied to you or not guided you correctly.

Weightlifting is the biggest bang for your fitness buck you'll get. If you lift weights two hours a week, you'll get a ton out of it. Jogging won't do that for you. If you can hire a personal trainer who has a great track record, it's worth the money. If you want to save some money you can write me at [alex@pokerheadrush.com](mailto:alex@pokerheadrush.com) and I'll put you in touch with the trainer I've used for years. He still writes all my gym routines. He's good at creating routines that won't kill you but will still get results. He also uses a great app that will give you routines with videos that show you how to do the movements. If you're ever confused at a gym about an exercise, I've found gym rats to be surprisingly happy to help when you ask them. Many of them just love having a chance to share their knowledge.

Your mental game in poker won't be airtight, though, if you just lift weights. I learned that the hard way.

During 2020, I was stuck in my apartment in Queens, New York. I lamented to a buddy about how bored I was. The whole city was shutdown. There was nothing to do. When you went out on to the streets there were a bunch of assholes drinking who would bother you. My buddy said, "Let's hop on a Zoom call and we'll do my cardio routine together."

What I didn't understand is that my buddy is a beast with his cardio. He had me doing hard interval training. High knees! Rest. Mountain climbers!

Rest. Push-ups! Rest. And on and on we went, exercise after exercise. I could barely breathe. But for the next two days I felt amazingly sharp mentally.

He gave me five or six routines that I started doing religiously in my apartment. I never thought I'd be this fitness guy, but I needed the money when it came to poker. I was willing to do anything that would help me play better. 2020 hit me hard financially. My sister got laid off and my mother had to move suddenly when her landlord sold her old place and gave her one month's notice. I was also financing a cross country move to get out of New York City and to top it all off I needed emergency dental surgery. Fun times.

I couldn't lift weights at that time, so I did basic resistance band and body weight exercises every day in my apartment. Then I turned on DVR-ed NFL RedZone, turned off the audio, and played a podcast that was semi-interesting. Then I'd bang out a cardio routine. Even if I was sleepwalking through it, I tried to do it every single day.

My poker results soared. I started final tabling tournaments seemingly every single day. I was sharp as hell 12 hours into a session. After months of this, I won the \$250K guaranteed.

Those are the broad strokes. None of them are that hard to implement. They're just boring. We can all go to bed earlier with a paperback and look like a dork with an eye mask. We all can play more pickup basketball or some other cardio activity. We all can walk to any gym and lift some small free weights. We all can throw some chicken on a burner for a few minutes and boil some frozen peas. It's just boring to do all of this. That's what prevents us. But if we want to make money in this game, we need to take care of the intangibles. That's the free money. All these things raise your ROI. If you get all this down, I wouldn't be shocked if you raised your ROI 20% if you're playing smaller games.

The problem most of us have is that we want to eat junk food and do anything other than exercise. That's less boring. We want to stay up late and watch TV as opposed to keeping a good sleep schedule. We're all human. But if we want to make the most money, we need to take care of the basics. Professional athletes are freaks about diet, fitness, and sleep for a reason.

If you're feeling depressed, it's likely that you neglected one of these categories. We like to think our moods are a product of our thoughts, but it's actually our thoughts that are a product of our moods. There's a perfect correlation between eating poorly, sleeping poorly and exercising poorly and feeling depressed.

If you take care of all those things and you still feel down, it might be time



to consult a doctor. There's no shame in that. Another way I got my mental health in check was through visiting a psychiatrist. He put me on meds that have made me more stable and efficient for years. The trial-and-error phase with medication is a pain in the ass, but once you get the right combination it helps you dramatically.

Many of my students ask if I use supplements or energy drinks of any kind. Honestly, your mental game and health will be defined far more by what you cut out than what you put in. Smoking pot or drinking, for example, are fine in moderation but I know many poker players who just never touch them. I've never met a poker player who quit drinking or smoking pot who regretted it. They're not planning to be completely sober for the rest of their life. They're fine with a social drink or joint at a party on occasion, but when they're on the clock constantly with poker they just don't want to mess with their pitching arm. They need that thing to work every day for them. They don't want to crank on it.

The only supplements I've ever used that did anything were vitamin C, vitamin D, zinc, and fish oil. Fish oil dramatically improved my mental health. It doesn't work for everybody, but it does seem to work wonders for some people.

As for staying alert at the table, I've never found anything that works long term other than coffee or tea. If you can learn to enjoy the taste of either without sugar or milk, then you have it made. It's been a performance enhancer for me for decades.

Long sessions are extremely tiring on the brain. Our brains have remarkable difficulty staying fully focused for more than four hours. Once you push beyond that threshold, you are going to tax your brain. This becomes truer as you get older. I recommend a deliberate rest routine to make sure you're playing hard in all your sessions. If you start feeling fatigued when you wake up, I recommend a long hike. The fresh air and nature get you back to the tables quickly. If you spend a full day hiking, you will be refreshed for your next session. If you're in Vegas, you can drive to Mt. Charleston to get some hiking in. A day off spent watching football is fun but it's not going to get you the same recharge.

I also do intermittent fasting on most days. I just delay my first meal into the afternoon. I don't know if there's any science behind it. I've read conflicting studies about intermittent fasting's efficacy. I'm not a doctor and I don't know anything about this. In my highly unscientific experiment of my own life, I've found I feel more focused, alert, and relaxed when I delay my first

meal until the afternoon. My doctors seem to like what it does for me. I love to eat. It's easier to fast than it is to count calories.

If you ever need more fine tuning with your mental game, I'd highly recommend consulting Tricia Cardner. She found some fixes for my mental health that had outsized results. She was the one who told me exactly what fish oil to try, how much of it, and what it needed to consist of. She had read the actual research and knew the fish oil I was buying at the time wasn't doing anything. When I followed her instructions to the letter, I felt a massive difference the next day. My racing, intrusive thoughts were gone and I was sleeping like a baby. My focus was back. That's just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to her work. She gives you input like that all the time and it always has amazing results. I don't know if I'd still be in the game if it weren't for her work with me. She hasn't even done that many sessions with me. I can't even imagine what good she does for her more consistent clients.

I'd also recommend getting your blood work done sometime with your primary care physician. Often, poor mental health is just the result of your body feeling awful. When you have zero energy, it's impossible to focus. My primary care physician did my blood work and found that my body was low in vitamin D. I later found it was a family thing. None of us had much vitamin D. As soon as I started supplementing, I began feeling remarkably better.

The problem with mental acuity and the game of poker is that it is all a house of cards. If you pull one of them out, it all falls apart. It's a full-time job getting ready to play. That's why I completely understand why so many people do not want to do this for a living. I lose money every time I have a bad day at the office. That means constantly analyzing my decisions and going back to the drawing board. There are no days off. I'm always on the clock with all of this going on. It is totally fine if someone doesn't want that constant stress.

## CHAPTER 43

# NOT THINKING THROUGH POTENTIAL RIVER BETS

### Think Through the River Before You Touch a Chip

You are playing \$25/\$50 in a private game. Despite the high stakes, the quality of play is not that great. This is the dream game. You are playing with restaurant owners in the area who have more money than card sense. The game is friendly. Limping is common. Multiway pots happen frequently. Pots don't often get big. The guys are more interested in talking shop and blowing off some steam.

There are seven players at the table. The Rangers game picks up on TV at the start of the hand. The first three players at the table start watching the game. They fold their hands without thought. This doesn't happen often.

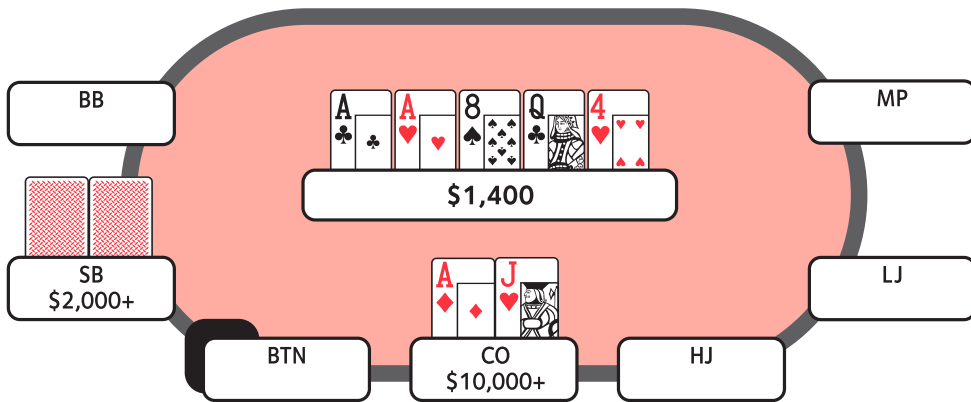
It's on you in the cutoff. You make it \$150 to go with A♦-J♥. You have more than \$10,000 behind.

The small blind calls. He's one of the better players in the game. He owns an Indian restaurant. He's diligent. You don't know if he's a winner but he seems to hold his own. The big blind folds.

The board comes A♣-A♥-8♠. He checks to you. You bet \$175 with your trips. Villain calls quickly.

The turn is the Q♣. He checks to you. You bet \$350 into the \$700 pot. He calls.

The river is the 4♥. The final board is 8♠-A♥-A♣-Q♣-4♥. You have A♦-J♥. There is \$1,400 in the pot. He checks to you. What do you here? (*Diagram 10*).



**Diagram 10**

Your opponent has \$2,000 and change back. You can't exactly count his stack. He doesn't have his chips stacked well. This is such a casual game it would be bad form to ask him for an exact count. It would look like you are trying.

Do you want to bet? Do you want to check back? If you're betting then how much are you betting? Why are you betting that amount? If you want to check, why do you want to check?

You bet \$700. He quickly throws up his hands and says, "I'm all-in."

He puts \$2,200 in the middle. He counts out the chips for you now.

What do you do here? Do you want to call? Do you want to fold? Why do you want to do that? Before we get into the answer, I want you to take a couple of seconds to observe your thought process. Did you feel an impulse and act on it? Did you have a pilot's checklist you went through?

This is how you think through this hand. We do this before every potential hero call. We ask ourselves some key questions. It's important to ask yourself the right questions because your time is finite in a poker game. You don't have all day to think through every abstract reason that might have been mentioned once in a YouTube video.

"Does he do this with X?" is always the first question we ask ourselves. X is the best hand that we beat. Sometimes I will ask myself this question and find that my opponent shoves numerous mediocre value hands I crush. That makes thin calls easy calls.

In this instance X would be A-10. That would be a thin check-raise for value. What is he hoping to get called by? If he is making that check-raise, it means he's the type of player who thinks any three-of-a-kind is gold. There

are players like that in this game, but he's not one of them. You would have noticed if he couldn't hand range properly.

The second question we ask ourselves is, "Could he be doing this with a missed draw?" Most river bluffs occur from players who missed their draw. It's hard for them to get to the river with just an awful high card. Is he really calling two streets with king-high here just to check-raise the river? Most people don't play that way. They need to have a draw to get so deep in the hand and then, when they miss everything, they sometimes try to save the day. But in this hand the turn brought the flush draw. Unless he check-called with pure backdoors, it is hard for him to have a missed draw.

The third question we ask is, "Could he be turning a pair into a bluff?" That is a high-level play, but it actually occurs a ton in home games. It's more likely they got to the river with a pair than with nothing. The players don't know they are turning a pair into a bluff. They get pissed off and try to win the pot with pure chutzpah.

There are players in this game who we have seen do the angry all-in when they don't want to fold their hand, but we haven't seen this guy do it. If we consider him one of the better players in the game, it's likely because we've never seen a risky bluff like this that is likely to fail. It's not impossible he's bluffing here with an eight, but it is unlikely.

The final question we ask is, "Does he do this with an absolute bluff? Does he ever just ram and jam with a high card?" That would require him to call two streets with king-high just to check-raise us on the river. We are not that special. No one hates us enough to go after us that hard.

Before you bet any river you should always ask yourself what you are going to do if your opponent raises. Ask yourself these four quick questions:

- ◆ Does he do this with X? (X is the best value hand you beat. If he doesn't do this move with X, then he doesn't have value hands you beat).
- ◆ Does he do this with a missed draw?
- ◆ Does he turn pairs into a bluff?
- ◆ Does he do this with a complete bluff?

Many people would tell you to assess your pot odds in this spot and make a judgment call. I'll be honest with you. When I eyeballed a pot like this, I thought I had to be right around 30% of the time to call, but the number is close to 25%. If you want to get the exact number in any river call situation,

you divide the amount you're calling by the size of the entire pot you stand to win. If you slow down and do that, you'll get closer to the actual number.

But I won't always do that in the real world. If I run through my checklist and think the guy is never bluffing, then who cares what price I'm getting? Yes, if I'm right here three times out of 10, I'm crushing him, but that's an excellent excuse to make an entitlement-tilt induced call when I have the best hand zero out of 10 times.

You see many players who are afraid to bet the river or even the turn here because it will hurt their little feelings if they get raised. They can't stand the thought that they might have been bluffed and that they don't belong at a poker table.

This is not the correct way to approach the game. Even Kobe got dunked on. Nobody is flawless. No limit hold'em is the fist fight of poker variants. If you walk into a fist fight you need to be prepared to get punched in the face.

I get bluffed all the time. I make bad calls all the time. The only reason I can still pay my bills every month is because I'm right more often than I'm wrong.

Most people are trying to be perfect when they play poker. Most people are trying to be the cleverest at the table. Me? I know I'm not that good. We don't rise to the occasion. We fall to the level of our training. My job every day is to play hard and not do anything stupid. This is much harder than it sounds. No limit hold'em provides you ample opportunities to burn your bankroll up. You can lose every chip in less than a minute. If you are actively avoiding that big mistake, then you will go much further than your peers who play amazingly for 99% of the time and burn themselves down in the final minutes.

Betting and folding rivers is how pros pay for their family's groceries. Anytime you check back the winner, you should want to punch yourself. People always call too much. It's fun to call and see if your hand is good. That's like a table game at a casino. If you check and don't value bet, then you are turning down free money.

When it's checked to you on the river, assess whether he is calling with anything worse. In this situation we thought there was a decent chance he called the flop with K-Q, Q-J, or Q-10. Most casual players hate folding decent high cards to a single continuation bet. In a home game there's always a chance you get called by some absurd eight as well. For that reason, we bet smaller expecting to be called by all those hands and weaker aces. We fold instantly when raised all-in because we've already done the checklist in our heads. He's not shoving anything worse. He trapped us. Nice hand.

## CHAPTER 44

# ALWAYS PLAYING A PAIR THE SAME WAY

### How Would You Play This Hand?

You are in a \$50 heads-up sit-and-go on a smaller network. You have 1,992 chips to start the hand. Your opponent has 1,008. The blinds are 10/20. You have 9♦-6♦. Your opponent has been stupidly aggressive the entire match. This guy clearly mashes buttons versus recreational players for a living and gets by on uneducated aggression alone.

You raise to 60 on the button. Your opponent calls out of the big blind. The board comes 9♠-2♥-K♠. He checks to you. You bet 60 into the 120 pot. He calls. The pot is now 240.

The turn is the 7♠. He checks. You check.

The river is the 10♠. The final board is 9♠-2♥-K♠-7♠-10♠. You have 9♦-6♦. You bet 50% pot on the flop, checked turn, and now he leads 120 into 240. He has 788 back. You have 1,882 back.

What do you want to do here?

For many people, they have a binary decision. They either call or they fold. They are not allowed to do anything else with a pair. Pairs are for calling and showing down.

If you played this hand in your mind and thought to yourself, "I'd either call or fold here normally," you need to ask yourself why that is. We're using a simpler hand for this illustration.

When the fourth spade comes off, your idiotically aggressive opponent is betting 100% of the time. He can't resist firing when the board runs out

in an intimidating fashion. He is betting all his out-of-position floats. He is betting all his pairs. He is betting all his garbage spades. He is betting everything. In the actual hand, I raised to 300 and he folded. I risked 300 to win the 660 in the middle, which means my bet had to succeed 45.45% of the time to be profitable. If I think this bet will succeed more than half the time, I am making great money.

“But you have showdown value! You can’t raise there! You will be imbalanced!”

Yes. Versus imbalanced opponents, you can take exploitative lines because they are so wildly exploitable. This player is folding most of the time because he likely doesn’t fold much to my first continuation bet and he’s firing everything he called with on that river.

I also don’t beat many of the hands he’s betting with. He doesn’t think he’s value betting with a better nine or a king here. He just thinks he’s the king of everything because he’s so aggressive. But that doesn’t change the fact that many of his hands beat my hand. However, if I raise on the four-flush board, he will probably only call with his spades, which isn’t many combinations within his betting range of damn near everything.

## Let’s Look at Another Hand

You have A♣-K♠ in the big blind. You have 8,602 chips at the beginning of a \$55 tournament on a softer international site. A mediocre American reg opens from UTG+2. He makes it 132 when the blinds are 30/60 with an eight-chip ante. You have 8,602 in the big blind. It gets folded to you. What do you do here?

Do you always three-bet when you’re this deep? Interesting. Let’s say you just call today. Let’s see how you handle that.

You call. There is 366 in the middle. The board comes K♦-2♥-J♣. You check your A♣-K♠. The mediocre reg bets 121. What do you do? (*Diagram 11*).

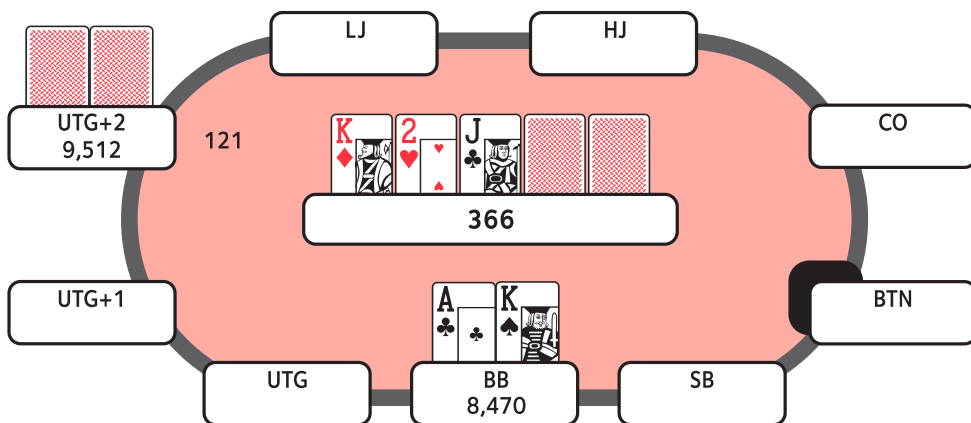
This is a classic play. Have you ever done it?

You check-raise to 425 because most mediocre regs are bad at folding pairs. They will say to themselves in this spot, “He has K-J, 2-2, or nothing. I can’t fold to that few value combinations!” Then the jack is coming for the ride.

Your opponent calls the raise. The turn is the 9♣. What do you do?

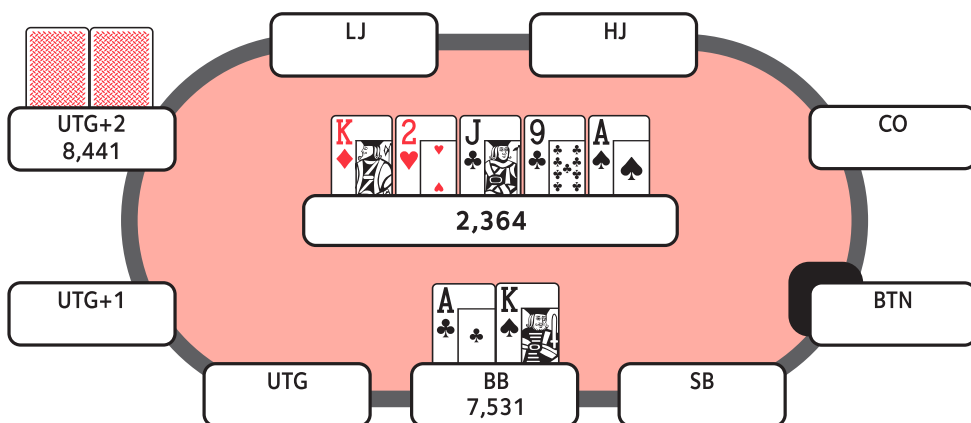
You bet 574 into 1,216.





**Diagram 11**

Your opponent calls. The river is the A♠. The final board is K♦-2♥-J♣-9♣-A♠. You have A♣-K♠. You check-raised the flop and fired the turn. There is 2,364 in the middle. You have 7,531 in your stack. Your opponent has 8,441. What do you do? (*Diagram 12*).



**Diagram 12**

Free money baby. No one folds a king here when the stacks are that deep. Yes, you would fold a king. You're the type of person who reads poker books. You're not gambling up like many bad regs are doing.

What do you do if he raises? You should already know the answer to that before I asked you. You can't fire this river without preparation.

Remember our checklist? If you don't then you're reading this book passively. Many people read a poker book and think they got 100% of it. That is

not even close to true. There are poker books in my library I've reread three times and still haven't fully absorbed. Come on. Let's get our heads in the game.

Does he raise there with X? X is the best hand you beat. X in this situation would be A-J. There's no chance he's raising that hand. Bad regs are showdown monkeys. He doesn't know what a raise-fold for value on a river even is.

Is he turning a draw into a bluff? Well, you're blocking the missed flush draw, so that's hard. Q-10 got there on the turn.

Wait, why did we bet the turn if the draw got there? Shouldn't we just check to see if he has it?

No! You're not folding if he bets anyway! All you're doing when you check there is capping your range at one pair and letting your opponent only value bet the hands that are better than yours. If you bet the turn, he's not folding any king or jack, especially considering many of them just developed a straight draw. Get your money now!

Let's get back to what we will do to the river raise. He's not raising a worse value hand. He's likely not raising a missed draw because there are so few of them that he could even have. What else do we need to analyze?

Does he turn a pair into a bluff? Does he ever have an absolute bluff here?

He would have to be turning a jack into a bluff if he was to be bluffing a pair here. Mediocre American regs are terrible at turning hands into bluffs. He also can't have a pure bluff because what the hell high card gets to this river? Try to think of even one.

You can't call a river raise here. He has Q-10 every time. Bet-fold and feed your family. You get plenty of money every time you flat with ace-king in the big blind and check-raise a top pair. Mediocre regs have never check-raised a pair for value in their life. They always three-bet A-Ko in your position. You will fry their fragile ranging brain when you run this play. If the board runs out better for you, you are collecting value bets on three streets. Even when he hits his hand, he's not a tricky enough player to get value. This is a slam dunk for you, and it was all made possible because you can now bet-fold a river. You're also much harder to range now because you don't just call down with pairs. You can also raise them as a bluff or as a value hand.

## CHAPTER 45

# NOT USING APPROPRIATE SOFTWARE

### 1) A GTO Trainer

These next few sections will be short, but that doesn't mean they won't be important.

If you want to get better at this game, I recommend you invest in a GTO trainer. There are several of them on the market. There are solvers that can help you create poker solutions based on different poker ranges. There's also software that has preset solutions installed. In these programs, you can play against the software and have your plays analyzed. This is so valuable, it's dumbfounding.

Most players assume that if they were playing in 2006, they would have cleaned up. The games were much easier to beat back then, but there was a trade-off. It was difficult to get better back then. It was hard to find good poker training. If you did find good poker training, it wasn't in the form of active learning.

Playing against a great GTO player is an amazingly good form of training. We never had anything like this back then.

When you get to a certain point in your poker study, you need to find other advisors. Your own imagination will not come up with new plays. You will need someone to point out imbalances you're not seeing. GTO trainers can be great for this. They will tell you when a play doesn't make sense. They will tell you when you are being imbalanced. They will inform you when you could have been exploited. Training in this matter is how you will defend

yourself against good, classically trained players, especially overseas. I would not have made a WPT final table in Prague without poker training in this vein.

More fascinating to me are the GTO trainers that let you pop open the hood and see the solution they're using so they can test you. If you look at the range assumptions the GTO software is making, you will be able to extrapolate that into an actual game. If you know your opponents are imbalanced in a certain area, you will be able to make an exploitative play that would still be good if your opponent was balanced. It will become more correct as they fold too much or call too much.

An example is if the GTO trainer told you to lead a turn. You pop open the hood and look at the range your opponent is supposed to be defending with. It's filled with backdoors and goofy pairs. You know, in reality, that your opponent led the flop with more hands than what you're looking at and doesn't defend nearly enough hands to this turn lead. Boom. You have a potential exploitative play you can try in your next session.

## 2) An Exploitative Poker Trainer

Another valuable form of training is exploitative training. The GTO training market has numerous products in it. I didn't recommend specific software in the last section because the space is always changing. It's possible something better could be released the day after this book is published. You will need to do your own research when it comes to poker software. You should try out each product and see what works for you.

There are fewer options when it comes to training for exploitative poker. The one exploitative poker trainer I use consistently is called Advanced Poker Training.

I know the folks who put together the software. They're great people. More importantly, their software works. They do things differently than the GTO people. They program bots to play like human players in your games. You can practice against terrible cash-game players who never fold and cyborgs who are constantly bombing you with huge bets. You can train in tournament simulations, cash game simulations, heads-up simulations, and so on. It's fascinating. I've learned a ton from their software.

Using Advanced Poker Training along with a GTO solver-trainer every day is a great way to build a balanced game that can still exploit bad players.

Both GTO and exploitative simulators have their limitations. The software never gets tired or emotional like a human player. You can only get

experience of a real human collapsing by watching them at a real table. In real life, humans get emotional all the time and make plays that don't make sense. They start playing weak poker because they are mad at themselves. They'll start running crazy bluffs because they're mad at you for sucking out on them. They will refuse to fold mediocre hands because they're fatigued after playing for so long.

I've often tried to bridge the gap between software-based training and real-world solutions. I've created hundreds of hours of training materials that focus on thousands of hands that happened in actual play. I present these hands in the form of tests on my own site. You can test yourself versus real opponents and what they actually did at major tournament final tables, for example. This kind of training was not available to me when I started out, so I sought to create it.

If you want to watch hours of free training videos, go to:

[www.pokerheadrush.com](http://www.pokerheadrush.com)

Click on the button: "See Free Training Videos." That will take you to my site which hosts all the training packs. If you click on any training pack, there will be a free streaming video on the product page that shows you how the training works. I made several training videos free on that site so people could train themselves without spending anything. If you enjoy that form of training, you can sign up for my mailing list at [pokerheadrush.com](http://pokerheadrush.com) and get free training and quizzes sent to your email every day. This is a great way to get your daily practice in and not spend a dime.

### 3) An ICM Trainer

The final piece of poker software you must acquire is an ICM-based trainer. Without getting too deep into the details, tournament hands are difficult to solve. In cash games a dollar is a dollar. Whatever is the most profitable play is the play you should take. This is not how tournaments work. Tournaments feature evolving situations and prize structures. It doesn't matter how many chips you cash the tournament with. If you cash a tournament with one chip and the min-cash is worth \$6,040, your one chip has now secured you \$6,040. That's not what that chip was worth five minutes ago before the bubble burst. Your chips, for this reason, are always changing value based on the prize structure and the stages of the tournament.

There is poker software that will help you understand how tournaments work. Quizzes there are based on Independent Chip Modeling, known as

ICM. The software quizzes will tell you when you should move all-in and when you should fold, with calculations based on what your stack is worth at different points of the tournament. The software will tell you when it is mathematically correct to reraise all-in because your opponent has opened a range that is too wide to defend. The software will tell you when your opponent has a difficult time calling a jam because it's such a disaster for them ICM-wise if they call and lose.

When you use this software, you need to remember that not everyone understands ICM. I used to make some all-in plays in multi-table satellites because there were times the player who opened couldn't call the all-in with kings without losing money. Unfortunately, I learned the hard way that humans are not logical and betting on them to be that way is a sucker's bet.

That said, if you don't understand this side of the game, you can use ICM software to play with the different ranges and find out what you're supposed to be doing in different tournament situations. ICM-based poker is not intuitive. I still struggle with it tremendously after playing for 15 years.

The software my friends, coaches, and I all use is ICMIZER. I love their quizzes.

## CHAPTER 46

# NOT DRILLING EVERY SINGLE DAY

### There Is No Excuse

There is no excuse for not studying every day. The technology is here. It's never been easier to improve your game in a short period of time.

Some people say to me, "I have zero time each day. I can't study." That's why we discussed time optimization earlier.

No one does anything that they truly don't want to do. You might think you don't want to go to work, but you want a paycheck more than anything. If our reason for getting better at poker is not there, we won't "find the time" because we truly don't want to do it. If you want to do something you will find a way. If you don't want to do something you will find an excuse.

Daily study is not optional in poker anymore. It's mandatory. I study practically every day just to be competitive in mid-stakes tournaments. I can still slaughter micro-stakes and low-stakes games, but professionals play mid-stakes games now more than ever to make a living. You have to keep up.

The problem most people have with poker is they start too fast. It's like dieting. If you want to lose weight, you just need to cut out some snacking and go for a walk. You don't need to train like an Olympic weightlifter on day one. If you want to get better at poker, all you need to do is read one article or take one quiz per day. I believe in this so much I created my free mailing list at [pokerheadrush.com](http://pokerheadrush.com) so that people could always receive one article or one quiz every day. I make sure there are no ads on the videos and you can play them at double speed precisely so you can be in and out of the quiz in

two minutes. If that's all the time you have each day, then you should still be able to make your game better.

If you have more than five minutes per day to read an article or watch one quiz video then we just discussed an array of advanced options that can help you. Don't forget that if you want to move up to high stakes, you'll likely need to get private coaches to help you put all your training within a context. There are many times a professional will be able to tell you to override something AI is telling you to do. Many of the assumptions the computer is making about the real world are inaccurate. Once you build that context into your own game you will be unstoppable.

More importantly, studying every day should be fun. People don't do crossword puzzles every day because there is money in it. They do crosswords because they are fun. Getting better at poker is fun.

You know what's worse than having to spend time studying poker? Wanting to get better at poker but not having the right resources. There were years of my poker career when I didn't improve because I hired bad coaches and didn't have access to the tools that exist today.

People think that all poker coaches are competitive and that we are trying to poach fans from each other. That couldn't be further from the truth. I love learning from many of the bigger coaches working today. I love how much access there is to high level instruction in the 2020s.

All the coaches working today can offer you something. The one area I think poker coaches can improve (me included) is by placing all of their coaching within a context.

My goal with this book is to give you a fundamental playbook that will apply to most poker games with semi-serious players who don't adjust well enough. That will cover more than 90% of the games the average player will ever face. These concepts will be timeless and will get you through the next decades. This will provide you the context you need to keep winning in the future.

That doesn't mean we shouldn't keep improving our game. Getting to those 10% of high-level games with big money is fun! The deeper understanding advanced poker provides also allows you to be more savage in beating up weak competition at low stakes.

The thing I love about poker is that I get to be fascinated every day by something new. Poker never gets boring. My hope is that you find the game's unruliness to be fun and challenging rather than frustrating.

On that note, let's get to another fun hand quiz.



## CHAPTER 47

# NOT READING HOW THE PLAYER READS YOU

### A Hand Quiz

You have 25 big blinds to start the hand in an overseas €1,050 buy-in tournament. It's still day one in this multiple day event. You have been playing in Prague for weeks. The players have been tough and aggressive. You like the action, but fatigue is starting to get to you. For this hypothetical, everyone at the table knows you're American.

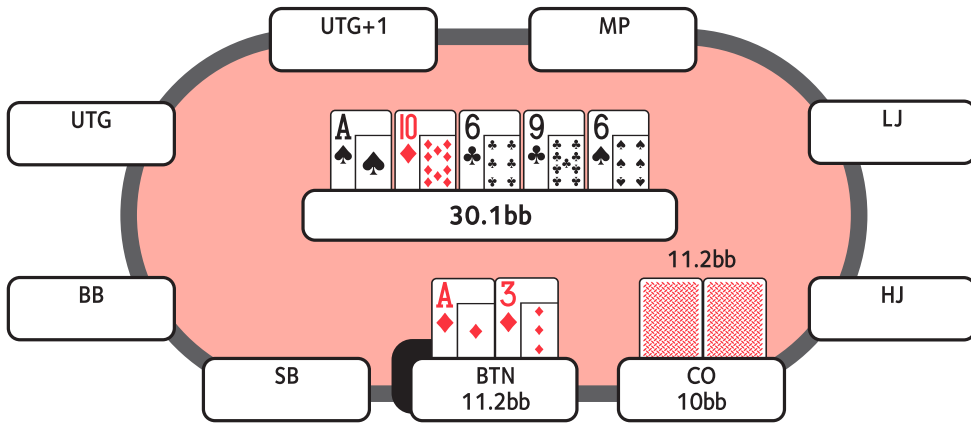
The cutoff, a wild player from Eastern Europe, opens to 2x. He has you slightly covered with a 35 big blind stack. He has been the most active player at the table all day. You cold call on the button with A♦-3♦. Everyone else folds.

The flop comes A♠-10♦-6♣. He bets 4.3 big blinds into the 6.5 big blind pot. You call with your top pair and weak kicker.

The turn is the 9♣. The board now is A♠-10♦-6♣-9♣. You have A♦-3♦. Your opponent reaches into his stack and fires out 7.5 big blinds into the 15.1 big blind pot. What do you do?

Let's say you call. The river is the 6♠. He looks at your stack for a second and then calmly slides his chips into the middle. The final board is A♠-10♦-6♣-9♣-6♠. You have A♦-3♦. The pot is 30.1 big blinds. You would need to call off your remaining 11.2 big blind stack to call his all-in. What do you do? (*Diagram 13*).

I watch this situation come up often with Americans who call that turn with no plan for the river. What mistake are they making?



**Diagram 13**

First off, roughly how often do you need to be right here to call? Most people don't even know how to arrive at that number. The way you do it is to divide the calling amount by what the pot would be if it included your call. In this case, you would be calling 11.2 big blinds to win 52.4 big blinds. You need to be right 21.4% of the time to make this call. You could call and be out of the door seven times out of ten and it would still be the right decision.

In an actual tournament, you will be unlikely to come up with those exact numbers. You need to be able to eyeball it. If someone bets half-pot as a bluff, the bet needs to work 33% of the time. If you are calling, you don't need to be right as often because there is now more money in the pot. Your opponent only stands to win their bet back plus what's in the pot. If you call, you get their bet and your bet back. So if someone bets 100 into 200 as a bluff, it needs to work as a bluff 100 (their bet) divided by 300 (the pot they get when they succeed) = 0.33 or 33% of the time. If we call 100 into this 300-chip pot, we will get 400 back when we are right, so  $100/400 = 0.25$  or 25% of the time.

My thought process works this way when I play hands like this. You'll notice I'm not using exact numbers because I have a finite amount of time.

He bet roughly 1/3 of the pot, so I know his bet as a bluff needs to succeed 1/4 of the time and my call needs to be right 1/5 of the time. You can use the fractions in a descending fashion like that. Of course, 1/5 is 20% of the time and the actual number is 21.4% but it gets me in the right ballpark before I decide.

So let's ask a new question. Did any of you ask yourself this? Is an aggressive Eastern European player trying to bluff you here more than 21.4%

of the time?

All of these are judgment calls and you can never be absolutely sure, but I'm putting my money on "Yes, he shoves that river as a bluff more than 21.4% of the time." This is a great opportunity for him to make an exploitative bluff. Why?

For one, his river bluff doesn't need to succeed that often to be successful. He knows that. He's more likely to be classically trained. Many Europeans treat poker with the same discipline they treated chess growing up, whereas we Americans learned the game while goofing off with friends and family. It's more likely we Americans will believe all-in bluffs need to succeed all the time. If we are using our emotions to feel our way through the hand, we will probably be on autopilot and assume yet another all-in bet needs to succeed all the time to be right. This is opposed to looking at the game like a chess match, with definitive numbers needed for different moves.

He should be making an exploitative all-in here. He doesn't need to balance. He can put more bluffs in his range because we are likely to fold. Why do you think that is?

This is the key lesson in the hand. Did you get this earlier?

Your hand looks awful. Think about what he's seeing. Don't just think about your opponent's range. That will be enough to make you good money in low to mid-stakes games, but as you move up you will need to consider how your range looks as well.

You did not three-bet pre-flop with 25 big blinds. Your opponent knows you do not have strong aces. You would have moved all-in pre-flop with A-K, A-Q, and A-J. You would probably have raised A-10, A-9, and A-6 on the turn given how many straight and flush draws came on the board. You also were likely to get value from weaker hands if you shoved at that point, thanks to the stack sizes.

He now knows your range is mediocre aces and a ton of second pairs. None of those hands want to call off all their chips for their tournament life. He also probably knows that a river jam only needs to work one time in four.

If you are the one American at the table, I would encourage you to call more. I've seen so many Americans make ridiculous river folds in big live tournaments because they overvalue their tournament life. I can't be the only person who has noticed this. I wouldn't blame the cutoff player at all here if he shoves more with all his busted draws and bluffs.

# CHAPTER 48

## BEING RESULTS ORIENTED

### Enjoy the Ride

I love buying traffic for e-commerce sites. I love betting on boxing matches. I love stocks and bonds. I love investing in companies. I love playing poker.

You know why we all love action? You know why we all love gambling? Uncertainty. When you hero call all-in on that river, there is one glorious second before the cards are turned over where you feel nothing. Anything can happen. There is hope in your future again.

How do you keep that feeling? You avoid becoming results oriented.

None of us is perfect when it comes to gambling. The idea is to be right far more often than you are wrong. The idea is to make your mistakes as small as possible. The idea is to decrease the rake while you do all of this.

As I've said before, your perspective is one of 7 billion on earth. What are the chances it is the most accurate one? If you believe you see the world with impartiality then you know for certain you are crazy.

Let's take that last hand. Let's say you call and villain has K-J high for a complete bluff. What happens? You feel like King Fucking Kong at the table. Your chest pops out. You scoop up your chips and feel your heart rate climb. You're euphoric. "Nice call," someone says to you. You look like a badass.

What happens if he has 6-5s for the rivered trips? God. Now it feels like you took a Mike Tyson body shot.

All of this is silly of course. You can't play this situation a million times. You have a limited amount of information. You only ever get to see one data point on this graph. You'll never know for certain whether your call was correct or not. You will have to make your analysis before you stick the chips in and live with it for the rest of your life.

Are there going to be occasions where you're wrong? Yes, of course. You know who never succeeds? Guys who are afraid to be wrong. If you can't run a huge bluff that possibly fails deep in a live major tournament then that is one gear the elite competition has that you don't. You don't want that.

How do you live with the results and not let the results ruin you? Bankroll management.

We are not going to devote a chapter to bankroll management in this book because none of you will use it anyway. If you're not using proper bankroll management by now, it is never going to happen.

If you want a reference point, I always used to have 300 buy-ins for MTTs, 100 buy-ins for cash games, and 100 buy-ins for SNGs. That is completely unrealistic if you do not play this game professionally. If you can reload your bankroll often without much stress, then go ahead and take shots. Just pretend you went on a golf trip and the money is already lost. Don't expect anything to come back.

If you keep a large bankroll, the result of any one investment won't bother you. If you keep six months of savings outside your poker roll, you won't be bothered by short-term variance. I had six months of expenses saved up when I went pro at 18 and I have six months of expenses saved now. It frees you up.

One tournament is one data point. One cash game session is one data point. You don't care about individual data points. You care about how the graph is trending.

The eternal game is what I love when it comes to professional gambling. I love beating my bills every month in the ring. If I win the fight, I don't care if I got banged up along the way. I wouldn't walk into a fist fight without expecting to get punched in the face. Gambling to make a living is something most people avoid for a good reason.

The uncertainty is part of the salary when it comes to gambling. If there was no possibility of losing, this game wouldn't be very exciting. You need to walk out on that ledge. The view is better from up there.

The way to not become results driven is to track all your sessions and make poker one long game. It's impossible to win every session. Your goal is to increase your bottom line every year. Your system is to be right more often than you are wrong. If you have a functioning system, it will be proven through volume.

Think through your analysis before you make your move. If you think deeply, you will know that 100% foolproof bets do not exist. Everything

exists between 0% and 100% in gambling. Even if you are going to be right 70% of the time that still means you will lose nearly a third of the time. If that 30% chance comes in, shake the man's hand and walk out of the room with your head held high.

You have to roll with the punches. Sometimes you'll even have to call off your tournament knowing that most of the time you will be walking out of the room. If the price is right and you have the right hand then you need to go with it. You can't let what the other players say and think get to you. You need to move forward and keep beating up your bills. You need to keep posting new data on your graph and racking points. There is no way back. You must keep moving forward.

## CHAPTER 49

# OVERVALUING MEDIocre DRAWS

### Do You Do This?

You are playing a tournament and have 100 big blinds. You have J♦-8♦ in the small blind. An aggressive, solid regular opens from the cutoff to 2.3x. He also has 100 big blinds. You call from the small blind. The pot is 6.6 big blinds pre-flop. The board comes 7♣-6♦-6♣. You check to the cutoff. He bets 5.3 big blinds into the 6.6 big blind pot. What do you do?

Let's change the situation. If you are 40 big blinds deep, what do you do here? Do you raise the continuation bet? Do you call? Do you fold?

Which one of these two situations is a fold?

What do you base that assessment on?

Do you have your answer yet? Great. These are both arguably folds.

There are specialized situations in tournaments where you can float out of position, but neither situation here fits into that category. If your opponent is solid, it is unlikely he is continuation betting nearly a pot-sized bet without a plan to approach the turn. Calling here means you believe the opponent opens too many hands, continuation bets all of them, checks everything he missed on the turn, and then folds everything when faced with a river bet. That is a lot of things that need to go right before you can call here.

Your opponent is solid. It is unlikely he is continuation betting this flop without a plan. There are probably many times he checks back after missing and then makes a delayed continuation bet. He is also checking with some backdoor hands with equity to see if he hits on the turn. He is not betting

100% of the time here. You will not be able to bluff out all the hands that missed this flop because all those hands are not in his continuation betting range.

Many people do one-factor analysis here. "I have backdoor straight draws and flush draws. I want to call." They've watched so many high stakes players call continuation bets with those hands on TV that they feel they are being exploited if they don't always play backdoor draws.

This situation is completely different from the deep-stacked situations you see on TV. The player with the backdoor draws is out of position. In one situation, the stacks are short. The implied odds of hitting the hand are reduced. Even if you do go runner-runner, it's unlikely you'll get paid much because of the shorter stacks. Chasing backdoor draws in cash games with 200+ big blind stacks can be profitable because you win huge river pots when you hit your hand and no one can figure out what you have. That situation won't come up in this tournament.

Don't get into the habit of flatting every single continuation bet when you have backdoor draws. That's a fashionable way of saying, "I just don't want to fold because calling is more fun." Playing profitable poker is not always fun. Follow the money. Don't follow your gambling impulses.



## CHAPTER 50

# PLAYING INCORRECTLY AGAINST SHORT STACKS

### Let's Keep Working on These Hands

You have A♥-6♥ in a softer online tournament on a large American-facing international site. You raise to two big blinds from a 15 big blind stack in the hijack. The cutoff, who also has around 15 big blinds, cold calls you. All the other players fold.

The flop comes 9♠-7♦-4♣. It's on you. What do you want to do?

The pot is 6.5 big blinds. Both you and your opponent now have 13 big blinds.

Check? Bet? What do you normally do here?

If you do want to bet, how much do you want to bet?

The correct play is to bet 1/3 pot and try to pick up the chips in the middle. Why do you think that is? If you guessed the correct answer, that is not good enough. If you're guessing answers or if your autopilot game just happens to have the correct answer, that is not good enough. You need to understand the methodology so you can replicate the plays in the field.

We discussed a situation earlier where we raised pre-flop and a good player cold called in position. In that situation, do you remember what we wanted to do? We liked checking and folding there. Why? Because a traditional solid player only cold calls with a tight range they can defend easily. They understand that cold calls are difficult to make profitable. They like cold calling with good suited aces, pairs, and suited connectors. That's a limited range that hits many boards.

This situation is different. We want to continuation bet here because this is a softer tournament. Our opponent doesn't understand how strong a hand they need to cold call from such a short stack with so many players to act behind. If they had a good ace or a small pair, it's likely they would have moved all-in.

This cold call suggests a lot of big cards that have missed and some suited connectors. There are far more combinations of big cards in his range than there are combinations of suited connectors. If you think he cold calls there with K-Jo, for instance, and 8-7s, those two hands are not equal in his range. There are 12 combinations of unsuited K-Jo. There are four combinations of 8-7s. You need three suited connector hands to equal one K-Jo.

If he's calling pre-flop with J-10o, Q-10o, K-10o, K-Jo, K-Qo, and A-10o, that is going to be a ton of combinations that missed this flop. Given how short the stacks are, it's unlikely he'll love to call a flop bet with a high card. We need to bet 1/3 pot here (i.e., 33%) because our bet only needs to work 25% of the time as a pure bluff and that's very likely to happen. If we get called, we still have good equity and the ace overcard to work with on the turn. If we hit our ace, we can get our money in. The stack sizes are so short it's never going to be a mistake betting off our tournament with a turned top pair.

## CHAPTER 51

# NOT PLAYING MULTI-TABLE SATELLITES

### The Free Money in No Limit Hold'em

I have never met a serious player who took on satellite tournaments and regretted it.

A multi-table satellite is a tournament where multiple people enter and multiple people win entry into a larger event. They are strange tournaments. Often, more than 1,000 people will enter and only 20 people will cash. Those 20 people all get a seat to a bigger buy-in event. First through 20th place all pays the exact same. There's no reason to build a chip stack after a certain point. You're just trying to get into the top 20.

The great thing about tournaments like this is that no one knows exactly how they're supposed to be playing them. If you want to learn about no limit hold'em tournaments, that knowledge will be relevant in tons of different tournaments every day. If you want to learn about multi-table satellites, much of that knowledge will only be applicable in specific events. For this reason, many players are lazy and never learn how to properly play these tournaments. They might want to play a big event, live or online, so they enter the large multi-table satellite, but then they get deep and find they have no idea what they are doing. This is where you come in.

There are entire books dedicated to satellite strategy, and if you want to get access to some of the easiest money in poker, I suggest you study this game format extensively. D&B has a book out right now called *Poker Satellite Success!* by Bernard Lee, which will help you get on your merry moneymaking ways.

However, I'm only going to give you a couple of quick tips, which were taught to me in 30 minutes when I was a teenager in high school. Back then, all the underground poker clubs in the Seattle area were running satellite events to a big poker tournament. I wanted to play that big event badly, because I couldn't play tournament poker anywhere else at 17 years old. So I took notes on these strategies, and won my way in. I played horribly to get into the tournament, but I was hooked from that day forward. After that, I started satelliting into events in Asia, Latin America, and all over Europe. I had some of the greatest times of my life thanks to my tiny amount of knowledge of satellite tournaments.

The other great thing about online satellite tournaments is that some sites let you cash out the tournament buy-in and not play. In the live arena, you can sell a ticket to a large event for a slight discount, and you'll pocket the cash. You can make big profits this way because there will be tons of people deep in multi-table satellites who will have no idea what they are doing and will be playing like it's a lottery. They will fold too much or play too much. Rarely do they play well. The structures are top heavy so there is an immense reward in taking advantage of these weak players.

Finally, one other great aspect of online multi-table satellites is that you can often gain entry to them as a loyalty reward from the poker rooms. Many online players don't even know they have this multi-table satellite ticket in their account, or they don't have the time to play the tournament, so their stacks will be blinding out at your table while you play. That's literally free money!

Anyway, on to the quick tips to get you started. These should be enough for you to begin getting good results, but don't get too excited. You'll only really master this game format through real study and a ton of practice with ICM poker. I've gone through several training packages on satellite poker, and I still feel like a sucker versus the better regs. But that doesn't matter. If you're playing a large, live multi-table satellite there will be so many punters. This brief set of tips should get you into the winner's circle often.

First, understand what stack size you are aiming for. Most people enter multi-table satellite tournaments and don't know what they're trying to do. They know they must acquire enough chips to survive to the point of winning a seat, but they don't know how many chips that will be.

Try this formula: Take however many people entered the tournament. Multiply that number by the starting stack. This will give you the total number of chips in the tournament. Now divide that by the number of winning

packages on offer. That will give you the average stack of the players who win a seat.

In my experience, you're going to need to aim for about 75% to 80% of that average winning stack, although you can get away with less if nobody has a clue what they're doing. In live satellites, I've won huge tournament seats with less than 50% of the chips I should have needed just because so many of my opponents played horribly.

Before you get to your desired stack, you are in what I call the "dog-fighting" stage. You should be playing to maximize your chip EV. The closer you get to your desired stack, the less you should gamble.

Secondly, you need to know the basic differences between these tournaments and regular MTTs. Of course, ICM is a big deal in any poker tournament, but in a normal freezeout you can play for first and still make a lot of money. Playing for first in multi-table satellites will destroy your potential profits.

We discussed ICM in a previous section. We discussed why your chips can change in real dollar value from hand to hand even if your actual chip count doesn't change. The worth of those chips change because the tournament stage and prize pool is changing. Let's use an example to illustrate how this works in a multi-table satellite. These numbers aren't exact. They're meant to illustrate a point.

Let's say you're deep in one of these events. You have the exact average stack everybody should have to win a seat. Let's also say you are at a point in the tournament at which your chances of winning the seat are 96%. Barring a huge cooler or a bizarre series of events, you're probably going to win an entry to the big tournament.

Someone with the same stack size as you shoves all-in. You look down to see you have A-Ko. Your opponent suddenly sneezes! His hand flips over to reveal he has A-Qo.

Do you call?

No, you fold. If you call and win this pot, your chances of winning the seat go from 96% to 99.99% – an increase of 3.99%. If you call and lose, your chances of winning a seat go from 96% to 0% – a 96% loss. That's too much to risk even if your opponent is massively behind before the flop, turn, and river come out.

Do you see why, despite the stacks being numerically equivalent, the chips you would be risking here are worth far more than the chips you stand to gain? This is the rough basis of ICM. The flat structure of multi-table sat-

ellites makes this independent chip modeling process difficult to do on the fly, but we must never give up the fight. That's what our opponents are doing.

Third, an easy player to take advantage of in these events is a player who has already won a seat but is still playing a ton of pots.

There will come a stage in these events where you almost have the stack you need to win a tournament package. How do you chip up and try to cross that finish line?

Look for good poker players who are still raising consistently from a large stack that is almost guaranteeing them a tournament package. These players are probably still raising because they assume no one is going to willingly jeopardize a chance of winning a seat. These players are taking the blinds and antes because people are giving them away. The good player is raising to make sure he doesn't blind out during a long bubble. He doesn't actually want to play a big pot.

If you have a smaller stack, you should realize that you can gamble for a package, but they should not. If this player opens and you have a decent hand, reraise large enough to put their guaranteed tournament package at risk. They will usually fold.

This brings us to our fourth point. Don't just reraise or call.

You have done the math deep in a multi-table satellite. The stack you need to win a seat to the Main Event is roughly equivalent to 35 big blinds. You have 28 big blinds. A good regular opens from the cutoff with a stack of 60 big blinds. He has his seat all but wrapped up. You have A-Qs on the button. What do you do?

Do you want to trap to get the most money out of this hand? You would use that technique if first place paid dramatically more than seventh or 12th. But that is not the case here.

Do you want to three-bet a standard amount to allow him to move all-in with weaker aces? That is a technique you would use to maximize your tournament chips. That technique should also not be applied here when 14th, sixth and first pay the same amount. Remember, you're trying to get to 35 big blinds.

You need to move all-in. If he folds, you will be close to the 35 big blinds you need. You're allowed to gamble given your chip stack. Your opponent doesn't want to call your all-in even with kings because he will be risking an almost guaranteed Main Event seat for...what exactly? A more guaranteed seat? There's nothing in it for him.

That brings us to point five. There's another player you can exploit. Many

players will get to a stack they think is good enough to win a seat and they will stop playing. I've even seen some of them leave the table to stop themselves doing something stupid like raise pre-flop with aces.

Of course, most players will stay at the table so they can stall and force the other players to play more hands. That doesn't mean they will be touching a chip. By the way, don't assume they know how many chips they need to guarantee a seat. I've seen some people shut down their own action when they are still far away from the stack they require to win a tournament package.

When you identify one of the players who is folding everything, do not call attention to what they're doing. Don't complain about them stalling. It's possible no one else at the table has noticed. Raise this person's big blind more. Assume they are going to fold if you are in the cutoff and they have the button. You have two buttons now.

This point is related to point six: You need to know who is dreaming of satelliting into this event. This happens a great deal with the WSOP Main Event. You'll see people in super satellites who have no business playing them. Why are they committing their hard-earned money to a tournament format they know nothing about? They want to play for millions and glory in a prestigious event. This is quite literally their dream.

In live games, you can identify tourists by their lack of familiarity with the chips and the game. They will take longer on each decision. They'll often tell you they work in another field.

Online you can identify these players by looking up their statistics, if possible. If they normally play much lower buy-in events, they're likely going to be scared when the big money approaches.

If you identify these players, you will have to abuse them. Most of them will continue opening the hands they would normally play in a freezeout or their home game. It's only when you three-bet them that they will realize they're in too deep. They will fold, knowing a package is close. Make their life a living hell until they stop opening. Those free chips belong to you.

Finally, to get the most out of satellite poker, you will need to practice and play a ton of them. You will need thick skin. I have stone bubbled satellites for \$17,000 packages after playing through no sleep for hours. It feels awful. You want to double over when it happens. Your hands go to your scalp as you pull your hair out. You're surprised that blood isn't running out of your mouth as your jaw hits the floor.

You need to take the good with the bad. No limit hold'em was not pop-

ular in poker rooms for a long time for a very good reason. It's bad for business when a player gets cleaned out in one hand and doesn't want to play anymore. The online and live casinos have done everything they can to make sure we keep paying rake for the rest of our lives. Some work to actively discourage or ban pros who are playing. Some flatten the tournament payout structures so no one goes broke playing them. This means decreased winnings for prolific winners and more min-cashes for mediocre players.

If you want to get past all this and play big money tournament poker with players who have no idea what they are doing, you are going to need to get into the satellite game. Just prepare for pain.



## CHAPTER 52

# HOW MANY OUTS DO YOU TRULY HAVE?

### How Do You Play This Hand?

You raise pre-flop in a full ring \$5/\$10 cash game. You're playing against serious amateurs and regulars in a Las Vegas casino. You are 100 big blinds deep. You raise to three big blinds from the hijack with 10♠-9♠. The cutoff, an aggressive regular, three-bets you to 10 big blinds. You call.

The board comes Q♠-7♦-4♦. You check to the three-bettor. He checks back.

The turn is the 3♠. The board now is Q♠-7♦-4♦-3♠. You have 10♠-9♠. The pot is roughly 20 big blinds plus the blinds. What do you do?

You lead 13.2 big blinds into the pot. Your opponent calls.

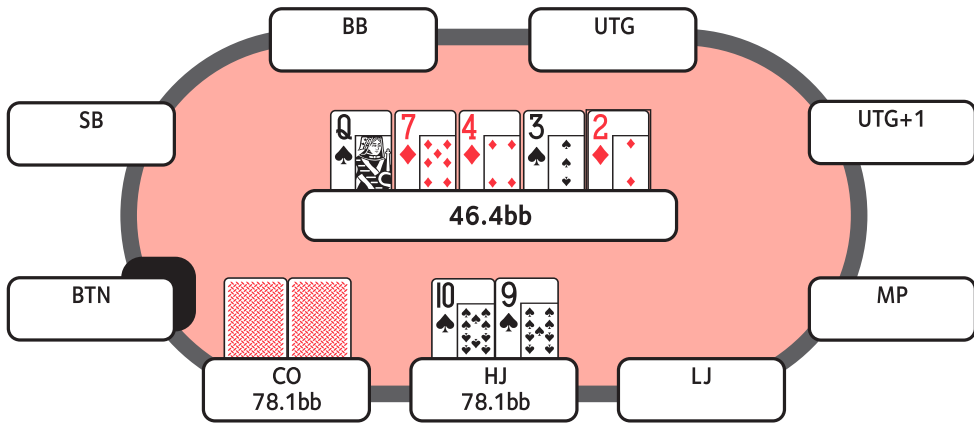
The river is the 2♦. What do you do?

The pot is now 46.4 big blinds. You both started the hand with 100 big blinds, so you have roughly 78.1 big blinds back.

People hate this situation. They should prepare for it before it happens.

What do you like doing here? Check? Bet? Remember, it's not good enough to guess the right answer. You want to be able to replicate your successful plays consistently. That requires having the right methodology.

To recap: You have 10♠-9♠. The final board is Q♠-7♦-4♦-3♠-2♦. The pot is 46.4 big blinds. You have 78.1 big blinds in your stack. What is your move? (*Diagram 14*).



**Diagram 14**

You should move all-in. Why?

Your opponent three-bet pre-flop. They did it with three players to act behind. That is usually a strong hand, but they gave away that they don't have a strong hand here. How?

When he checks back that flop, he is likely doing that with middle pairs. A set would want to bet to win a big pot. A set would bet with a draw out there. A queen or over-pair would usually bet for value versus smaller pocket pairs and flush draws. When he checks, it's more likely he has J-J, 10-10, 9-9, and 8-8. He also has some ace highs he's trying to get to showdown.

When the turn gives you the flush draw, you can bet as a bluff and know your bet doesn't need to work that often. You will probably get to see the river and your backdoor flush is likely to be good. It's unlikely your opponent is going to raise the turn when he has capped his range at one pair. It's possible he has checked back some sets, but that wouldn't be many combinations in his range. We shouldn't worry about that.

On the river, the diamond flush draw comes in but your flush draw misses. That's okay because the diamonds are outs for you too.

"Wait," you're thinking. "The diamonds are outs for me too?"

Yes, because your opponent doesn't have diamonds in his range. Your opponent would have bet his diamond draws on the flop most of the time. Most people bet their diamond draws on the flop because they have nothing at that point but would like it if the player who flatted the three-bet just folded on such a hit-or-miss board with only one high card.

You would have checked your diamond draws and then led them on the turn, which is exactly what happened here. Diamond draws are still in your

range.

If you bet 78.1 big blinds here to win the 46.4 big blinds in the middle, how often does your bet need to work? You would be risking 78.1 big blinds to win 124.5 big blinds, because you would get the pot plus your bet back when the bluff succeeds. 78.1 divided by 124.5 is 0.6273. Your bet would need to work 62.73% of the time here as a bluff in order to be profitable.

Is that likely to happen? Yes. Why?

It's because your opponent has mostly J-J, 10-10, 9-9, and 8-8 here along with some mediocre queens. None of those hands want to see a shove when this flush draw comes in.

There's so much going on in this hand that we need to untangle.

For one, in bigger cash games against serious amateurs you're more likely to make an opponent lay down a hand. The cash is real to them if they work a job outside of the game.

Two, it's not impossible that your opponent picks you off. I would take the over on the betting line of 62.73%. I would guess your average serious opponent folds more than seven times out of 10 if you calmly move all-in here and don't have a long track record of bluffing. Most people do not want to hero call with a mediocre pair here if they have an excuse to fold. Your over-bet makes it easier for them to find the muck.

Does that mean you succeed every time? No. You can throw a 101mph fastball in the corner of the strike zone and still have it get hit out of the park. People catch me bluffing all the time. You're trying to be correct more often than the field. There's only one way to never get caught bluffing: You never bluff in the first place. Most players use this strategy because it hurts if they get caught bluffing. They feel like nobody ever respects them.

This is why bankroll management is so important. If you can't move all-in here, get called, and genuinely say "nice call" and go back to the game with a reload, you're playing too high.

Three, notice how we had to combine hand reading of our opponent and ourselves with a willingness to over-bet when our artificial outs came in. If you did not have those poker assets working for you, there was no way to work through this hand.

It's not easy playing cards for money. It takes a ton of practice. The more you practice, the more you will succeed.

## CHAPTER 53

# NOT HAND RANGING THROUGH EACH STREET

### How Hard Do You Work?

If you did not immediately see the solution to the previous quiz, it is likely you were not ranging your opponent and yourself as the hand was progressing. I specifically selected that hand for review so we could test for those poker assets at this point in the book.

It wouldn't have been fair to give you that hand earlier on. We had not discussed the over-bet enough. I hadn't exposed you to the idea that people have a hard time slow-playing their big hands with multiple draws on the board. The list goes on. There was a lot happening in that hand.

If you did not immediately see that the diamond flush was in your range while not being in your opponent's range, and that your opponent was capped at mostly mediocre pairs, then you would not have seen the over-bet as being a possible play. People constantly bet half-pot on the river thinking that will fold out most of their opponent's range. That's unlikely to happen. Your opponent pot controlled precisely so he could call that kind of bet on the river. The over-bet is probably what they haven't seen much.

If you had difficulties on that hand, don't worry about it. Poker is difficult. No one ever completely masters this game.

There's a story I heard once. Somebody from Ray Dalio's outfit was going skiing. They hired a well-known instructor for the day. It turns out the ski instructor had worked with Michael Jordan. The ski instructor said Jordan loved hearing about the mistakes he was making when he was learning how

to ski. He saw mistakes as opportunities for growth. If he didn't know what his mistakes were, he felt he couldn't get better.

That's one of those stories that's so good you hope it's true. It sounds right. I've never known a successful poker player who lasted over a decade in the game who didn't love finding new ways they could improve. They usually found their points of improvement through leaks that they didn't know existed. I can also tell you from experience that it is discomfoting to be losing at poker and not sure where you're screwing up. There's nothing more worrying than knowing there's so much you don't know. If there is a way to get out of the woods with some instruction, that's more comforting than being clueless.

Poker is a test of common sense and I love it for that. Your titles, degrees, advanced placement, and IQ tests are worthless on the felt. The cards don't care about your qualifications. They will punish and reward people because they feel like it. If you take them for granted, they can turn against you. There's a beauty in that. If you can handle this world, you can handle most other worlds.

What's interesting about playing cards is that some of the smartest people you will ever meet can completely lose their minds on the felt. They're not thinking through hands. The money clouds their vision. They almost enter a fugue state. They see another player bet and they try to feel their way to the right decision. Every year on TV you can watch people try to do this and completely obliterate their entire Main Event.

I have made a lot of money playing cards against people who are much smarter than me. The only way I have ever been able to do this is through educated guesses. If I'm making educated guesses while the other person is experiencing a rush from being in a casino, I'm going to win most of our pots together.

Educated guessing doesn't mean you're always right. Educated guessing means you're right more often than not.

If you think more clearly than the other guy, you will win more often. You might not have as much horsepower, but they don't even have wheels on their car. They're not applying anything they learn from watching poker videos on YouTube because they're too busy having a thrill as they shuffle the chips.

Every time you play a hand, you should ask yourself at each decision point what an opponent's actions mean. Playing poker is like being a detective. You're using the evidence to create a profile of your opponent's hand. If

they three-bet, what hands does that typically entail? When they cold call from different positions, what hands does that rule out?

If they call a continuation bet post-flop, what does that help you rule out? Would they have raised with a set or two pair with a flush draw on the board? Would they have folded or called with a high card?

What range does it look like you have given how the hand played out?

I know this is all confusing to start with, so we will need to take baby steps as we help you get your feet wet.

Play online where you can talk to yourself. Do poker quizzes where you can take as much time as you need to work through the hands. Take notes. Work through flops, turns, and rivers verbally. Remember when you were learning to drive a car? You talked yourself through everything before it became second nature. It's the same thing here.

If you're lost and don't know where to begin, start by assessing what your opponent has. Don't worry about your own range just yet. If you're playing low limits, most of your opponents will be thinking about their own hands. They won't even be thinking about your range, so you can ignore that for now.

When you are trying to guess your opponent's hand range, start with the basics: Two pair or better, pairs, draws, and high cards. As you get more information on each street, ask what that means for his two pair or better hands, pairs, draws, and high cards. You'll find in many instances you can rule out the draws and two pair or better hands because your opponent would have played them aggressively. If your opponent usually folds to a continuation bet, you can rule out the high cards when they call. If your opponent is likely to have a pair, you can guess they've paired a hole card with one card on the board. Pocket pairs are much more difficult to construct combination-wise than a top pair or second pair with a random kicker. You can play around with Flopzilla Pro to learn more about this.

Don't expect perfection to begin with. Realize that pros often make mistakes as well. Mistakes are opportunities to learn. You just need to keep practicing.

Play fewer tables. Do more quizzes. Work through the hands with a trainer if you can. Write down your work. Eventually you won't need to think through hands as much when you're playing. You'll be able to range both yourself and your opponents naturally as the cards come out. You won't even be thinking it through consciously. It will be a part of you.

Of course, some pros naturally do this better than others. My hand-rang-

ing ability, for example, is above average but not world class. But the fact remains that anybody will get better with practice.

Most people never get better at poker because playing like this is difficult. It takes more mental energy. People want to go the cardroom, sling some chips around, hang with the boys, and play some cards. That's fine. It's unlikely to lead to improvement, but it will be fun.

However, if you want to get better, you're not going to be able to relax as much. You will be trying to range your opponents in hands you're not even playing. If this sounds mentally draining that's because it is. When I get done playing a live event, I feel like a zombie. That's how drained I am. I feel like I've been taking standardized tests for days.

If you're not consistently trying to put your opponents on hands and observing hands you're not even involved in, you're not playing for money. You're playing for fun. That's completely fine, but if you're taking the time to read this book, you're better than that. Most poker players do not read poker books to improve their game. You're not like most poker players. Give yourself the chance to get better at hand reading. It gets fun as you get better at it. The huge value bets and bluffs you'll be able to pull off that confuse your opponents is the sweetest salary in the world.

## CHAPTER 54

# BEING AFRAID TO MAKE MISTAKES

### You're Allowed to Be Human

Do you want to hear something super controversial that I truly believe?

I don't want to be successful.

Do you want to hear the greatest gift that was ever given to me?

No teacher in my high school ever talked to me about going to college. Nobody told me to go take the SAT or apply to a college. Nobody had any expectations for me. I was couch surfing through high school until I got my commercial fishing and security jobs. Once I started playing poker nobody told me I was throwing my life away. Nobody expected anything from me anyway.

Do you think I'm joking? I'm not kidding at all. Allow me to explain why.

First, when I say "I don't want to be successful" what I mean is that I don't want to join this strange cult we have in America where you're somehow more moral for working long hours. If I say the words "easy money" then any American likely thinks I'm saying something negative. But who in the world doesn't want easy money? Are you not worthy of a good salary unless you work all day every day?

I use money to buy back my time and my life. I work less than anyone I know and have more fun working than anyone I know. That's my salary. If I wanted to make the most money I could possibly make, I would work twice as much. I respect people who do that, but it doesn't appeal to me. I like my life. I'll turn down good money if it means answering to somebody else. I'll turn down other money if it means constant stress.



I'm not joking either when I say I'm glad nobody expected anything from me.

For one thing, most people are too concerned with their own lives to notice anyone else. No teacher tried to help me get into college because I showed zero interest in academia. They would have been wasting their time. It's not their job to make me make better decisions. Additionally, my parents had a lot going on at the time. I'd always been good at making money and they trusted me to continue doing so. It wasn't their job to police me as I became an adult.

What I didn't understand until I got older is that I was handed a lottery ticket. I wasn't scared about going pro in poker because I'd just go back to couch surfing if I failed. My parents wouldn't judge me. My friends wouldn't judge me. No one was pressuring me. I was free to fail. With that freedom, I turned pro at 18. I haven't had a real job in 15 years.

My high school friends who were much brighter than me got psychologically manipulated. First, they were told that they could be anything they wanted to be. They seriously all thought they were going to rehaul NASA and land on Mars themselves. They thought it was going to be the easiest thing in the world to succeed in life because they were so brilliant. It wasn't their fault they believed this. Their parents had been telling them this their whole lives!

If I told you every day of your life that swimming the English Channel was easy and then I made you swim it on a stormy day you would think I was nuts. Unfortunately, something similar happened to many people I know.

The expectations for good kids and smart kids became ridiculous. Their parents spoke to them like anyone could be Mark Zuckerberg. It blew me away! They truly expected everyone to have their life figured out by 25. This is wholly unrealistic in a world that changes more in 10 years than it used to change in 1,000. We're all struggling to keep up.

There is an unhealthy belief in what some have termed "entity-based learning." There are apparently two belief systems when it comes to learning anything. Entity-based learning means you believe you're either born with a talent or you're not. Incremental-based learning means you believe people learn things incrementally. Apparently, you can manipulate people's behavior based on what learning style you project on them. As we saw in a previous chapter, if you tell children "You worked so hard!" after they accomplish a difficult task, they will want to try harder the next time. If you tell children "You're so smart!" after they accomplish the task, they will be worried about failing in the future and exposing themselves as being not smart.

The point of these paragraphs is this: If you beat yourself up and feel awful when you play poker, it's not your fault. Much of our society has projected an entity-based learning system on us. You either got it or you don't. You're first place or you're a loser. You get the picture.

Of course, in such a competitive society where making money is seen as more important than spending time with your family, people naturally get insecure. Sometimes they project their insecurities on others. Those are the mean people at the poker table.

Entity-based learning encourages children to stop trying if they don't want to be exposed as unintelligent. If a task becomes too difficult, they will give up and say the task is stupid. They have never been taught to enjoy the challenge. They have never been taught that their mistakes are opportunities to learn.

You will encounter many people who buy into this at the poker table. They love to play the game still. They love holding the chips. They love the dopamine hit of having a pot pushed their way. They don't love losing or being made to feel stupid, though. Their parents made them feel dumb when they failed by acting like succeeding was the simplest thing in the world - any idiot could do it!

These players will avoid criticism like the plague. They pot control all the time so they won't get bluffed. They'll call river bets so they won't get bluffed. They could call to see the flop when they know they should fold. They could call pre-flop when they know they should three-bet because if they get four-bet they'll feel ridiculous. What if the board would have hit them!? Any idiot could have called there!

Are you seeing a theme? It's a fear of making mistakes. Americans have a lot of this because we buy into the dog-eat-dog mentality. We believe you're either a champion or a loser. We feel that about ourselves. We project that on to others. That's why people will mock you when your bluffs fail or when you fold to someone who shows a bluff.

This is not healthy. We're just playing a game! This is a great opportunity for us to experience small failures and mistakes as we become comfortable with them. If we're playing with money we can afford to lose, it is our right to play any way we wish.

If anyone gives you a hard time, give them a big smile and say, "I like the action. I want to gamble. Do you mind if I gamble with my own money the way I like?"

You have a right to play the way you want. Tell them that. The floor staff

and dealers love polite action players. Real grinders will defend you if they hear you say this. It's our job to make sure you have a good time. You have a right to learn. You have a right to play any way you want.

This is what I love about playing with Brazilians. They love the game! I've seen Brazilian players lose to a two-outer and hug the other guy! I've seen Brazilians get shown a bluff and laugh their ass off while high-fiving the other guy! How cool is that?

Furthermore, what an advantage this is for them. How are you going to beat people who can take your best punch and laugh? How are you going to beat people who celebrate trying any play at any time!?

If you lose at a poker table, it's not because you're dumb. I have never met a pro who didn't have bad years. Take your time. This game is hard for everybody. It takes a lifetime to learn. I'm still learning and I'm 15 years into my journey. If you get a little better each day, you will eventually be hard to deal with. Don't rush yourself. It doesn't happen overnight. Pay your dues. Enjoy the ride.

## CHAPTER 55

# NOT THINKING ABOUT UNORTHODOX VALUE

### Let's Work on This Hand

You are playing a faster-paced tournament on a Caribbean island. It's a \$1,050 buy-in tournament with a number of semi-serious players from the United States. The tournament just started so every player has 5,000 in chips. A young reg opens on your big blind when blinds are 50/100 with no ante. You have A♠-J♣ in the big blind. He opened from the cutoff to 250. You call.

The board comes J♦-7♣-4♣. There is 550 in the pot. You check. Your opponent continuation bets to 300. What do you want to do here?

You call. The turn is the 2♥. You check. The board now is J♦-7♣-4♣-2♥. You have A♠-J♣.

Your opponent double barrels 450 into 1,150. What do you want to do here?

You call. The river is the K♥.

There is 2,050 in the pot. The final board is J♦-7♣-4♣-2♥-K♥. You have A♠-J♣.

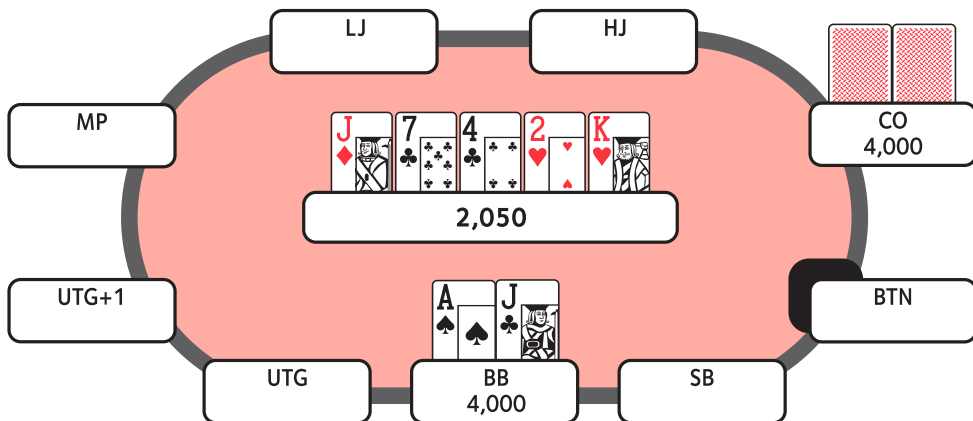
Do you want to check and then raise?

Do you want to check-call?

Do you want to check and fold?

Do you want to lead on the king?

What is your move? (*Diagram 15*).



**Diagram 15**

You should lead. This hand combines several concepts we've talked about so far in this book. If you are thinking about getting real value, you should be ready to play a big pot early. You slaughtered this flop. You can't take a moment to settle in when you play poker. The game is on from the moment a tournament starts.

If you wanted to check-raise this flop, that's great. If you wanted to three-bet pre-flop, that's good too. If you wanted to check-raise the turn, that's fine. What is not acceptable is trying like hell to get to showdown because you're afraid of playing a big pot. You have the best hand most of the time. The name of the game is getting the other player's chips. You can't do that if you flop the best hand and think to yourself, "How do I make this pot as small as possible?"

We lead 1,300 into the 2,050 pot here because the king of hearts doesn't hit your opponent's range

When your opponent bet 450 into 1,150 what did you think he had?

Does that look like a bet that someone would make with a flush draw to get you to fold? No. Does that look like a jack that's trying to get value? No. It looks like a mediocre pair which is trying to get to showdown. He is trying to buy the showdown. You have seen this play before. He is running an exploitative play on you. That means there's an opening for you to exploit him.

You lead here because the river king isn't likely to have hit your opponent and their mediocre pairs. Your hand looks like two clubs that called twice, missed, and decided to make a desperate play at the pot. You will get called a large percentage of the time.

## Let's Work on Another Hand

You have A♦-10♥ in a \$55 buy-in online tournament on a large American-facing poker site. You have 5,000 chips at 50/100. It's folded to you on the button and you raise to 250. The small blind folds. The big blind, a standard American reg with no real creativity in his game, calls.

The board comes J♦-5♦-4♠. The big blind checks. You check back.

The turn is the 10♠. Your opponent leads 300 into 550. What is your move?

You should raise for value to 900. Most people say they prefer to call to pot control. But you can control the pot size more through a raise than a call. You will get more value as well.

Why do you want to raise? This is a standard American reg. After you check back the flop, he is looking for excuses to bet the turn. On this board of J♦-5♦-4♠-10♠ he is likely leading K-Q, 8-9, spade combos, and diamond combos. Those are all combinations you beat that only pay you on the turn. You need to raise the turn to get value out of those hands. If you call, he will either hit his hand on the river or he will miss and possibly stop paying.

A great reason to raise here is that many bad regs will lead any turn they hit. It's also possible he's betting a 10 that you beat. Many other players will check with those hands to try to get a cheap showdown. In this event, you're likely getting more value.

Most players call on that turn 100% of the time. If you're following the systems we discuss in this book about hand ranging on the fly and always trying to get value, you will spot occasions like this where the majority of poker players are missing value.

# CHAPTER 56

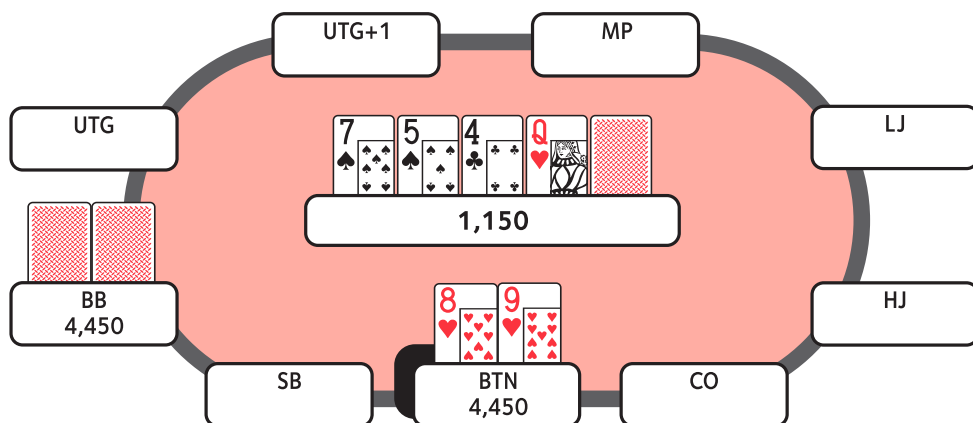
## NOT USING UNORTHODOX BETS

### Let's Construct Another Situation

You are in another \$55 event. You have 8♥-9♥ and open on the button to 250 from a stack of 5,000 at 50/100. Only the big blind calls. He also has 5,000 chips. He's a more timid reg who has a hard time getting value from his hands. He pot controls too much.

The board comes 7♠-5♠-4♣. Your opponent checks to you. You bet 300 into 500. He calls.

The turn is the Q♥. There is 1,150 in the pot. He checks to you. What do you do? (*Diagram 16*).



*Diagram 16*

Let me ask you something. What would you do with A-Qo here? How much would you bet? Would you bet?

Let's say we bet 2,000 here into the 1,150 pot. How does that make you feel?

Many people say, "I hate that bet! My opponents never fold anything!"

Great! So you over-bet with A-Qo here, yes? Did you say over-bet with A-Qo?

If you didn't say over-bet with A-Qo then we have an issue. Do you see what it is? We're not being consistent. We're saying our opponents never fold, yet when we turn an incredible hand, we're not betting large for value. That doesn't make sense. It has to be one or the other. Either our opponents never fold and we told ourselves we should over-bet with A-Qo, or they always fold and we should over-bet with 8♥-9♥.

We said at the beginning of the hand that the opponent is a timid reg. He hates playing big pots. He is the exact person you want to over-bet against.

Let's combine some concepts we've been discussing so far. When he called you on this flop, what did he tell you he had? When he didn't three-bet pre-flop, what did he tell you he had?

When he didn't three-bet pre-flop, he told you he probably doesn't have most good aces and solid pocket pairs.

When he checks and calls on this flop, he is unlikely to have two pair, a set, or a straight.

You might be saying to yourself, "Wait a second. I thought he hates big pots! Wouldn't he call with those hands to make sure a safe card comes on the turn?"

Great point! That is more of a PLO play that you don't see many no limit hold'em tournament regs employ, but that's a great question.

Most timid regs become that way because they hate when the pot gets big and they have to fold a decent hand. That makes them doubt themselves to the extreme. It's uncomfortable. "Did I fold the winner? Did he bluff me? Should I even be playing this game?"

When these players do flop a good made hand, they tend to play it fast because they want to avoid uncertain feelings on the turn when a flush draw or straight draw comes in and their two pair doesn't look as good anymore.

If it's unlikely our opponent has an over-pair or a hand better than two pair after they flat pre-flop and on the flop, what does that leave them with?

Pairs. Lots of pairs. Lots of garbage pairs because our opponent is calling us with so many terrible unsuited hands out of the big blind. Sevens, fives,



and fours aplenty are in his range. And missed draws. None of these hands love that queen on the turn.

Most people will bet half the pot on the turn and their opponent will call. The river will brick out and they will fire again. Their opponent will call river bets because now they're worried about getting bluffed by a missed flush draw. The button player will then whine that some donkey called him down with A-5o. How is he the donkey if he called you down correctly?

If you bet 2,000 into 1,150, how do you solve for how often that needs to work?  $2,000/3,150 = 0.6349$ . Your bet needs to work 63.5% of the time. Your opponent therefore needs to defend with 36.5% of his hands. That is a tall order. How would you feel with A-7o on this turn if your opponent suddenly bombed the pot like that? How would you feel with a five or a four?

You don't necessarily need to make this play, but it needs to be in your mental catalog. This situation combined everything we have been talking about so far. You might not want to make the play because you think you'd look ridiculous if you bet big and the play fails. The table might make fun of you, and no one wants that. But for the same reason, some players don't want to over-bet with A-Qo there for value. But you can't have it both ways. Either people don't fold enough to that large turn bet or they fold too much. It is rare that they are perfectly balanced. Make your judgment call and fire. Every professional gambler must learn to live with the consequences.

# CHAPTER 57

## MAKING A CONFUSED “VALUE” BET

### A Small Spot That Comes Up Often

You are in a huge online tournament with a buy-in of \$2,650 and \$1 million for first place. The field is full of nameless faces.

You have 274,458 chips. The blinds are 900/1,800 with a 270 ante. It is early in the tournament so all the players have around 300,000 in chips. You are in the small blind at an eight-handed table and have A♦-J♦. UTG+2 opens to 3,600. He has been a confusing but aggressive player. He will randomly play a big pot when he feels like it. The button cold calls. You call and the big blind calls as well.

The board comes Q♣-10♦-5♣. You check. The big blind checks. The initial raiser bets 4,140 into 16,560. The button folds. You call. The big blind folds.

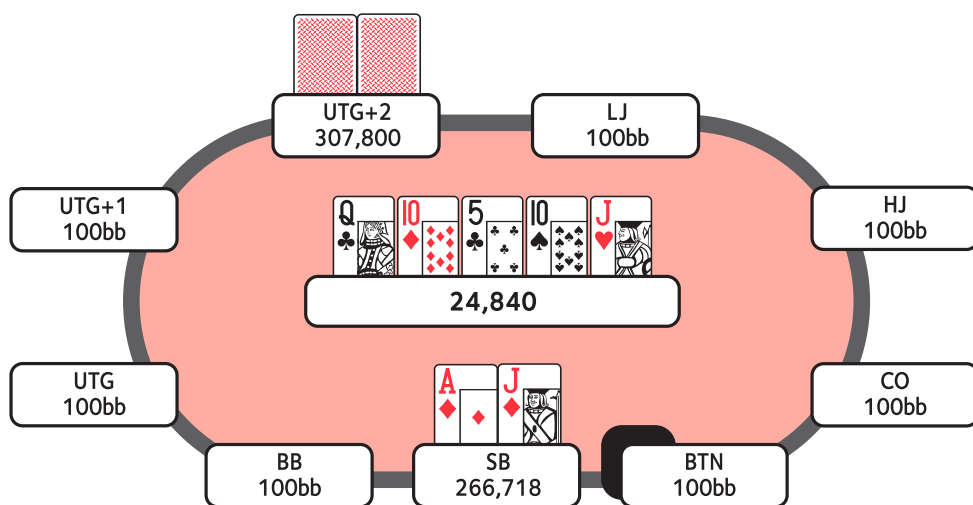
The turn is the 10♠ making the board 5♣-10♦-Q♣-10♠. You check. UTG+2 checks now.

The river is the J♥. There is 24,840 in the middle. You have 266,718. Your opponent has 307,800 in chips. The board is now 5♣-10♦-Q♣-10♠-J♥. You have A♦-J♦. What do you want to do now? (*Diagram 17*).

Many amateur players will bet here, but they don't ask themselves a critical question.

If you learn nothing else from this book, then learn how to be more deliberate. Before you value bet, ask what you expect to get value from. If you are bluffing, ask yourself what hand you want your opponent to fold. If you

are making a hero call, ask yourself what you expect him to be bluffing with. If you consistently ask yourself those three questions, you will be more successful at the game.



**Diagram 17**

Players in this situation will say to themselves, "I hit my hand. It's likely the best hand. I'm going to bet." This is what I like to call the confused value bet. In 2007, a poker coach taught me that phrase when I led with a hand that couldn't get value from much. I wish I could remember who that was. It's been a helpful concept for more than a decade.

If you bet here, what do you expect to get value from? He checks back some queens, so you're value betting his hand for him. He would bet a 10. If he has a missed flush draw, he is going to fold.

If you check, you give him a chance to bet a missed draw. If he was goofing off on the flop with a garbage hand, you'll give him another chance to fire. You deny him all of that when you bet here because you hit your hand.

## CHAPTER 58

# NOT PRACTICING WHAT YOU “ALREADY KNOW”

### Tough Love

How many jabs do you think Floyd Mayweather has thrown in his life? Do you think he doesn't know how to throw a jab? Why does he keep throwing them then? He's probably throwing a jab somewhere right now.

One of the most confusing aspects of poker is how people believe they have talent or they don't. This game never stops changing. A proven strategy that worked last year can be worthless this year. The work never ends.

The only way you can continue to make money at poker is by staying ahead of your competition. This requires you to keep an open mind and look at new concepts. More than anything, it requires you to readdress the fundamentals consistently.

On a typical day, I study poker for around three hours and 15 minutes. The three-hour chunk is spent working on concepts and fundamentals I “already know.”

The truth is you never know anything forever in poker. The poker world changes constantly. I spend three hours every morning working on my projects. This is how I work on fundamentals. I get direct feedback from my clients quickly. Poker players are good at letting me know if one of my techniques is not working in the field. It doesn't happen often, but when I start getting those reports, that part of the playbook is edited immediately. The playbook is edited and redone consistently to make it more effective.

The final 15 minutes of my study sessions are what I look forward to.

That's when I get in the lab and try to create some newer plays or catch myself in a huge, high stakes mistake. As much as I enjoy that part of my job, it doesn't give me plays I can use that often. If I'm in a game where I get to use high stakes plays, that typically means I'm table selecting poorly. A few times a year I'll get to play with a high stakes player in a tournament, but even then my best course of action is to avoid him in most pots.

This goes back to the beginning of the book. The goal is to make money. If you're trying to make money from poker, your job is to play the biggest games you can with the worst players on Earth. If you're trying to be the best poker player on Earth, you need to play against great players. There are many players who have chosen the second route in their poker career. I am not one of them. You will have to learn from them if you want to follow that path.

I do want to use complex plays when I play. It makes me feel good about myself. I've spent my entire adult life as a professional poker player. All my high school friends are married with kids now. I want to know I made the right decision picking this vagrant life. When I pull off a huge bluff or hero call it makes me feel good about myself. If I relive that moment in my coaching, it makes me feel good about myself again. It makes me feel like I took the right career path. But that's not how you make the most money in no limit hold'em. The way you make the most money is by finding bad players in cash games and value betting the shit out of them. The end. However, it doesn't exactly make you feel intelligent just sitting around all day waiting for aces to value bet, especially when you get your hand cracked. That's why so many players suffer from Fancy Play Syndrome, as veterans used to call it. Humans get bored. Humans want to justify things to themselves. Humans complicate things.

That said, there is a beauty to the fundamentals. I love the game because it can feel like a martial art. You never throw a perfect punch. The journey to the perfect jab is what intrigues fighters endlessly. Similarly, in poker, there is no such thing as a perfect cash game session or tournament. Every single day, someone throws a haymaker at me that I am not prepared for. Every session wakes me up and makes me focus. The perfect application of the fundamentals corrals all players. That's why I get obsessed with them.

Never stop studying "what you already know." You'll be amazed when you discover new issues even decades into your career, and it's immensely satisfying when you notice them.

If you're a fan of baseball, you might have heard a good example of this.

John Smoltz is an MLB Hall of Famer with an incredible baseball mind, and after a long, illustrious career for the Braves, Smoltz went to play for the Boston Red Sox. He pitched so poorly there that the Red Sox wanted to send him to the minor leagues. This was a huge blow for a pitcher who had already had a career worthy of the Hall of Fame. Many baseball analysts said that Smoltz's career was over.

Except that wasn't the end of the story. Smoltz was left without a team when the Red Sox let him go. He went to go throw some balls in front of scouts. One of them noticed something. Smoltz's footwork was off. He had been setting one of his feet incorrectly. He'd developed a bad habit because he hadn't double checked something he had been doing since he was a kid. Everybody, including Smoltz, assumed he had his entire process fixed. He could do no wrong after such an illustrious career. However, if he had been deliberately practicing with different coaches, he likely would have identified this bad habit earlier.

Once he fixed this part of his pitching stride, he returned to form. In his first start for the St. Louis Cardinals, he set a Cardinals record by striking out seven batters in a row.

If you're not getting the results from poker that you want, start from the beginning. Focus on a session with small stakes players. Play fewer tables or focus more on one table. Play shorter sessions. Rethink all your automatic plays. Why do you open with this hand? Why do you continuation bet in this spot? Does anything need to change?

## CHAPTER 59

# BEING UNWILLING TO MOVE DOWN

### One of The Greatest Career Killers

Let's continue discussing a subject that came up in the last chapter.

How often do you move down in stakes? I've lost count of the number of professional poker players who have lost their roll and their job because they are unwilling to move down.

If you have a \$10,000 poker bankroll, but you panic when the roll hits \$5,000 and play poorly, you don't actually have a \$10,000 poker bankroll. Your true bankroll is \$5,000. You should play as if you only have \$5,000 and move down.

I have heard great poker analysts say you shouldn't take time off when you're running poorly. I have heard other analysts say you shouldn't move down when you're struggling. I am surprised every time I hear it. I have used both of those tactics to great effect for 15 years.

I used to hear this all the time: "Alex, your coaching doesn't work at micro-stakes games! These players never fold!"

The first 15 times I heard it, it merely confused me. I know the strength of my playbooks. My landlord doesn't let me pay my rent with my good looks. But after I kept hearing that same refrain again and again, I got worried. Perhaps something I was saying wasn't working at the smallest games? I had to find out for myself.

I decided to play one session of microscopic buy-in tournaments. We are talking 50-cent games with thousands of runners.

I will admit: The first hour was tough. I was surprised at some of the bizarre things players were trying. But after that hour I got back into my old rhythm. I ended up winning a 65-cent tournament with a bazillion runners. My students loved watching the hand history when I turned it into a quiz. To be fair, I did have to make some small adjustments because of the players, and it was good to discuss those changes with my students. In my defense, however, 99% of my playbook did work at those games. If you're not winning at the smallest games, it's not because the players aren't folding. You need to hit the books or poker quizzes and try again.

I didn't make much money that night, but that's not the point. Getting to Hulk smash a final table again made me feel better about my game. The next time I played I felt calm. I knew I could always move back down and make money if I needed to.

This comes up more often than you would think. The general public assumes professional poker players never lose. The truth is we lose constantly. The idea is to be in the black by the end of the year. If you lose 364 sessions but then win the Main Event on day 365 you're an incredibly successful poker player. That also means you are losing almost every single day.

That's obviously an extreme hypothetical, but life as a tournament professional is not too different than that. You have many small winning and losing days throughout the year, then maybe one signature win makes your year. You will have entire months where everything goes to shit.

As I write this passage, I just got off the tour. I played 14 huge live events in three different states. I had a ton of fun playing, but I didn't make money. I cashed one event, bubbled two others, and didn't come close to cashing in the other events. That's a normal run for that many tournaments. Cashing zero tournaments wouldn't have been uncommon. I got lucky that the one cash I did get was in the second biggest event I played. Unfortunately, I ran A-Ks into A-A right after the bubble burst, and I wasn't rewarded with a huge cash.

When you read that paragraph, it seems like a normal run. It seems like just another day at the office. But that's not how I experienced it. For two months I woke up, worked out, shaved, dressed presentably, and then got the shit kicked out of me for 10 hours. There were no easy days. There was no money. I was away from my family. I was bored. I was dejected. All my traps failed. I was card dead most of the time. The one cash I managed required every short-stack trick I had. I nearly bubbled that tournament as well. My stress levels were high.



It doesn't feel good when you come off the tour with a loss and you're staring at all the tournament, motel, and airfare receipts. It's normal for there to be tension in your family. I have yet to date a woman who is fine with me being gone all the time.

But guess what? Your family's health insurance plan doesn't care how you're feeling. They still want payment on the first of the month. You need to get back on the felt, even if you don't feel good. You're dejected. You're seeing things. Everything has been going wrong for so long. You're doubting everything about your game.

That's when you play small stakes games. Find a small friendly home game you always crush and spend a few days there. Give the punters some stories from Vegas. If you're a real stud, bring them back something from your travels. Act like it's nothing. Cuban cigars from Florida always go a long way.

I played another micro-stakes session when I got back this time. My students loved the first training video series with quizzes based on a micro-stakes win. I figured while I wasn't feeling great about my game I'd go back to the smallest games on Earth and see what happened. I don't usually mind moving down when I'm not loving my game, but I'll admit it: I didn't want to do it this time. I wanted to go right back to online majors. I was playing \$10 million guaranteed tournaments a couple months prior to this session. How the hell was I going to play a 10-cent tournament now?

I woke up that day and put \$100 across 20 or 30 tournaments. I normally keep great records, but I just didn't give a shit on this particular day. I started 12-tabling for the first time in years.

Thirteen hours later, I was at my fifth final table. I only made around \$300 on the entire session, but more importantly my confidence was back. I had to get back to fundamentals to play that many tables at a time. Of course, I ran above expectation, but getting a cheap final table would have been common, and it would have made me feel equally good about my game.

Another way you can move down in stakes is by changing where you live. If you are an expat in many countries, your home country and your new country of residence will charge you next to nothing in taxes. You can currency leverage as well. If you make \$50,000 a year in New York City, that's not going to get you far. But you'll be able to buy multiple properties in Latin America with that same salary if you play your cards right.

I spent more than 10 years outside of the United States precisely because I wasn't good enough to cut it in the USA. When I live in the United

States, my biggest expense every year is my tax bill. That bill is significantly lower when I live elsewhere. I have paid hundreds of thousands of dollars in taxes over the past few years just to continue working out of my country of birth.

If that doesn't sound appealing to you, I don't blame you. Start your poker career somewhere else if that is an option. I loved my 10+ years abroad. When you consider how much money you're saving on taxes, it feels like getting free rent. I loved the opportunity I had to live in Europe, Asia, and Latin America. Not many people get that opportunity.

Sometimes I play small stakes tournaments just to remember where I came from. It reminds me of that stupid kid who was up until 4:00 AM on a school night playing \$5 tournament final tables. It reminds me of when this was all a dream.

Sometimes I play the small tournaments to remind myself I can always support myself through the game. If my girl ever decided that dating a bipolar professional gambler wasn't the greatest life move, I could just move to Thailand and support myself with the \$5 tournaments.

You would think that a professional poker player would have confidence in himself after decades in the game. You would think you would have confidence after paying all your bills for so many years, but that's not how it works. Many poker players survive because they always doubt themselves. That doubt motivates them to study more and play harder. I'm no different.

I can't tell you how many poker players I know who went broke because they always had to be seen in the biggest game in the room. It didn't matter if a drunk was punting stacks at \$1/\$3. They had to play with all the regs in the \$5/\$10.

I love playing small stakes games for a month and running up some money. I love the confidence it gives me. I love how much fun I can have even playing the smaller games. I love having that confidence when I play some bigger tournaments and cash games again. I love knowing I can always move down and make more money if my shots don't work out. That makes a man fearless.

None of your poker friends or critics are going to pay your family's bills if you fail. Get the money wherever you can get it.

## CHAPTER 60

# NOT PLAYING ACE HIGH FOR VALUE

### Grind for The Moment

You are playing a \$109 buy-in tournament online against several recreational players. The game is extremely loose. The blinds are 2,600/5,200 with a 625 ante. The button, a player who has never folded to you today and is clearly playing for fun, opens to 11,440. He has played 50% of the hands so far and has raised 28% of the time, when he has had the opportunity pre-flop. He has been aggressive in previous hands. You have A♣-K♠ in the small blind. You make it 35,780. You have an additional 394,680 chips in your stack.

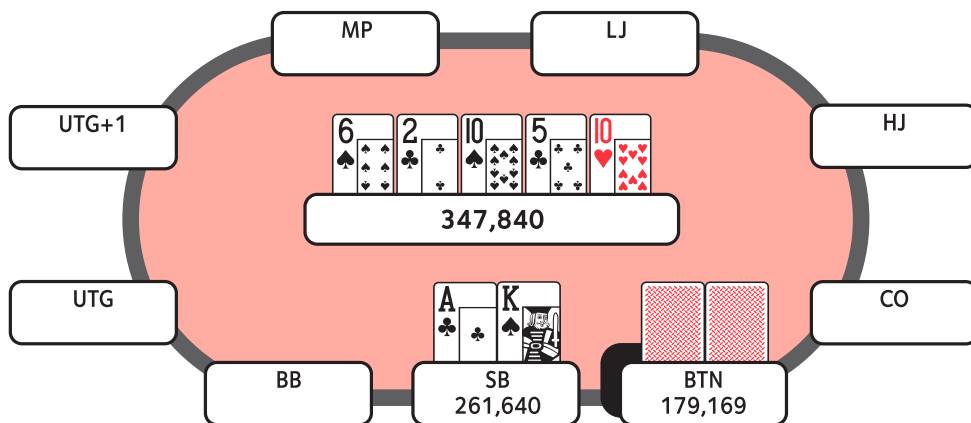
The big blind folds. The button opener calls your three-bet. There is now 81,760 in the pot. You have your opponent covered. He has 312,209 after the pre-flop action.

The board comes 6♠-2♣-10♠. You bet 46,080. Your opponent calls.

The turn is the 5♣. The board now is 6♠-2♣-10♠-5♣. There is 173,920 in the middle. Your opponent has 266,129 behind. You have 348,600. What do you want to do now?

You fire 86,960 into the 173,920 pot. Your opponent calls.

The river is the 10♥. The board now is 6♠-2♣-10♠-5♣-10♥. The pot is 347,840 and your opponent has 179,169 chips back. You have 261,640 in your stack. What do you do here? Your hand is A♣-K♠. You three-bet this opponent pre-flop from the small blind after they raised on the button. You bet the flop and were called. You bet the turn and were called. What is your move now? (*Diagram 18*).



**Diagram 18**

I'll tell you what I did. I moved all-in.

My opponent called immediately with A♠-Q♠. I picked up the 706,179 chip pot and he was out of the tournament.

This is a genuine hand from one of my online sessions. To be truthful, I don't recall the buy-in and it wasn't in the hand history I saved, so for this example I made the buy-in the largest you could likely get away with this play on a large international site. If this had been some \$44 tournament, I wouldn't be surprised. You can always help punters leave the game at those smaller buy-ins. They want to gamble.

There are several concepts in this hand we should discuss. Let's start at the beginning.

For one, when a player never folds to you, that doesn't mean you give up. I hear this refrain constantly: "I can't win! None of these players ever fold!" Do you know how hard I need to look for good cash games where no one ever folds? No one ever folding is the ideal.

If no one ever truly folds, then I should look at your database and find you frequently triple barreling second pair with top kicker. That would be a premium hand versus someone who never folds any pair. If I don't find that in your database, that means you're not value betting enough versus players who want to call.

That's okay. We can all improve at this game. This is one of the fastest ways to make money.

Going back to an earlier section, it's a great experiment to play a session in which we try to land the most ridiculous value bet. This will lead to some explosions in our lab. We will value own ourselves frequently right out of

small tournaments, but the more we practice, the better we will get at taking other people's stacks.

I admit it. I took things quite far in this hand. I don't recommend trying this in your next session, but it does illustrate a point.

For one, when a player doesn't want to fold to you, you need to expand your value betting range. Two, when a player calls your three-bet in position after they opened the button, they are going to fold to you even less. They feel ridiculous giving up to the first continuation bet after you try to re-steal. They feel your ploy is obvious. Even tighter players are less willing to fold when they are in position. All these factors mean we need to expand our value betting ranges more.

In live play, I'm not able to process as many details as I'd like to. I did wing this play to a point. I'm not in love with how I played it. I wish I had checked the opponent's aggression frequencies on each street before I explored a pure value betting line. I could have possibly checked and gotten this to showdown. Instead, I threw the bomb down the field versus decent coverage. It was risky but it paid off in this specific example.

The flop continuation bet is money in the bank. My aggressive opponent is unlikely to fold much of anything versus the continuation bet when I am out of position. My high card beats almost all the combinations he flats with.

My turn bet makes me a lot of money over time. When two flush draws and a straight draw develop on the turn, aggressive opponents have a hard time folding anything in position. They are too worried about folding to a draw that is bluff betting. I doubt I'm even getting many king or queen-high hands to fold if the guy wants to gamble. He's going to be too curious to see if I blink on the many river cards that miss me.

The river is important because it pairs the top card. This needs to be discussed but it doesn't merit its own chapter. (That's another reason we are discussing this hand.) When you saw that the top card paired, did that sicken you or excite you?

It should have pumped you up. No aggressive opponent was going to fold top pair anyway. If he had a 10, he wasn't going to fold. It's not as if he was going to fold to a triple barrel with a 10 but now he will call with three-of-a-kind. When the 10 paired, it merely made it less likely our opponent had a 10. There are only two 10s left in the deck. Our opponent is far more likely to have some other hand now.

Could he have a draw? This is where I was wrong. If I thought his range was now a ton of missed draws and some sixes, I would check with the in-

tention of calling an all-in, but I didn't think he had draws. I'm blocking the turned nut flush draw. I'm blocking a number of spade draws. Additionally, this is the kind of player who you would assume would raise with draws on the flop.

When he calls our flop bet, his most likely hands are high cards that don't want to fold yet, some smaller draws, and sixes. He likely would have four-bet pre-flop with over-pairs. He could also have 7-7, 8-8, and 9-9. When the 10 pairs, it's less likely he has a 10. There are not many combinations of sixes because even loose and aggressive opponents are unlikely to raise and call with unsuited combinations of sixes. That leaves only a few suited combinations.

I made this quick analysis and decided to go for the home run. I assumed that most of his range was ace-highs that didn't believe me. Combination wise, those are the easiest hands to make. There are three combinations of 7-6s he could have and 12 combinations of A-Q he could have, for example. I wouldn't be shocked if this opponent just decided he wasn't folding A-9o. People are routinely stunned by what loose and recreational players show up with. To get inside their heads you need to remember how you played at your first home games. Any ace looked like gold! A draw missed? He clearly missed his draw!

This is a great example of how you can win a huge pot and be wrong too. In my analysis, I shoved this river because he didn't have many missed draws he could bluff with. I was clearly wrong about that. Based on just a few hands I had played with this player I made an all-or-nothing black-and-white analysis. I assumed he was doing something 100% of the time or 0% of the time. I didn't work harder to be more nuanced. I was lost in the hand and jammed the second I saw the river. That was a mistake. If I had thought about it for a second more, I would have seen that he doesn't raise all his draws. He had been limping more pre-flop than he was raising. That's typically a sign of someone who wants to see more cards. I failed to notice this. This is like throwing a ball deep and connecting with your star receiver, but you didn't even notice another defender was near him. Everyone thinks you saw the player, but you know the truth. You took a huge risk and didn't calculate the odds. You could have given away the game.

There's a great chance I would have still shoved the river, but I was rattled when I saw his hand. My ranging didn't feature that hand at all. I had been using anecdotal evidence to crowd out my rational mind.

The human mind is not logical. What is hilarious to me about humans

is they talk constantly about how much they believe in science. Yet, if you watch the TV news, you'll see what they truly want is anecdotes. Vivid anecdote after colorful anecdote. Technicolored. Memorable.

You can't do that to yourself. Your mind wants the shiniest object to focus on. If you give it a memorable anecdote it will never remember the corresponding data. I made that mistake here. I'd seen him play aggressively in a few pots and took that to mean he is always aggressive in every spot.

# CHAPTER 61

## NOT DIVERSIFYING YOUR POKER PORTFOLIO

### Learn from My Mistakes

Let's assume you pay 35% income tax after you total all the city, state, and federal percentages. You're playing tournaments for a living. In the first year you lose \$100,000. No worries. That's why you set aside savings. Your poker bankroll and living expenses are separate. You were prepared for this.

The next year you make \$200,000 playing poker tournaments. Nice! So you're a success now, right? You can tell everyone from high school that you're a professional poker player. \$50,000 a year isn't a ton of money, but it beats flipping burgers, right?

Professional poker players already know where I am going with this. You didn't make \$100,000. You made much less than that.

Your first year you reported a loss, so you paid nothing in taxes.

Your second year, you reported \$200,000 profit. Your tax rate is 35%. You pay \$70,000 in taxes.

So you lost \$100,000 the first year. The second year you made \$200,000, which is a staggering amount that only excellent poker players make. Your profit is \$100,000. You will pay \$70,000 in taxes on it. You are left with \$30,000. That is \$15,000 a year. You're near the federal poverty line in my country with that kind of earnings. And I repeat: You made \$200,000 in one year. You pulled it together. You busted your ass. You turned the ship around. And it was all for nothing.

Of course, people disagree with this kind of taxation, but the govern-



ment is unlikely to change it anytime soon. You need to work around it.

There's a reason I play only 10 to 20 live events per year if I'm lucky. The rest of the year, I'm trying to make an actual profit. Professional poker players rarely have the luxury of having a negative year. Their spouses don't quite understand "my aces got cracked" when their child needs braces.

For that reason, a lot of us play cash games most of the year. We try to find the softest games there are. It's not about playing the most poker. It's about making the most money from the hours invested. If there's one home game that is much better than all the rest don't be surprised to see a poker player disappear into it for two years.

I play a small number of live events once I am in profit for the year. I set myself up so that I can lose in every tournament and not worry about it. I can write off the tournament buy-ins, which means I pay less in taxes. This small tax break gives me more incentive to play. If I'm paying tournament rake, hotel, airfare, and taxes on my tournament cashes then it is difficult to justify most live tournament trips. Your ROI needs to be excellent to beat all that rake. If you get to write off a tournament that doesn't go well, it helps you pay for everything.

Every poker player should work to diversify their portfolio. I love tournaments but you need other ways of making money. Cash games are an excellent way to make money. Satellite tournaments with small fields are incredible. Small field poker tournaments that everyone else is ignoring are money in the bank. Let the big tournaments be a treat you can indulge in once in a while.

## CHAPTER 62

# NOT PAYING YOUR TAXES

### Bad Gamble

While we're on the topic, here's a quick public service announcement for young poker players. This might be the most valuable section of this book.

Pay your taxes. Don't goof off. Don't get on the wrong side of the IRS.

I'll be frank with you: When I was young, I was an idiot. I always wanted to be a poker player, but deep down I never actually expected it would happen. Once I did make some money, I had no idea how to file correctly. When I finally got the correct bills back, it turned out I was behind on my taxes. I struggled for years to get rid of those bills and take care of my family at the same time. Not only was I paying back taxes, but I was also paying taxes on the money I was making to pay my back taxes. The more money I made to pay off my back taxes, the higher my tax rate became. It was tough.

Now things are fine. I'm current with the IRS and I even get to save money for myself. You should learn from my mistakes and never get into the same stressful hole. Everyone makes mistakes. It takes a true genius to learn from someone else's mistake. Be that genius and learn from mine.

I really didn't have it that bad. My tax professionals are great. The USA is very polite with you as long as you're working to make things right. It was just a huge pain in the ass for years and years.

Once you get your taxes filed correctly and you have your returns, it's much easier to get a mortgage. Obviously, no one knows what the future holds, but it's not the worst thing in the world to pay into social security. Many poker players avoid paying any kind of taxes and then are shocked to find out they no longer qualify for social security.

I'm not going to get into personal finance in this book, but many inves-

tors can tell you that leveraging debt will make you money in certain investments. You can't do any of that investing with no credit or reported income. If you call yourself an entrepreneur, you need to have something you can show on paper to potential investors.

If you're renting an apartment as a poker player, it's often difficult to get anyone to give you a lease. Why should they let you rent their flat? You can hear the discussions now: "You rented to a professional gambler? What did you think was going to happen?" It's much easier for them to rent to a young couple with tech jobs. However, if you have your tax returns ready and they're significant, it shows you're responsible. I haven't been turned down for an apartment in years. I got my pick of the litter in New York City and Denver.

Just pay your taxes and don't deal with the stress. You'll make more money because of it. Put all your business purchases on a credit card with points and no annual fee. Pay off every bill immediately. Build a credit score.

No one wants to talk about this, but your taxes are essentially the annual fee you pay to belong to your country. Your childhood years are the free trial. You need to pick a country and pay the fee. You can't live on a yacht in the ocean.

You might think, "I'll travel abroad and avoid paying anything!" That's a great strategy! Almost every country will give you a huge break on your taxes if you live abroad, even the USA. Some won't charge you anything. Just make sure you're aware of the taxation policies in your new country.

In my opinion, even if you stay in your home country and pay the full rate, it's not a big deal. You get what you pay for in many instances. I spent more than a decade outside of the USA. You don't understand what you have until it's gone.

In the United States, I never have to worry about my family members when I leave home. Every time I've had to call the police for anything, they've been there in three to five minutes. I once saw a man get murdered in a Latin American country and the police did nothing when I called. They showed up eventually, sure. But they didn't follow up with me or anything. They didn't care.

Seeing that kind of thing up close makes you rethink where your family lives. I sleep well in this country. I can live with the tax bill.

## CHAPTER 63

# NOT KNOWING WHEN TO HOLD 'EM AND WHEN TO FOLD 'EM

### Let's Put You Back in the Game

You are playing a \$215 buy-in major on a large international poker site. You have 10,549 chips. UTG+2, a solid player, opens to 300 at 75/150 with a 20 ante. It gets folded around to you in the cutoff. You look down at A♦-A♣. You make it 750. Everyone folds back to UTG+2. He calls. He has you covered with 13,881 chips.

The board comes K♦-Q♥-2♦. Your opponent checks to you. You bet 953 into the pot of 1,905. Your opponent calls.

The turn is the 4♦. The board now is 2♦-K♦-Q♥-4♦. Your opponent checks to you again. There is 3,811 in the middle. You bet 1,906.

Your opponent now makes it 4,500. You call.

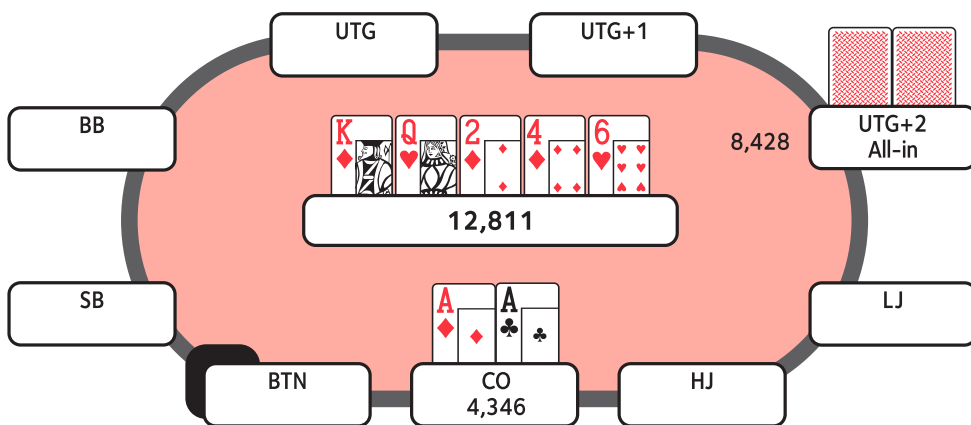
The river is the 6♥. The final board is 2♦-K♦-Q♥-4♦-6♥. Your opponent moves all-in for 8,428. You have 4,346 chips left. What is your move with A♦-A♣? (*Diagram 19*).

Take your time to think through this one. Professional poker players already know the answer. Do you know what it is?

It's not enough to guess the correct answer. You can guess many correct answers in poker. That doesn't mean you will be able to guess the hardest answers.

Do you remember our process for making a big call? This is a big call if you make it.

This is a fold. This is a clear fold. This is an automatic fold. This is such an easy fold you shouldn't even be thinking about it after the hand is through.



**Diagram 19**

“Isn’t that wildly exploitable?” some of you are asking. Sure. If you’re value betting turns a little too thinly, your opponent could turn a number of hands into bluffs. But there are not many players who will do that to you.

Whenever you are considering a big call, ask yourself if he makes this bet with any value combinations you beat. A-Ko? Does he check-raise the turn with A-Ko to jam river? Most players won’t go for that much value with one pair.

Are there any missed draws this player could have? That’s a pretty weird way to play J-10o. Does he even open that pre-flop?

Does he ever do this with an absolute bluff? Just an A♥-7♥ that got angry? That seems far-fetched. That would be out of character for a solid player.

Does he turn a hand into a bluff? Does he ever decide that his queen or 10-10 is no longer good and decides to represent the flush?

“Yes! That’s it!” Many people will say just that. “I’m blocking the nut flush! It’s more likely they turned their hand into a bluff!”

No. If this is a solid player, it is more likely to be J♦-10♦ or 10♦-9♦. Most good tournament players struggle to bluff in these situations. They’re especially wary of doing it when someone has three-bet them so early in the tournament after they have opened from early position.

You can call on the turn. You can river the nut flush. It’s possible he’s goofing off with a small check-raise on the turn. Once you miss on the river and he follows through, it’s a different equation. If you can’t come up with one hand that you beat, you should fold.

When people don’t fold here it is because they are generalizing. Gener-

alizing is how we get through our day-to-day lives. We don't need to know what cars are most likely to run us over. We need to know instead that cars are dangerous to us as pedestrians so we should look both ways before crossing a street.

That's not how poker works. Aces are a great hand most of the time, but there will still be a solid percentage of occasions where the hand is no longer good.

When I used to call on this river, it was out of entitlement. When I was a tight player, I was extremely entitled. If we are being honest with ourselves, most of us play poker because we believe we can outsmart the other players and make money. That means we think we are smarter than other people. Tight players can take this to another level. They can believe that they're more virtuous than these animals who play anything halfway suited or connected.

When I used to get dealt aces as a disciplined player, I would expect to win. I deserved it! I had been waiting for hours! These clowns can win with any piece of shit hand! I deserve to win with the best hand in no limit hold'em!

Of course, this is not how the game works. We don't always get to win at a no limit hold'em table. There are eight opponents at most of our tables and only one of us. The odds are against us. It's not likely that it is going to be our day to shine. It's more likely one of our eight opponents will get the card rush as opposed to us.

Our job is to navigate those days and do the best we can. Anybody can keep winning when they're getting a card rush. It takes a real pro to get his act together after getting shelled at the beginning of a session.

The rail wants action when they see a poker game going on. They want to see you pump in the chips and come back with more. You need to understand the rail is looking for action, but you're supposed to be a technician.

There are times boxers go into a fight and they know from the jump they are the weaker fighter. It is then the job of the boxer to outwit his stronger opponent, stay on the outside, and tag his foe when he leaves openings. Crowds hate these fights, but they're not in the arena. They don't understand fighters are trained killers. The people in the crowd couldn't stand there for 12 rounds in front of a trained killer and stay safe. The weaker fighter is thinking about getting home to his family in one piece with his paycheck and sanity intact. The crowd wants blood. The fighter understands the game. The crowd does not.

When you play poker at a casino or online, you're playing cards with

many fans. They want blood on every deal. They always want to gamble. When they see a pair of aces they are not folding. They came to get into a firefight. They want to win!

That's their right. Poker allows any man or woman to be anyone they want. But you need to be better than the crowd.

The first sign of a weak player is always the inability to fold a good hand. Most people learn in their first few years of poker that pairs are not all that great. Most players never get beyond that. Tournament players can especially struggle because short-stack structures reward getting their money in early and often with decent equity. When these same players are dealing with full stacks, they start facing issues.

Anybody, literally anybody, can get dealt a big hand and not fold. If you go to any small cardroom in any country, that is all you will see. People get dealt big hands, they get raised, they can't fold, they call, they look stupidly at the other player's hand, they shake their head, they show their hand to other players, then they muck. They never stop to ask themselves why this always happens to them.

If you want to quickly figure out who is a winner and who is a loser, figure out who believes they control their life. Some people believe life happens to them. Other people believe they can make something happen.

Obviously, both viewpoints are bullshit. Accidents happen. Bad things happen to good people all the time. We can't control everything in our lives. Some people are given natural advantages that other people are not given. That said, the more useful view to have on life is that you control everything. If you believe that every failure is your fault, you will fight to be better.

Every great player can fold a big hand when it's necessary. Almost always what holds back mediocre regulars is their inability to fold a hand. They feel that life happens to them. They don't feel that they have the right to fold any hand they want at any time.

So much goes in to making a big fold. Public shame is a huge factor. People feel like they're suckers who shouldn't be playing the game when they see a big bluff. If they call with a huge hand that got cracked, no one will blame them. There's no shame. They get to see if they caught a player bluffing. There's the thrill.

There is some research that indicates gambling lovers get dopamine spikes even when they lose. It's like the anticipation before the next big hit. You can read the book *Dopamine Nation* by Anna Lembke if you'd like to learn more.

You need to learn to not fear the embarrassment of taking control of your poker life and possibly not being right.

I tested this theory one time. I had a group of guys I was teaching who were playing \$50 to \$100 tournaments online. They were all solid, but they just couldn't get to that next level.

If you want to make a grown man cry, make him watch all his river calls. So many players call rivers constantly even when it's clear in retrospect that they're beat.

I kept doing it with these guys. They kept bemoaning how bad they played but not fixing it. Finally, I realized they feared the embarrassment of folding a big hand and being wrong. I told them, "Next time you want to fold at any time, do it. Don't even think about it. Do it immediately. Then blame me. Let's see what happens."

Their results skyrocketed. Once they could blame me, they suddenly took control of their game. They got major final tables left and right! Of course, on occasion they folded incorrectly, but they took the shot when they saw it.

When people watch poker, they want to see fireworks. They want big pots. The public doesn't understand the finesse required to be a great poker player. You are defined by the investments you don't take much more than the investments you do.

Anyone can get caught up in a bubble. Any investor can follow the crowd. Poker players follow the bubble of overvalued hands consistently. It takes discipline to go against the crowd and get mocked. That is not easy.

You know when you're beat! How many times do you call on the river and you know you're losing? Why do you do that?! You're better than that!

You don't have to tell anyone what you folded. Keep that to yourself.

I have been spectacularly bluffed more times than I can count. And I don't care. Those pots tend to be smaller in nature. You can't get a person's whole stack with a bluff.

Think of the boxer again. Have you ever seen a fighter fight who had major league power? He doesn't want to overcommit and get rocked. He gets in and gets out until he finds an angle. He's always moving so his opponent can't get a shot on him. He'll get tagged on occasion with glancing shots that hurt, but he's not going to go for broke to protect his honor. The guy got a shot in. Good for him. He respects his opponent.

Until he doesn't. At some point his opponent is going to slip and get cocky. That's when he's going to rock him. Hope you enjoyed your cheap pot shots. Clean yourself off. You're bleeding.



Who cares if a guy gets you for 10 to 30 big blinds? If it's a cash game, you can always reload. If it's a tournament no one can ever fold anyway.

You always have dynamite power in poker. I cannot tell you how many supposedly good poker players will call out of the big blind with any terrible hand and call you down for three streets with any pair. You will rock these people if you keep your distance and don't let your ego get involved. When the opening presents itself, you get in and get your money. Until then, you're not giving them the firefight they want. That's the only chance they have to win! Why would you give them that?

If a guy shows you a bluff, he's letting you know he's a sucker. I haven't shown a bluff in 10 years. You know why? Because I'm always bluffing! I don't want people to start calling me! I want them to keep thinking I hit hands. I'd prefer to rap the table and say, "Good fold." I want people to think I'm a card rack.

A guy who shows you a bluff is reveling in the moment. He has no plans to bluff in the future, because he almost never bluffed in the past. He's telling you your fold was good! He never bluffs! You're not psychic. Unless you had a physical tell, you had to go with his past behavior. The FBI has never done better than "past behavior predicts future behavior" when it comes to violent criminals. How do you expect to be a better profiler than the FBI?

You can't be perfect. Trying to save your honor by protecting yourself against every possible bluff is what the suckers do in every casino on Earth. You're better than that. You believe in yourself. You are a person of conviction. You trust your opinion over others. When the time is right you execute.

Money saved is money earned. When you go to buy groceries, they're not going to turn you down if the money you use came from not calling down with a busted over-pair.

## CHAPTER 64

# PLAYING POORLY WHEN TIRED OR DISTRACTED

### No One Cares How You Feel

No one cares. Work harder.

I had those words said to me more times than I can count. Of course, they're not true. Your friends and family care about how you're doing, but it is also likely they are so busy with their own problems that they can't help.

"No one cares. Work harder," is a filter we can affix upon the world. It's not correct, but it is useful. If we want to change our lives it is going to be on us.

There were occasions in my life where I was taught a great amount about work ethic. Those occasions were when I was playing football and when I was commercial fishing.

Let's be clear about something: I played youth tackle football for 10 years. I wasn't good. I also worked as a commercial fisherman for one season and was not good at it. But the scrub who gets through basic training is still a guy who got through basic training. He can tell you what it was like.

I had a football coach who was truly convinced we were supposed to be doing military drills. The guy would have us doing high knees in full pads endlessly. I would get tired and start slowing down.

That was his moment. He would get an inch from my ear and scream, "FitzHerald! I know you have more than that! What is this? Is this a joke? Get moving!"

And he would keep going. My ear felt as if it was going to start bleeding.

I would do anything to stop that.

To my shock, he was right. A minute previously, I was convinced I had nothing left in the tank. Now it was clear to me I had more. I picked up the pace dramatically.

By the way, yes, he called me FitzHerald for all the years I played for him. I never found out if he was messing with me or if he truly thought that was my name. He was not the kind of guy you could ask that question. His drawl made it hard for me to understand him half the time anyway. I doubt I'd have gotten much of an answer if I had summoned the testicular fortitude to ask one day. He probably would have just made me run more laps.

When I did commercial fishing, I also learned my work ethic wasn't anything to be proud of. I used to have problems with my father, like any teenage son. Much like any parent, I'm sure my father wishes he could have done some things differently with me.

But holy hell. Once I tried commercial fishing for one season, I understood why my father was such a hard ass. You do not know hard work until you do that job. Sweet Jesus. I can't believe my father ever had enough energy to speak, much less do anything else.

When you work as a commercial fisherman, you are a contractor. You are hired to do a job. You get paid a percentage of the profits. My skipper was a good guy because he dealt with my stupid ass for an entire season without killing me. He also picked up my meals and equipment without asking me to pay him back. I couldn't have asked for a better guy to give me a job.

That said, when my captain needed something done on the boat, there were no coffee breaks. When the government said we could fish, we fished. We fished until we couldn't fish anymore. You got paid for how much you brought in. You don't get paid by the hour. No one is paying your salary when you take time off. You're losing money.

When the getting was good, we would literally work 100+ hour weeks. We didn't take a day off for months. This was also summertime in Alaska. The sun doesn't exactly go down at that time of year in that part of the world.

I have never been that delirious, either before or since. I am glad I was so dumb back then that I didn't realize how tired I was. I have no idea how I didn't seriously injure myself.

There were times I felt too tired to continue. Then our captain was screaming, "Go! Go! Go! You have three minutes!" and magically you had more energy again. Because once again this was not exactly a guy you wanted to cross.

As I've gotten older, I've thought that I should have paid both these men to take me on. I lived in New York City for a few years recently. The great thing about that city is you get to find your exact tribe. I found the friends I gelled with most were former military, first responders, doctors, and MMA fighters. They were eccentric as all hell. I loved it.

I found after a certain period of time that you can clearly understand when someone has been through something that pushed them to the limit. They have a quiet confidence about themselves that will never go away. Oddly, I found many MMA fighters to be some of the nicest guys I ever met. They hated fights outside of the cage. They didn't need to prove anything to anyone.

Whether it's mandatory military service you go through to remain in South Korea, or your residency in med school, the lesson is the same. You always have another gear. Unless you drop dead, there is always more in the tank. You can always rely on yourself and your freak gear to get through whatever comes. You can sleep well at night knowing you truly know yourself.

There are going to be many times you are tired at the poker table. Some of the best games take place early in the morning after everyone is liquored up. My record longest session was 49 hours. I once played in Las Vegas for 15 hours straight without making more than \$700. But in the 16th hour, I ran up more than \$20,000. You never know when the tide is going to turn.

If you want to get to know yourself, you will need to embrace the pain. This is your moment to find out what you're made of. You will know who you are after putting in the real hours. Playing tired is a skill. Everyone has to deal with it.

How do you play tired and not go bust?

Keep your head clear. A beer will slow you down.

Keep hydrated. I've run this drill hundreds of times. Hydration seems to be the biggest deciding factor in keeping ahead of the game. Down water religiously.

Buy the PediaLyte electrolyte solution for adults. In my experience, the more horrible it tastes, the more effective it is.

Stick to black coffee or tea. All the added sugars and artificial sweeteners that come with energy drinks and lattes eventually create a spike and a crash. A crash late at night when the game is not breaking is awful.

Don't sip an espresso until you need one. That's your turbo shot. If you think you have multiple guys ready to crack and you're fading fast, go to the espresso shot. There will be a crash, but most likely the witching hour is at

hand. You need to take the risk.

Bring a sack of almonds. If you're feeling ambitious, put avocado slices in a Tupperware. Those energy bars all have hidden sugar. That will cause a crash.

That will keep you sane in the early morning hours. That will keep your head on straight on day four or five of a tournament.

Now let's discuss the actual poker play.

A very basic player can make real money during these fatigued hours. My career is testament to this.

All you have to do is not crack. Most other guys will crack. You need to be the guy who doesn't.

Think of the hand before you do anything. Imagine the hand as if you were seeing it in a hand history replayer. Get a bird's eye view of the table in your mind. What would you do if you saw this hand in a training session? Do that.

DO NOT get creative. No cowboy shit. Stick to the plan. Your exhaustion is playing with your mind. NO big calls unless you have excellent evidence. NO big bluffs unless you know the player incredibly well. Stick to the fundamentals. Focus. Wait them out. Don't crack.

It will happen sooner or later. One of your opponents will crack when you have something. This generally comes in the form of big calls they can't justify. They like their hand and they're done folding. They've been waiting around for hours and hours for a big pot. They haven't had one. They're going to force it now. They're tired. They're not built like you. They don't have it. Deep down they know that. They're going to throw the Hail Mary and pray. That's all they have.

Your job is to wait until they give up. Your job is to recognize top pair with a second kicker is good enough for the kill shot in this moment.

You should love these moments. You should love how tired you are. That's how you know how bad all your opponents are feeling. It's not hurting you. It is hurting them. You're too in love with the game for any of that. You love watching grown men give up. You love knowing they aren't you.

Your job is to take care of your health away from the table so that you are ready for these moments. It doesn't take much. Eat clean. Don't drink your calories. Practice good sleep hygiene. No candy or fried food. Moderate weightlifting and cardio. All of this will put you ahead of the crowd.

This is how you get through distractions. There will always be something playing with your mind at the poker table. You'll have fights with your spouse.

You'll have problems with money. You will have family members who are sick. There will be drama. The bullshit never stops, but you can never stop for it.

You don't want to be soft. If someone calls you soft or emotional, you want to be confused. You want to have no idea what they're talking about. You need to earn that within yourself.

The actual act of playing poker should be relaxing. Training should be hard. You won't crack if you know your game like the back of your hand. If you practice every day for years until you can't get it wrong, you will trust yourself in these harder moments.

If you make it to the end of a session without cracking, that is a huge win. Most people don't have that in them. The more you do that, the more you will know you've got what it takes to play this game for serious money.

## CHAPTER 65

# NOT LAUGHING AT YOUR OPPONENTS

### Let's Take It Further

I want you to imagine this scenario. You just walked out of a bar. You are talking to your friends and don't notice who is ahead of you. You knock into a guy having a smoke. He falls into a puddle and messes up his expensive leather jacket. He stands up immediately and yells at you. "Asshole!" He walks up to you and shoves you. He jams his finger into your face.

You walk up to him and ask, "What the hell is your problem? It was clearly an accident. Look, let's solve this like adults."

Out of nowhere, he swings at you. You somehow back up and he misses your jaw. Running on pure fear and adrenaline, you throw the most hellacious right hand of your entire life. You can feel this asshole's jaw break as you connect with him. He falls like a rag doll. You got him!

His head pops up while lying on the ground. He stares at you like he's been waiting for this moment his entire life. Blood is running down his slack jaw. He laughs. He stands up. "It's on now," he mumbles.

How terrified are you at that moment? Are you feeling good about the next five minutes?

But you're the one who connected first! How did he do that to you? How are you afraid now when you have the upper hand?

If this sounds ridiculous to you, it shouldn't. Any fan of fight sports can tell you it happens all the time. One of the craziest moments of my young life was watching Evander Holyfield hit George Foreman with a shot that

would have sent any mortal man to hell. Instead, Foreman's head snapped back instantly. He glared and started marching forward. Holyfield made the smartest move of all time and started running like hell.

How does this apply to you? You can do the same thing when you play poker.

If a guy gets you for a huge pot, just laugh. You don't need to talk to the person. Then you might get into a game of Fantasy Poker as Tommy Angelo calls it. "Did you have X? I could have had Y." And on and on until blood shoots from all our noses from boredom.

No. Rap the table gently and say, "Nice hand." You need to show you're unperturbed.

I always make the same move when I feel like talking. You can get the same mental advantage by just not looking like you care. If you're gambling responsibly, like an adult, and treating this tournament like a concert ticket, you should know the money is already gone. Half the fun is how you never know how any poker day is going to go. You should be relaxed.

But if you need to sell it a little more, get into an authentic conversation with the dealer. Relax your shoulders. Ask the dealer how they're doing. Ask follow-up questions. Laugh and let the tension out if they make a joke. Breathe deeply into your gut and let it out slowly. Relax.

Dealers get treated terribly all the time. Almost all of them welcome a player who treats them like a human being. If you consistently talk to the dealer but not the other players, it allows you to keep a distance from your opponents if that's important to you. It is to me. Most dealers will be quiet during the hands, even if they want to be chatterboxes. Other players might not extend you the same courtesy if you want to get back to focusing. Even if you do get a chatty dealer, they will have to change tables soon enough.

If you want to get to a zen level most will never reach, pat a guy on the back when they bluff you. Laugh and say, "Nice bet" and genuinely mean it. This was super hard for me to do for the first decade of my poker career. Once I started noticing how much more fun my poker days were compared with my business days, I cut out my entitlement. My poker days are always exciting because the other players are so unpredictable. I love it.

I recently played a hand in Florida against a player who sounded like he wandered in right off the bayou. The guy ran a suicidal all-in bluff, and I thought there was no way he had it in him to run the play with a missed draw. I folded and he showed me the bluff. I'm not sure what possessed me, but I laughed and clapped him on the back. He smiled wide. You could tell he had



a memory to go home with. It defused the entire situation. I was able to get some key folds later. I didn't seem like a wounded lamb everyone could hunt. They remained cautious when I entered a pot.

Obviously, it's impossible to keep a good attitude all the time, especially when a guy is being a real asshole. But the funniest thing is if you can laugh at those guys and say, "You emotional?" they're the ones who get pissed off the most. They're used to getting their way. They want attention. A player who doesn't care about them is the last thing they want.

You can feel this kind of peace at the table by playing the games that are appropriate for you. What is the lowest buy-in level you can stand? You should play a great deal at one level below that. Every time I have done that, I have made money hand over fist. I have even forgotten to check my cashier page for entire months because the swings mean so little to me. It's amazing how many times you'll love the game at that level and open the cashier after a month only to see huge profits.

You don't want to be one of the guys staking their life and masculinity on a poker tournament. It's far more intimidating to look like the person who is taking it seriously but having a great time. You can't beat that person.

## CHAPTER 66

# NOT WANTING TO BE WRONG MUCH OF THE TIME

### Another Quiz for You

You have 20 big blinds. You are deep in a major live tournament in Oklahoma. Lojack also has almost exactly 20 big blinds. She opens to two big blinds. You've been playing with her the last couple of days. She's tricky. She's hard to play against.

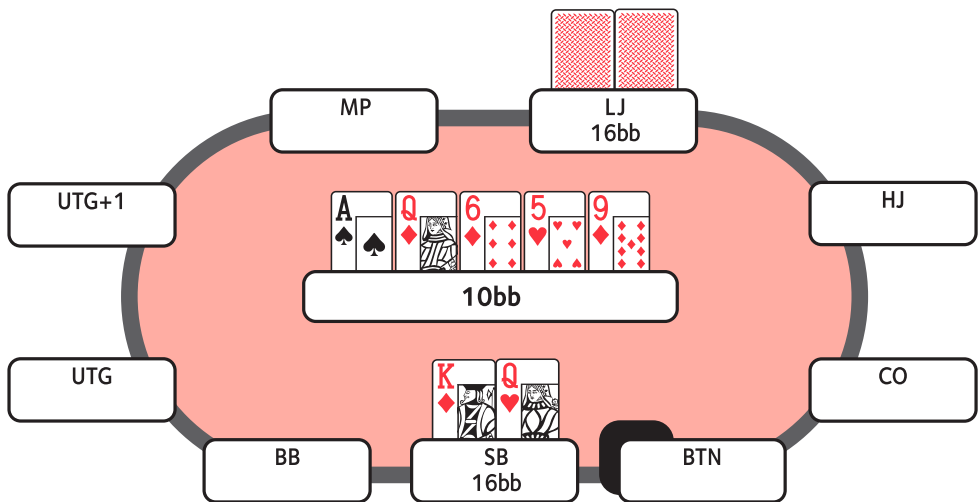
You look down at your hand in the small blind.  $K\heartsuit-Q\heartsuit$ . You don't think the lojack opens enough to warrant an all-in pre-flop, but you do know that big cards play extremely well in short-stack situations. With 10-20 big blinds, it's hard to make a mistake after you flop a great top pair, assuming you get the money in. It's the suited and connected hands that get you in trouble. You have no implied odds when you hit your flush or straight, but you'll make a ton of garbage pairs that will give you trouble post-flop.

You call from the small blind. The big blind folds. The board comes  $A\spadesuit-Q\heartsuit-6\heartsuit$ . You check. Your opponent bets two big blinds into a six big blind pot. You call.

The turn is the  $5\heartsuit$ . The board now is  $A\spadesuit-Q\heartsuit-6\heartsuit-5\heartsuit$ . You check again.

She checks back instantly. The river is the  $9\heartsuit$ . The board is now  $A\spadesuit-Q\heartsuit-6\heartsuit-5\heartsuit-9\heartsuit$ . You have  $K\heartsuit-Q\heartsuit$ . The pot is 10 big blinds. You have 16 big blinds in your stack. She has roughly the same amount. What is your plan?

You check. She goes to her stack immediately and fires out 6.6 big blinds. It's on you. What do you want to do here? What are you basing your decision on? (*Diagram 20*).



**Diagram 20**

Were you paying attention to her early in the day? Was she discussing what kind of poker games she normally plays? Poker players always want to discuss how high they play. I don't know why they do that. It gives away a ton of information.

Let's say she's a good cash game player. She travels the circuit to play the side games. She's done well over the years. What do you do then?

In that case, you need to call. You're going to be wrong a large percentage of the time, but you don't have a choice.

Do you know how often you need to be right here to make a call? You are going to need to eyeball these bets when you play live. This should be off the top of your head.

When she bets 2/3 pot, her bet needs to work 40% of the time as a complete bluff. That means you need to defend 60% of the time to make sure she can't bluff you with any two cards. That is a lot of calling!

You will be calling 6.6 big blinds. When you are right, you will get your 6.6 big blinds back plus the 16.6 big blinds already in the pot. 16.6 plus 6.6 is 23.2. You will be risking 6.6 big blinds to win 23.2. 6.6 divided by 23.2 is 0.2845. You need to be right here 28.45% of the time.

Of course, it's difficult to do this math at the table. This bet isn't exactly 2/3 the size of the pot, but it's close enough for you to estimate. If you memorize how often you need to be right when calling every normal-sized bet, you'll be close to accurate here in the field.

When you're playing you should memorize these numbers:

- ◆ You need 16% equity to call a 25% pot sized bet.
- ◆ You need 20% equity to call a 33% pot sized bet.
- ◆ You need 25% equity to call a 50% pot sized bet.
- ◆ You need 28% equity to call a 66% pot sized bet.
- ◆ You need 30% equity to call a 75% pot sized bet.
- ◆ You need 33% equity to call a 100% pot sized bet.
- ◆ You need 37.5% equity to call a 150% pot sized bet.
- ◆ You need 40% equity to call a 200% pot sized bet.

Notice how you can be wrong most of the time and still call a bet of two times the size of the pot!

Let's put those numbers in practical terms. If you call in the hand above, you need to be right three times out of 10. You can call and be shown a winner seven times out of 10. It doesn't matter. You still need to call.

Do you think she is bluffing more than three times out of 10? If she is tricky, she has a great reason to turn pocket pairs and missed big cards/connectors into bluffs on this river. You're calling off a lot of your short stack. That makes many players squeamish. A flush draw just came in. You checked this river instead of leading. This means you most likely do not have the flush or a weaker ace. You have more or less told your opponent you have a queen at best. It is difficult for a range as weak as yours to call on this river versus such a large bet.

Should you fold versus normal recreational opponents and unimaginative regulars? Yes. Most players are not capable of turning 7-7 into a bluff here, for instance. You're not going to catch a bluff 1/3 of the time. You will be lucky to catch a bluff 10% of the time.

Why? This is a bluff that gets picked off often. Even if we hero call here half the time, however, our opponent is still making money.

It should also be noted that we have the king of diamonds in our hand. That makes it less likely our opponent backdoored a flush.

This hand is an excellent example of when you need to take certain actions in poker even if they will fail a large percentage of the time. Our opponent has to bluff versus our weak range, even if she knows it will fail a decent percentage of the time. Why? It's still more likely than not to succeed the 40% of the time it needs to succeed.

We also need to call versus any player who can turn a hand into a bluff because it's such an obvious spot for them to bluff. Our range looks awful. Our stack is compromised. Many people in our spot will not call.

And that brings us to our discussion. This is the balancing act and the art of poker. When do you call here? That will make or break your career.

When I play in soft games, I don't think about calling here. Most of my opponents are incapable of turning a hand into a bluff on this river. If they suddenly found their guts on this one occasion, they can take the pot. There is no way I will call here and be right 28% of the time.

When you play higher stakes games, you don't want to get in the habit of always folding in this spot or you will be eaten alive. You need to take your time and ask yourself if this is the kind of opponent who forces you to call.

This is another reason it's so important to have poker coaches. You don't want to be the only one who doesn't know your weaknesses. One of my poker coaches identified my leak in this situation. I don't call enough in these spots. Muscle memory is a thing. Habits die hard. In my normal games, I have a good habit of never giving unimaginative regulars credit for a bluff. The statistics we can collect support my hypothesis that most players call too much and don't bet or fold enough. That said, that same good habit for soft games can kill you in higher stakes games.

Whenever you are in a close situation it is important to combine everything you know. You need to know how often you need to be right when you make certain calls and bets. You need to know what your range looks like, good or bad. You need to know if you're blocking any of your opponent's hands. You need to know if you have a bias that could be clouding your vision. Take your time. Ask the other players at your table for a few seconds if you need to. They will usually be accommodating.

If anyone ever chortles or gives you a disparaging look after you make a bet that fails or you make a bad call, ask them, "How often did I have to be right there? Mathematically. What percentage of the time?" Nine times out of 10 they will have no idea. Give them a big smile and say, "You can't give me a hard time when you didn't know that, can you?"

Or you can do what I do and just ignore it. The punters never understand what's going on at any table. There's a lot of Monday morning quarterbacking. There are not many true quarterbacks. Let them keep thinking they know what is going on. Don't be embarrassed. This is your game. Very few players will study and practice the way you are doing right now. You will succeed if you stick to the plan and keep practicing. They can't drag you down.

## CHAPTER 67

# NOT VALUING MENTAL TRAINING

### Your Mind Plays with You

As you can imagine, playing tougher games plays with your head. No human is immune to the neurological chemicals that secrete in our mind when we win or lose money. The human mind was not created to gamble large sums continuously. It can go haywire during the process.

There will be weeks, months, and years where you will be playing hands like the one we discussed in the last chapter. You will be able to argue for different plays. You might start folding too much because it feels like you're always wrong when you make a river call. You might start desperately calling too often because you imagine that everyone is always bluffing you. It's one of the reasons you need proven poker coaches you can trust. It's also why you need mental coaches.

No one is immune to tilt and worry. A friend of mine has taught me a ton about tournament poker. He has made millions in profit from the game. He has also had more \$100,000+ downswings than he can count. All the downswings take months to deal with.

My friend has told me it never gets easier to deal with those kinds of swings. It always plays with his mind. He's had years where nothing seems to go right.

I had two years in my career where I lost \$100,000+ and then I won a major to make it all back and then some. Each time it happened everyone said, "I knew you had it in you." Each time someone said that I wanted to say,

“Sure, buddy. You haven’t been around for months but now here you are. I’m sure you always believed in me.”

No one supports you when you’re on a downswing. You shouldn’t tell anyone about it because nobody cares. Your family will think they are being helpful by telling you to quit. To be fair to them, it seems like you’re always in pain and it’s costing you money to continue.

There will always be people in your camp who wish they had been getting your previous results. They might have always perceived you as lucky. They might secretly be glad that you’re finally going through a downswing.

This is when many poker players lose their careers. They have no one to talk to. No one believes in them. The tourists in this game will shit talk you if you haven’t had a result in the last seven months. That’s how losers get to feel better about themselves.

When poker players are in this spiral of negativity with no one to talk to, they get morose. They steal money out of frustration and desperation. This gets them blackballed. Some start drinking to cope. Others start fighting with their spouse more often. Some are less present with their children. The list goes on.

This is when mental health professionals and mental coaches come in. There’s a reason every baseball team in the MLB has sports psychologists now. It’s a huge part of the game, and you need someone to help you with it.

I’ve already mentioned Tricia Cardner. She turned my career around and I recommend listening to and reading everything she has released. I also enjoyed *Ninety Percent Mental*, by Bob Tewksbury and Scott Miller, and *How Champions Think*, by Bob Rotella. Jared Tendler’s work is also excellent. You can’t go wrong starting with these experts.

Personal attention from a mental coach is more expensive but it is worth it, especially if you’re playing for big money. I cannot tell you how many times a mental coach reframed something for me in a way that helped me see the world more clearly.

There was a time I felt my career was going to be over. My mother had a stroke. She wasn’t doing well. She ended up living with me for a couple years so I could take care of her. At the same time, I was going through a divorce. To make matters worse, I was also going through a downswing.

Obviously, this was a ton of pressure. More importantly, this is a specialized situation. Poker player friends weren’t going to understand any of this. This is also a competitive industry. I’d be naive if I believed some of my opponents wouldn’t delight to hear of my misfortune.

I needed professional help. That's where Tricia Cardner and John Wood came in. They got me through that awful situation. I wouldn't be writing this book if it weren't for them. It's amazing how much trained professionals can hear in your situation that you're not picking up. They kept giving me angles I wasn't considering. They kept revealing my blind spots. More importantly, they gave me people to be accountable to. I couldn't just stop playing for three weeks because I was down. I'd have to explain to them that I wasn't working out or playing. I'd have to explain why I wasn't placing one foot in front of the other.

There's a happy ending to the story. My mother is doing much better now and is living on her own again. I still fly her out to visit me most years. I'm making money at poker again. I am in much better health than I was back then. I owe much of that to my mental coaches.

I wish I could share more about mental training but, honestly, I'm not qualified. Read those books I recommended to get a better overview.

The one piece of advice I can offer regards meditation. A stupidly large number of successful people I know have some sort of meditation practice. I meditated for years but had a hard time keeping up the habit.

What I eventually learned was that you don't necessarily need to sit down and close your eyes to meditate. That certainly is a potent form of meditation, but you can also meditate just by walking through a park with your coffee without your headphones in.

You know why you get all your best ideas in the shower? That's the only place you don't have your cellphone. Let yourself go for a walk. The goal isn't to empty your mind. The goal is to observe what your mind is thinking and why. The goal is to breathe deeply and slow down. Let your brain think about whatever it wants. You'll be amazed at the solutions that jump out.



## CHAPTER 68

# GETTING EMOTIONAL WHEN YOU PLAY

### My Mental Training

There is one form of mental training I can help you with.

Do you want to play poker without having your emotions influence you? That's impossible. Asking your mind to stop thinking is akin to asking your heart to stop beating. That's why "emptying your mind" during meditation is so difficult. You're only able to observe your thoughts at a distance. You're never able to empty your mind of everything.

Most people have this misconception. They think that their thoughts create their mood. They think they had a depressing thought and that made them depressed. That can be true, but what is far more likely is that their mood is creating their thoughts. They have it backwards. How is your mood generated? Your mood is generated by your physical health. Pain is your body's signal that something is wrong. Pain is used to spur you to action. If you're experiencing pain, it is probably a signal that you need to change something.

Any time you are feeling fatigued, sad, or angry ask yourself what your diet, sleep, and exercise has been like over the past 24 hours. Scott Adams discusses this in his book *How To Fail At Almost Everything And Still Win Big*. As soon as I started tracking my diet, exercise, and sleep I noticed he was right. Nearly 100% of the time I didn't feel well it came after I interrupted my sleep, diet, and exercise in an unhealthy way.

My poker play improved dramatically after I religiously followed systems for my sleep, diet, and exercise. My ROI and win rates went up around 20%.

Of course, even if I give you that number, no one wants to hear about sleep, diet, and exercise. It's boring to control those three factors. People want to stay up late, eat junk food, and skip the gym the next day. They have a truckload of excuses for doing just that. "I'm super busy right now" or "I'm stressed" or "I'm starting next month" or whatever.

If you can control those three factors and quit giving yourself excuses, you will be much more successful at this game.

A coach once told me, "The first sign of a loser is an excuse." He'd say it every time we had an excuse for something. That phrase still grates through my mind every time I'm giving myself some bullshit out. That's neural programming. You can program yourself that way too.

People say those motivational videos on YouTube are bullshit, but that's not true. Robert Cialdini in *Pre-Suasion* demonstrated that motivational materials spur people to try harder. Nobody truly believes that but are we right? Has anyone ever in the history of man watched reality TV all night and not felt terrible? You're telling me media has no effect on you? Sure.

Control the intangibles as much as you can. It might be the only edge you can get on your competition. Once you get your sleep, exercise, and diet together your mind will be calibrated and ready to play cards. If you're still depressed after handling those three factors for two or three weeks, you should consult a doctor. There's no shame in that. The psychiatric medications I got from my doctor completely turned my life around.

Handle your diet, exercise, and sleep. Make sure to consume the right materials to program your mind. Don't feed your brain junk food through gossip forums and TV news. Focus on the task at hand.

Now, when you play poker, how do you keep yourself from letting your emotions overrun you and make you play horribly?

Simple. Get a friend who is willing to tear you apart when you need it.

I have exactly one system I use when I play cards. I report every hand to someone. I record every hand. I go over the hands with my coaches. I create presentations for my students. I never keep a hand private. I always get as many eyes as possible on them.

It's taken me a long time to find poker coaches I trust, but now that I have them my play has improved dramatically.

Most of us know how to play winning poker. You fold when you know you're beat, you play good hands, and you play aggressively. The problem is most of us, me included, get bored and entitled. We play hands out of spite. We call out of frustration. We never behave like a supercomputer.

I had an issue with a poker playing simulation I was using recently. My friend had rigged up bots designed to behave like bad \$1/\$2 players. The problem was the AI was still too smart. My students kept raising huge amounts pre-flop with their premiums after half the table limped in. The bots kept folding to these raises. This never happens in real life. At some point some guy drinking a Bud Light always says, "Fuck this guy" and calls the 15x raise out of position. To my frustration, however, we couldn't make the bots do that in this isolated setting. The dumbest AI on Earth seemingly could see that calling 15 big blinds out of position after capping its range with a limp was a bad idea, but the normal humans wanted to see if their 6-8s hit the flop, damn it.

The most fascinating thing about humans is that if you interviewed that player after he limp-called 15 big blinds with eight-high, he'd always have a perfectly logical reason for why he did it. "I saw him do this when he raised. I thought he was weak," or whatever it was. They'll never say, "I had a few beers in me and I wanted to gamble." I love people who say the latter because they're so real and rare.

Any researcher will tell you we are not rational beings. We are rationalizing beings. There is no evidence we make our decisions based on logic. If common sense was truly common we would agree on everything.

Your brain is a broken soggy computer and you need to rig the damn thing up to work. The way you do that is by finding a coach or friend you can process all your messy hands with. If you want to take this further, record every hand and send it to an analyst. Let them pummel you.

This is proven to improve decision making. Again, Jonathan Haidt's *The Righteous Mind* deals with this. The researchers and writers in that book discuss how test subjects made better decisions when they were told their decisions were going to be analyzed by their peers after they were done with the experiment. You can replicate the same thing in your play.

This process has been valuable to me. I have an emotional reaction now whenever I want to make a bad call or bluff bet. I can hear my coaches and friends as we have our inevitable future conversation. "What are you doing here?" I start trying to justify my play to them in my mind. When I realize I have no good reason to do what I'm doing I just check or fold. My poker play has simultaneously become more boring and more profitable during this time.

Don't get tunnel vision. Hire poker coaches or find poker coaches who disagree with you. I'm an exploitative player who focuses on soft games. I hired multiple high stakes GTO coaches. You need to know what you don't know. Get used to being wrong and enjoying it.

## CHAPTER 69

# NOT WANTING TO ADMIT YOU ARE WRONG OR DON'T KNOW

### Where the Profit Lies

It's easy to spot who is going to be good at poker.

This isn't a foolproof process but it's amazing how often it works. Look for a guy or gal who loves working on their game. Look for someone who seems to want to play even when things aren't going their way. Look for a track record. Who has been coming back again and again for years?

Winners tend to believe they can change their destiny through hard work. Losers believe the cards just happen to them. They don't believe they have control over their situation.

If you can find someone who enjoys working on their game even when things are going poorly and has been coming back for more for years, then you'll almost always find a winner.

There's one other component that sends most of these players into the winner's circle: If you can find someone who enjoys being wrong, you'll likely find a winner. It's a rare trait.

If you find a player who loves to say, "I don't know that. Teach me," you'll likely find a winner.

I didn't know this when I was younger but being wrong is extremely valuable. Being able to say "I don't know" is extremely valuable. There was a time in my poker career where I wasn't sure what I was doing wrong. I kept losing. Every day I grew more worried. When I finally found a coach who could come in and say, "You're wrong about this and this. You also don't know how to do

this," it was one of the best days of my life. It was akin to a doctor diagnosing an illness and prescribing medication.

People are always surprised that poker coaches need coaches themselves. All professional poker players need coaches. Even Kobe had coaches helping him when he was shooting in the gym. None of us are immune from making mistakes and having blind spots. That's why the best of us have so many specialists on hand.

There are many poker players who can't say, "I don't know how to do that." They're more concerned with how they look to others than making money. This is a bad sign, as you can imagine.

There are many other poker players who never want to be wrong. They'll never admit to you that they played a hand badly.

This is why the education system is so flawed. True education is learning through trial and error. Humans are emotional creatures. They will often correct their behavior when they have an emotionally charged memory that resulted from trying and failing. That's how many of us learn, but the education system isn't built that way. I don't know how other education systems are built, but in the United States we were taught that smart children never need help with anything. The teachers loved how the smart kids made them look good, so they always excused them from work. This sends an awful message that successful people never have to work hard. Additionally, if someone made a mistake the education system pounced on them. They said that was wrong and would exclude them from good colleges and opportunities. This teaches children that they should never mess up.

I've had this exchange with plenty of my students. "I can't ever win a flip deep in the tournament," they say.

"Why do you need to win a flip deep in a tournament?" I ask. "Every time I see you at the beginning of an event, you're on your phone not paying attention. You're probably missing opportunities to make real money."

As you can imagine, when someone is looking for sympathy, they don't exactly like hearing this. But what is more likely to get results? Should we all join the pity party or should we get to work?

Everyone in my group of friends knew that Faraz Jaka was going to blow up. If you ever gave him a note to work on, he'd always take it if he felt it had merit. One time I teased him about being on his cellphone and he immediately changed course. He thanked me for saying something. He wanted to win no matter what. If he felt you were genuinely trying to help, he'd always hear you out.

People say, “Your ego is not your amigo.” I disagree. In his book *Loser-think*, Scott Adams describes how you need to turn your ego up and down like a dial. When you’re at the table, it’s fine to let people be afraid of you. Of course, you should be kind. But it’s even better if you can carry yourself in a fashion that facilitates good play.

Before last year’s WSOP, I had been hitting the gym hard. I broadened out quite a bit. When I sat down at a table, I made sure to sit up straight, wear a fitted Henley, not talk to anybody, and carry myself well. This is somewhat egotistical but if I sat there like a wounded dog while wearing one of my baggy old metal shirts, I highly doubt my bluffs would have worked as well. You want to look like someone people don’t want to deal with.

In your private life, of course, you want to be more humble. At a party, you want to be asking other people questions and allowing them to talk. When you’re studying poker, you should turn your ego all the way down. You can’t learn anything when you’re talking unless you’re allowing someone to check your work. Every time someone corrects you on something or fills a gap in your knowledge with evidence and data, they’re putting money directly in your pocket. Scoop it all up.

## CHAPTER 70

# FINDING FRIENDS WHO DON'T CHALLENGE YOU

### Build Your Football Team

Most smart people grow up doing everything on their own. They don't need help in school. Everything comes so easy to them. They get into a good college and continue to succeed. They would consider it weak to ask for help or to seek a study partner.

The real world doesn't work that way. If you get into business and try to do everything on your own, you will fall behind. I'll be hiring new people on my side of the field until I have my own football team. When we line up on the line of scrimmage, the Cincinnati Bengals and I are going to run over your solitary ass because you had to do everything your own way.

Notice how none of us will have to be that good to run you over. You could be the toughest guy on Earth, but if there are 11 of us and one of you, you're getting run over. And in the real world there is no cap on the number of players I can put on the field. Fifty of us can stand on that line and go against you.

Last night, I was at a 1-year-old's birthday party. One of my longtime friends in poker is the father. We had a great time letting the 1-year-old bash the hell out of his cake. Later, my buddy and I talked shop. He went ahead and disputed about 10 or so things I said in open conversation. Most people would find this annoying. Some people would find this rude, especially since I was the guest. I have a different opinion. This is precisely why I have been friends with this person for over a decade. He's always willing to tell me when

I'm wrong. He's fixed so many aspects of my poker game that I've lost count.

You need people in your life who will work with you. None of us is perfect. We all have blind spots.

Of course, it's human to not want to be told we're wrong. I'm no different. Whenever I go work out my girlfriend can always find fault with my form. She was a personal trainer before and very good at what she did. I am not a coordinated guy. There is always something I could improve upon. Some days I'm tired and I know my form isn't perfect, but it is safe. On those days I want to say, "Leave me alone!" but I don't. I need her to correct me so I never get injured.

I started making four times my previous salary as soon as I started making sure I was always the dumbest person in the room. I spent a lot of money to get into a private gym in Manhattan so I could be surrounded by millionaires who knew tons more than me. It was worth every cent. I got a real-world education listening to those folks talk. I would have never gotten this education at a university. To my surprise, they were always willing to answer my stupid questions.

The dumbest thing I could have said in any of those situations was, "That's just your opinion, man." These guys understood the law, Amazon, the tax system, medicine, business ownership, IT, real estate, health, fitness, and a hundred other things more fully than I did. I would have been a fool wasting my time telling them what I thought and not hearing their opinion.

We all have people in our lives who refuse to admit when they're wrong or do not know something. We all have people in our lives who won't take good advice. We will have succeeded at something they want to get better at, but they won't listen to us. We need to make sure we don't become these people in a more minor way. This is why assembling your own football team is so important.

The best way to get people in your life who will push you higher is to find people who engage in exploratory thinking.

If you listen to conversations between people, you'll notice they break down into certain groups. Some people like to discuss people. This typically comes in the form of gossip or political conversations. "How could these people believe this?" Other people like to discuss ideas. It's rare to hear people who like to discuss people easily switch to a conversation about ideas. However, the reverse is not true. People who prefer to discuss ideas can discuss people. They just tend not to.

There's also confirmatory thinking and exploratory thinking. Confirmatory-



ry conversations come in the form of people just confirming what each other think. I used to lose my mind at some parties in Manhattan, where some of the upper crust just used conversation as an exercise in confirming each other's superiority. If someone said something that was blatantly untrue but socially popular, I'd want to say, "The data doesn't support that." I read data all day for my job. It's a hobby of mine. I take lessons in reading data. I'm not great with it, but I can tell when someone is off. But do you think people like it when you disprove something they just said? Of course not.

If you've ever been in one of these conversations, you know how draining it can be. A friend of mine likes to call these conversations "guess my opinion" exercises. You're not even supposed to be there to enjoy yourself. You're purely there to help another person feel great about themselves. I got asked a question at one of these parties and wanted to respond, "I'm afraid to answer. I didn't read *Pravda* this morning. What is the opinion we're supposed to have on this issue now? It changes every other week. I can't keep up."

Before you go thinking I'm making a political statement, let me assure you I'm not. I can typically see both sides of an issue, which gains me zero friends in this country. Everyone wants me to join their team so we can get into a dopamine-inducing confirmatory thinking exercise. I'm not about that. My family members on the other side of the political spectrum typically find me to be dull entertainment as well.

We have probably all been in this type of draining conversation – and wanted out. The topic can be family issues, health, politics, or anything where someone is just seeking confirmation. No one wants to hear, "I'm not so sure that thing you're staking your money or quality of life on is a sure bet."

What is truly rare is to find people who want to engage in exploratory thinking. Exploratory thinking is where you trade ideas and test the validity of the ideas you are trading. You want your conversation partner to punch holes in your arguments so you don't waste time and money defending those arguments later in your life. You're acting as each other's coach.

It's like the advertisement for *System* magazine from 1917: "You have a dollar. I have a dollar. We swap. Now you have my dollar. We are no better off. You have an idea. I have an idea. We swap. Now you have two ideas. And I have two ideas. That's the difference. There is another difference. A dollar does only so much work. It buys so many potatoes and no more. But an idea that fits your business may keep you in potatoes all your life. It may, incidentally, build you a palace to eat them in!"

I have had friends expose one of my blind spots and double my income. I've had professionals in other fields save me from career-altering mistakes. All it took was a willingness from me to listen.

It's so interesting how humans don't want to receive advice. It's as if we're revealing our lack of genetic fitness. No tribe will keep us! We'll be ostracized and left for dead!

But the way this world works is it's like taking a test at school. Except in this test, you're allowed to look at your friend's paper and copy his answers.

We should always be asking ourselves this: Who is the best kid in this classroom on this subject? Quick! Let's get around her table and copy! Wait. She might be wrong on this one. Let's ask her how she got to that answer. We can all figure this out together.

# CHAPTER 71

## NOT TAKING NOTES ON YOUR CELLPHONE

### How To Pay Great Attention

In a previous section, we discussed how good friends in poker call you out when you're not paying attention at the table. Usually, we are not paying attention at the poker table because we are on our cellphone. Let's face it. Poker can be slow. It's too easy to get on your phone and check your fantasy league, stocks, crypto, forums, Twitter, whatever.

I can remember playing poker before cellphones. People back then listened to iPods if they were real ballers. The Beats headphones became a big thing after that. I noticed a lot of poker players becoming much worse players after cellphones got better. They played tighter, more aggressive poker. I'll give them that. It's much easier to fold when you have hundreds of friends you can text between hands. That said, when these players did enter a pot, they often played horribly. I can't tell you how many times I've seen a guy check GTO charts and then call down versus a player that a 3-year-old could have told you was a tight player.

You need to pay attention at the table. You need to see when players are about to crack. You need to know when the game is about to change. If you're playing tournaments, you need to see when the stack sizes change because that will impact your play significantly.

How do you pay attention while still having your cellphone on you? Simple. Take notes on your cellphone. This will help you study more effectively with your poker coaches and friends later.

You don't need to take a note on every hand. You need to know what's going on at the table. That's it. The way to do this is to see how many notes you can gather on the other players. This will help you make more clarifying reads.

The way I pay attention is I always make sure to notice who raised pre-flop. If you miss who raised pre-flop, it's easy to misinterpret the entire hand. If I'm writing something in my note files after I've folded my hand, then I'll make sure to look up and see who is raising pre-flop. This takes conscious practice, but it can be learned.

You're not going to catch everything at the poker table. No one's focus is that good, but you do want to pay more attention than your competition. Your notes will tell you how much attention you paid to any situation. It's good practice to share them with a friend after you're done playing the tournament. I've had friends tell me that my notes were particularly bad after some tournaments.

Put some wireless headphones in. You don't need to have them on. You just need an excuse not to talk with other players. If you're talking about the Raiders, you're not going to be able to pay attention to the hands.

Write down notes about the other players. You'll be amazed what you'll pick up. I'm always trying to gather notes on how comfortable a player is with a big hand versus a bluff. A staggering number of online players show obvious signs of discomfort when they are bluffing. Some get excited and nervous with a big hand! If you can find out if their baseline comfort is different with each holding, you can get a big read on them. I've manufactured many live cashes I didn't deserve by catching a bluff that on paper was impossible to spot. All it took was watching some hands earlier in the day to see how comfortable a player was while bluffing or value betting.

The other notes I try to take concern whether a player likes to pot control. If a player is always in the habit of checking back pairs, that lets me know their continuation betting range is more polarized between great hands and bluffs. If they opened from late position and they have some bluffs in their range, I will check-raise them more. If they were bet-calling with their decent pairs, it would be much harder to bluff them in these spots.

A showdown is always a mine of information. If you spot a player opening too much from early position, you can start three-betting the shit out of them for the rest of the session. Most players won't know how to handle it.

If you see a player call a bet on the flop with a ridiculously bad pair in a multiway pot, you'll know they can never fold when they hit anything. You can value bet bigger whenever you hit a hand in a multiway pot against these

players. They will call if they hit and they weren't calling anything if they missed anyway, because in a multiway pot they know it's likely someone has something.

I also like to take notes of the hands I played. This helps me analyze the hands later with friends. In these hand histories, I'll refer to the players by their seat number. A typical note might be something like: "1 raises to 300." I put the positions in the hand history. I won't write "1 checks" if the player is out of position. I will write "1 bet 400", or whatever it is, and then when I reread the hand history later, I'll assume the player checked to me. That's what happens in 99% of pots where a player calls pre-flop out of position.

I also take notes all the time about my opponents' stack sizes. I try every 30 minutes or so to look around the table and guess everyone's stack size. I'll also always write down the blind levels so I have a point of reference later on. Additionally, you always need to write down when a player busts or changes tables.

Writing down the stack sizes is helpful. Players make boneheaded plays all the time because they don't look at the stack sizes to their left. They open speculative hands that will never see the flop because everyone behind them is either going to shove their short stack in or fold. They reraise as a bluff without realizing there are tons of short stacks behind them, and they'll be priced in to call a shove. You can avoid all of this with just basic note taking.

You don't have to take immaculate notes all the time. You just need to know you're paying attention. If a hand plays out in front of you with a showdown and you have no idea what happened, that is a horrible sign. You're not doing everything you can to win. How could you expect to win at that point?

If you're taking notes, you'll have a record of how good your attention levels were during the event. You are allowed to miss the occasional hand, but if your notes are sloppy and show you've not been paying attention, you will know you weren't there to win. If the hands you played were off, you will know it's time to pack it in.

I don't say this for my own health. I need to do this too. Last year at the WSOP, I played an event where my notes were awful and my play wasn't to my liking either. I packed it in after that. I checked out of my Air BnB early and went home to my apartment in Denver for 10 days. After I felt rested, I flew back into Vegas. I felt my play was much better from that point on because I did the responsible thing and took myself out of the game.

Poker is hard because we need to be both player and manager in our own careers. We need to manage ourselves better than anyone else is managing themselves. That requires honesty, a good team around us, and accountability.

## CHAPTER 72

# GOING EASY ON A WOUNDED DOG

### Finish Him

You are playing at your local casino. Terry just lost a huge pot in the previous hand. Terry is a well-known tilter. Terry runs a construction business. Terry doesn't need the money from this \$330 tournament.

It's folded to Terry in the small blind. He raises to 3.5x the big blind. You have 30 big blinds in the big blind. He has roughly the same amount. You look down at J-8o? Do you call?

Let's say you do. The board comes J♠-6♠-4♦. Terry bets 5.36 big blinds into the eight big blind pot. It's on you. You have 26.5 big blinds left. What do you do?

The proper play is to raise. You would normally not raise for value because you would be folding out some sixes and getting better jacks to move all-in. Those conditions do not apply here. This is why you need to play deliberately. If you start playing automatically, without thinking properly over decisions, you will make plays that are right often but not always.

Whenever the action is on you, please think of betting or raising. There are so many ways to win if you bet or raise. You could have the best hand and get more money out of a weaker hand. You could have the worst hand, but get a better hand to fold. You could have a weaker hand, but you slow down your opponent and get more cards. You could make your opponent fold a significant equity share in the pot, allowing you to cash out your equity immediately. All of this adds up in your bottom line. If you call down, there

is only one way to win. You must have the best hand and it must remain the best hand. You will have entire years in poker where this is hard to pull off.

Whenever you bet or raise, ask yourself what you are trying to do. Are you trying to get value out of your hand or are you trying to get your opponent to fold a better hand? Is your bet likely to accomplish your goal? You would be stunned by the number of players who have played for decades but never stop to consider the purpose of their bets and the likelihood of them succeeding.

Before you make your normal play, you should always consider what other options you have. Your automatic play here is to call, and that's the right move 98% of the time. However, if you take a second to consider a raise then you might find it has some merit. This is the one occasion in 50 when you do want to raise with a weak top pair. Why? Well, you would be raising for value, clearly. What hands are you getting value from?

Terry is pissed off. Terry wants to go home. Terry clearly wants to hit the rail and tell everyone about a bad beat he suffered earlier. Terry might just shove A♠-7♥ here if you raise. No solver is going to recommend you raise here versus a balanced player, but Terry is not a balanced player. Terry is nuts. Terry feels like he should have more chips, but he doesn't. Terry wants to get this stack in so he can stop grinding. He's too important to be humiliated with the indignity of grinding a short stack.

So you raise. He moves all-in. You call. It turns out he had J-7o. A little closer to your hand than you would expect but fine. He wanted to leave and now he's out.

No one usually raises in this situation because if Terry somehow wakes up with K-J or rivers an overcard, the whole table is going to say, "Why did you raise? I would have never raised there." Translation: I am better than you because that would have never happened to me. I want you all to recognize it.

I had a similar hand to this in a WSOP event. I was playing the \$1,000 Mini Main Event. Our table had a gentleman sit down late at the table. He was getting a massage. He looked like he woke up this morning on tilt. He seethed every time he lost a pot. The massage was not working. Nothing was working. He was clearly having a rough series. He kept shaking his head.

I had a pot with him a few minutes later. I raised with jacks in early position. This tilting gentleman made a small three-bet. Someone cold called behind him. I called. The board came J-5-2 rainbow. I checked. The tilted three-betting player put in a continuation bet. The player behind him raised.

Online I would always call here, but I knew at this stage of the WSOP everyone is fatigued and tilted. They want to go home. I try to help them.

I raised again. The tilting player getting a massage moved all-in. The raiser folded. I called. The tilting player had aces versus my obvious set. Another player at the table later said he couldn't believe I raised. It was so obvious I had a set.

The name of the game is not impressing your friends later or being perfectly balanced versus a supercomputer. It's about getting the money when the money is available. This guy was ready to go. He wanted a bad beat story. I gave him one. Why would I give him a chance to fear the cold call versus a bet and raise? If I raise again and keep the speed of play fast, he has a chance to be in his tilting element.

Whenever someone clearly wants to bust, expand your raising ranges. Put your normal slow-plays in your bet and raising range. Put some mediocre top pairs in there. The guy is ready to go. Help him find the door.



## CHAPTER 73

# NOT EXPLOITING CONDENSED RANGES

### Cash Game Fun

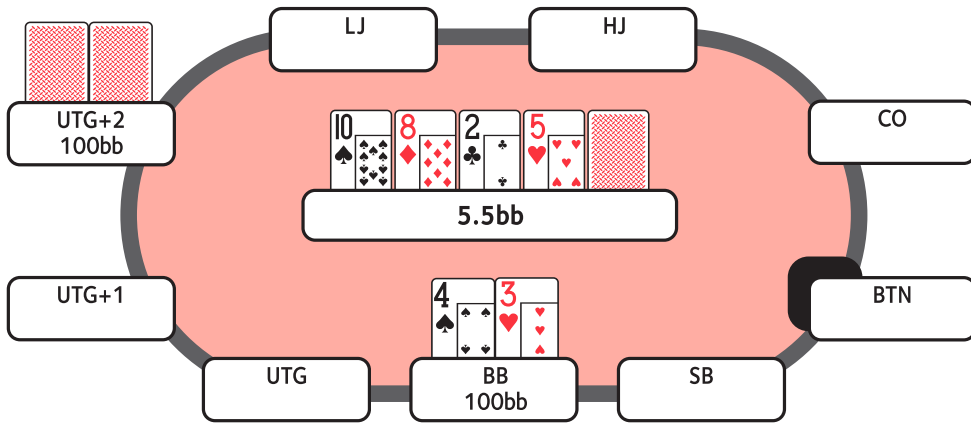
You are playing a private cash game in Bellevue, just outside Seattle. Many of the players here work for Amazon and Microsoft. They have money to burn but they're not dumb. They can play the game to a degree. They know you're a pro, but you're still expected to be an action player who keeps the game lively. They joke often about how they can beat the pro. You know the truth: You let them have some small pots, but your record keeping indicates consistent profits for months.

You get involved in a heads-up pot in a \$5/\$10 game, where you both have 100 big blinds. You have 4-3o in the big blind and are facing a raise to two big blinds from your opponent UTG+2. He is a dentist. He's a deliberate gentleman in his 40s. He talks often about the poker strategy books he has been reading.

Everyone folds to you and you call. You are usually fine with folding this hand, but folding your big blind heads-up versus a minimum raise would look awful in this game. You don't want people to think you're there for money. You need to look like an action player.

The board comes 10♠-8♦-2♣. You check. Your opponent checks back.

The turn is the 5♥. The pot is 5.5 big blinds. What do you want to do? (*Diagram 21*).



**Diagram 21**

We should over-bet in this spot. We should bet 125% the size of the pot. Why?

No solver is going to like this. If the player is balanced, they should be trapping us with some great hands when they check, but that's not how normal players work. If he was balanced, he would also be checking sometimes when he completely missed. He would also have some ace highs that would call down. There is no chance that this player is that balanced.

If he had an over-pair on that board, he would have bet. If he had a 10, he would have bet. Aspiring amateurs tend to keep it honest and aggressive. He will occasionally check back a 10, but it's unlikely he checks back anything stronger. If he flopped a set, it will be tempting to bet. He'll know that if he checks the flop and we check the turn, he isn't getting much money from us. Also, this is live poker. He is bored. He has been waiting for this hand all night. It's likely he will want to jump the gun.

Most players also bet in his situation with ace high. It is likely you have missed the board. He can pick up the pot right now. He feels he deserves something from his hand because he's waited so long for it. He can get that immediately.

What this means is that the average player checks back with a condensed range in this spot. When he checks back, he doesn't do that with many hands that completely missed. He doesn't do that with enough ace-highs. He doesn't do that with good sets or over-pairs. He likely doesn't do that with 10s. His range is primarily weak pairs. He has 9-9, some eights, 7-7, 6-6, 5-5, 4-4, 3-3, A-2s. Versus that range, a normal half-pot bet on the turn is not going to cut it. You need to over-bet. Your bet needs to work

55.56% of the time. It is unlikely he will call with those hands that often. If he does call, you have an open-ended straight draw you can cash in on.

If you get caught bluffing in this cash game, that is a good thing. People will see you're an actual gambler. Laugh it off! Show your hand and proudly yell, "Four high!" with a big grin if you get caught. The table will love it!

## CHAPTER 74

# GIVING SOMEONE AN UNDESERVED SHOWDOWN

### More Cash Game Fun

You are 100 big blinds deep in the same Bellevue \$5/\$10 home cash game. The rotating cast of Amazon execs, Microsoft employees, dentists, and vending machine moguls keeps rotating in. No, you have no idea how all these people know each other. No, you have never asked them. That might lead to the question as to why you are here.

This specific game is based around one particularly loaded executive.

One of the Microsoft guys opens from the lojack to 2.5 big blinds. He is loose but takes the game somewhat seriously. He likes to have fun, but he also wants to win.

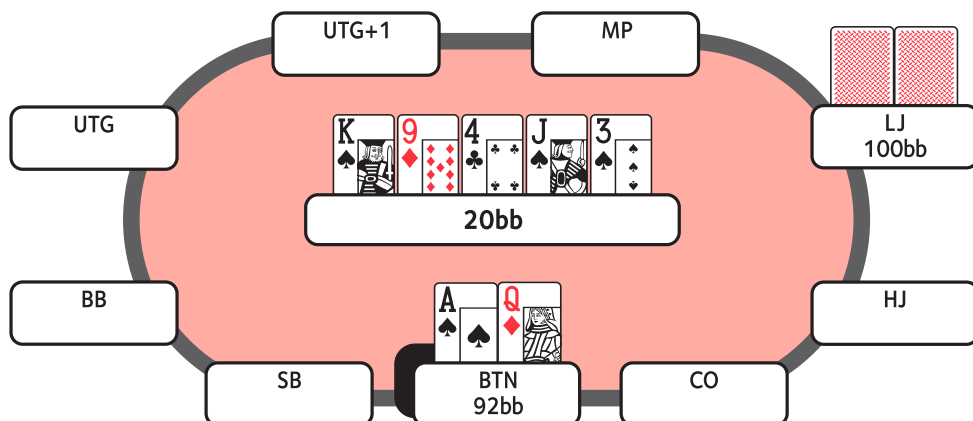
You look down at A♠-Q♦ on the button. How would we play this if the wealthy exec was in the small blind? You would heavily consider cold calling. You want the loaded executive to come into the pot any way you can get him. You would be hoping to make a good top pair and get three streets of value out of the exec's J-2s that hit a two.

However, in this particular example, the loaded executive is in the cutoff and folded. You three-bet from the button to 8.75 big blinds. It folds back to the lojack. He calls without much hesitation.

The board comes K♠-9♦-4♣. It's checked to you. What would you normally do here? The pot is 20 big blinds. You have around 92 big blinds left. Your opponent has you covered.

You check. The turn is the J♠. Lojack checks to you again. You check back.

The river is the 3♠. He checks to you again. What would you like to do? (Diagram 22).



**Diagram 22**

Let's break down this hand. On the flop, after the board came K♠-9♦-4♣ and it was checked to you, it is tempting to check back. Your hand is likely the best hand and it's not going to get much value from weaker aces. That said, we might also have wanted to bet something small, like 1/3 pot, because that would get a turn and river for cheap. It would also get many hands with serious equity to fold. Our hand is vulnerable. It's going to be hard to get it to showdown. How often do we expect the turn to go check-check and then river to go check-check? It seems unlikely with this player being loose. We are not going to be able to guess and call down perfectly. If we bet, we can also value bet if the turn is an ace or even a queen.

However, once we check flop and turn, the river becomes more interesting. Your opponent checks again. You block a backdoor nut flush. Your opponent would probably have led the river with a king or a jack. His range is capped at mediocre pairs. He has 10-10, some nines, 8-8, 7-7, 6-6, and 5-5 a lot of the time. You have some showdown value versus weaker ace highs but he's loose. Wouldn't he have turned some of those into bluffs?

You should consider betting twice the size of the pot on the river. Your bet will need to work two-thirds of the time to be successful. That's all you're gambling on. If he finds a hero call 20% of the time, that is not enough to make your play unprofitable.

If losing that much money in one pot scares you, you're playing too high. You need to be able to shrug it off if your opponent finds the hero call. If

you get caught in this game that's fine. It gives you the image of a fun action player. You can over-bet your ass off for the rest of the session and get called by everything. People will keep chasing the dragon of the dopamine-inducing hero call versus the pro.

In the spirit of honesty, I don't love having to over-bet on this river, even if it makes sense given the ranges. I prefer to work from the flop after betting 33.3% pot.

That said, this was a serious leak I had for years. I wouldn't be doing my job if I didn't show you guys where improvements helped me make more money. I used to check this river 100% of the time and hope for a favorable showdown. What are the chances the right answer was check 100% of the time? There are players you play against who are folding always to an over-bet. Target them. No undeserved showdowns!

## CHAPTER 75

# NOT BEING CURIOUS

### The Secret to Poker Success

Richard Feynman was a theoretical physicist who won the Nobel Prize in physics. He contributed to the research of quantum mechanics, quantum electrodynamics, and particle physics. He helped develop the atom bomb during World War II. In his later life he wrote a series of beloved books.

What's interesting is that Feynman's IQ was 124. Eight percent of the population has an IQ of this level, but very few of them achieve what Feynman achieved.

How did he accomplish so much? Curiosity.

"Study hard what interests you the most in the most undisciplined, irreverent and original manner possible." – Richard Feynman

Feynman tried to learn instruments so he could play in a band. He learned how to crack safes. He learned how to paint. He worked hard and deliberately to learn anything that interested him. He never let his own doubt or other people tell him what to do.

Most people don't want to be told they're wrong or that they don't know something. We want to be right about the world because then that means our world is orderly. We abhor chaos and the feeling of being helpless. Being right and righteous is a dopamine-inducing addiction that allows us to hide from those feelings.

We must resist this siren song. Whenever you are curious about the play of a hand or any concept in poker, seek to learn more. You don't have to do much. Fifteen minutes a day will get you miles ahead of the competition after years and years.

If you have ever watched a poker training video, you know how it goes.

You watch 30 minutes of footage, tons of great ideas get thrown at you, and perhaps one of them will stick with you. The other concepts are lost to the recesses of your memory.

Instead of forcing yourself to watch videos again and again, take it a few minutes at a time. Explore one key concept or play at a time. Write it down. Think of examples from your previous sessions. Think of when you will execute the play in the future. Create a homework assignment for the next time you're at the table. Let it become a part of you.

Stay curious. Get a little better each day.



## CHAPTER 76

# NEVER DEFENDING THE BIG BLIND PROPERLY

### Let's Get You Playing

You are deep in a \$250K guaranteed tournament on a large international site. A slick pro opens to 70,000 at 17,500/35,000 blinds. He is opening from hijack. The villain has 667,339 chips after he opens.

The cutoff has 684,218 chips. He folds. The button, a tight player, folds from his 397,534-chip stack. The small blind has 4,373,968 chips and folds. It's on you in the big blind. You have 1,833,184 chips with  $K\heartsuit-5\clubsuit$ . What is your move?

Most players treat this as a binary decision. They either flat or they fold. There is another way.

You make it 220,500 to go from the big blind. The villain folds.

What move did you just make here? You three-bet bluffed. The bet looks like it needs to work a lot from the big blind, but mathematically it doesn't. You're not risking 220,500 when you reraise. Part of your bet is the big blind. You are not wagering the big blind. The big blind belonged to the pot before the hand. It was no longer a part of your stack.

You actually wagered 185,500 chips to win 337,500. We divide 185,500 by 337,500 to find out how often the bet needs to succeed as a complete bluff because you will get your bet back when it succeeds. Your bet as a bluff needs to work roughly 55% of the time. Your opponent needs to call your three-bet or raise 45% of the time or more.

There is a good reason for you to believe you caught him opening light

more than 45% of the time. He is opening into two stacks that can't cold call. They need to move all-in to test him or fold. One would have to shove all their chips into the middle with three players to still act behind, two being larger stacks. One is a tighter player with a track record of not wanting to move their money in. The big stack is stuck out of position in the small blind with a minimal investment in the pot. Most players in the big blind don't even consider a three-bet bluff anymore. This guy has a clean lane to drive. You can't blame him for taking the shot. It's on you to counter punch and be ready.

You're making a straightforward wager. You believe this slick pro was trying to blind steal more than 45% of the time. He will fold when you catch him. What percentage of the time do you think you will be right about this wager? If you estimate 70% to 80%, you should take the shot. If you're not sure about your read, let it go.

When was the last time you three-bet bluffed from the big blind? What was the specific hand and situation? If you can't summon a memory right now, it is likely you're not doing it enough. If you can't summon two memories, it's likely you're not doing it enough.

Three-bet bluffing from the big blind is a monstrous play now because most players only three-bet A-Q+, 9-9+ from the big blind. They've grown infatuated with calling from the big blind. When they see you three-betting from the big blind they assume you also have a strong range. They're much more passive versus that kind of value-loaded range.

Once you get more comfortable with these simple three-bet bluffs, you can expand to post-flop bluffs out of position. There's a large pool of bad regulars now who will always flat a three-bet in position and then fold to any flop that misses them. It isn't much more complicated to bluff these players. You three-bet some hand with decent equity and then fire on the flop if the board isn't great for their high-card intensive calling ranges. You will find they fold too much on almost any board that doesn't contain two cards nine or higher.

If you do hit a marginal hand on the flop, check the second the board comes out. Most of your opponents will be weirded out by the three-bet and snap check. They'll check behind with most of their range. This allows you to keep the pot small out of position. They shouldn't be giving you this edge that often, but they'll happily take the turn card because they still assume you have a strong range given your line.

These plays work better if you target stacks that will be defending all their chips versus a typical continuation bet. They fold more when they see

they are about to go to the felt. A 30 to 40 big blind stack opening on your big blind is perfect. They open to 2x. They then call your three-bet to 7x, and then your normal continuation bet threatens all their chips. They fold more to this.

Out of position play is an obsession of mine, but I tell all my students the same thing: "You are not a coward if you get scared of this." The fastest way to make money in no limit hold'em is to play your big pots in position, always. It's hard to beat someone who does that. If you inflate pots out of position you'd better know what you're doing. Have a clear plan and evidence to back it up before you employ anything we discussed here.

## CHAPTER 77

# NOT HOLDING YOURSELF ACCOUNTABLE WITH BETS

### The Only Way to Get Anything Done

Gambling on yourself is a superpower.

Do you want to get anything done? Put money on it. Do it for the rest of your life. Have you ever seen how much weight poker players lose when they have money on it? There's a reason for that.

Take anything you want to do in life and put a wager on it. You can get creative.

Are you not studying the game as much as you'd like? Make a wager with a friend. You can send your friend a check made out to a politician you hate. Tell them, "mail this" if I don't send you five videos of me studying next week." Record your study sessions. Send them to your friend. Your friend can skim the videos just to make sure you're not muttering gibberish and then they won't mail the check.

Are you having a hard time with your diet? Weight loss bets. Don't go too extreme, but you can get it done.

My weight kept increasing up five years ago. My friends were worried about me. "Fine," I told them. "Three weeks. I'll lose 30 pounds." I'm not going to detail the wager I put on it. It was enough to scare the shit out of me and that's all that mattered. For three weeks, I did intermittent fasting and ate black beans and spinach. It was revolting. I won the bet. I've largely kept the weight off since then. I'm not doing that again.

As a professional gambler, I can't stand idle talk. Everyone's got an opin-

ion. No one ever wants to hear anyone else's opinion. They just want you to parrot their own opinion back at them. When people tell you they're readers and that they "do their own research", what they're truly telling you is they like books that articulate their own opinion well. That gives them more ammunition for the next time they get into some blowhard argument at a party they've now ruined. When it comes to their own lives, they discuss in wild detail all the great things they're going to do because they know X and they studied Y and they have an edge due their intelligence and blah blah blah.

When I've had enough of it, I always say, "Put money on it." It's the only thing that ever shuts these people up. You believe this politician is going to win? Let's bet. You believe this politician will get this legislation passed? Let's put money on it. You're going to write a book? Let's put money on it. You're going to lose weight? Let's put money on it. You're going to be some famous entrepreneur and your business is going to go to the moon? You're going to be in a much better position than me and my lucked-up ass in five years? Let's put money on it. Don't get mad at me! I'm not the one who started this conversation. I just want to know if you truly believe in what you're peddling.

I actually kind of dig it when someone says, "Let's do it. Let's do the bet." I like feeling like someone is firing back. It makes me feel alive. I don't mind losing if I thought the bet was a good bet to begin with. It's part of my life. The only issue is getting people to pay up. The exact people you target for these kinds of bets are the exact people who never want to pay.

Ninety-nine times out of a 100 you just get someone to come around to your point when you make a wager. This politician is Jesus Christ incarnate and somehow different than the other 2,000+ we've suffered through our lives? Let's put money on it. If this piece of key legislation is passed in this timeframe, I'll pay you X. If not, you pay me X. Oh, wait, what now? You don't think they'll get it passed? What happened? I thought this was the second coming. I thought we were all evil people if we didn't vote for your guy. Now you're telling me he's impotent and ineffective? Golly whiz, that's quite the reversal!

Nothing ever gets done if there isn't money on the line. The pain of losing real cash is so painful many people will get off their dead ass. If you ever need to get something done, put money on it. If you ever need to find the truth, put money on it. Have a mutually trusted friend hold on to the money. Make the pain real. You'll be stunned by what you can get done.

## CHAPTER 78

# NOT FINDING PEOPLE WHO PUMP YOU UP

### Self-Esteem Has Its Perks

In the previous chapter, we looked at ways you can exploit other people's negativity for good. In this section, we're simply looking for positive people.

I never used to believe in the positive psychology style of coaching. As my friend John Wood always says, "An optimistic gambler says 'hit me' on 20."

Then my girlfriend joined a singing class in New York City. The teacher had an unorthodox style. Students were asked to stand in front of the class and sing anything. Once they were done, the teacher would always first focus on what they did right. Someone could go up there and just stutter, but the teacher would still show them love for getting in front of everybody.

To my surprise, everyone in the class started becoming much more comfortable with their lessons. In no time, my girlfriend was hitting notes I never thought she could hit. What the hell was going on?

I looked into it. Apparently, there is precedent for this sort of thing. The Dale Carnegie course for public speaking used the same method. Students there were made to stand in front of the class and deliver a speech, and the class would pump them up regardless of the performance. By the end of the class, everyone could deliver a speech at a moment's notice.

I've learned something through my lessons. No one is going to learn something unless it is fun. If we try to maximize our learning every day through harsh, rote memorization, we will get sick of the process after a couple of weeks.

I lived in Seoul for a year. The entire time I was there, I failed to learn the language. It was easy to fail in this way. My group of friends spoke English very well and they wanted to practice with me. When I tried to study Korean, my eyes would glaze over at the scholastic texts.

A while ago I checked out DuoLingo again out of curiosity. “Wow, they tricked out this app,” I thought to myself. “I wonder if I still remember any of the Korean alphabet.”

I have no idea how it happened, but I’ve been studying Korean for 10 days in a row now. The lessons feel like a video game. I’m learning things I never knew about Korean. I’m not even planning to go back to Seoul anytime soon. I have no idea how they got me to study the language.

The app rewards me like I’m a gerbil. When I finally learn something I have been struggling with, the app gives me that slot-machine ringing noise. It’s addictive.

Learning poker is the same. I learned poker the same way many chefs learn their craft. I got a guy who knew the craft to beat me up. Nothing I ever did was good enough for my coaches. I got shredded constantly. It wasn’t until I was older that I realized there’s no need for that. That style works but you can pump up people just as much.

If you ever get a chance, Google “Teddy Atlas Best Corner Moments.” Teddy Atlas is a renowned boxing trainer. He worked with Mike Tyson when he was younger. (He stopped working with Tyson over concerns about his character.) Later, Atlas would create a heavyweight champion.

Atlas has an incredible track record when it comes to motivating fighters. When his guy is behind in the fight, he knows the exact words to say. He can get them into the winner’s circle through his psychological work.

If you pay attention to how Atlas works with his guys, he’s never antagonizing them. He isn’t exactly a positive speaker either. He fires them up.

I had a guy years ago who was stuck in his head deep in a tournament. He had made a bad play and he was spiraling fast. He was muttering to himself and wandering around the casino. I could see the blow-up coming. All his hard work was going to go to nothing. Much like public speakers, boxers, and classically trained musicians, he had the skills to work hard and go deep, but he was losing his mind.

I don’t know what came over me. I’ve done a variation of this speech with a hundred guys, but I nailed it this day.

I grabbed him, looked him in the eye, and yelled at him. “You get deep in tournaments all the time. All the time! Every day we talk, you tell me

about some bad beat or bad play you made deep in a tournament. You never catch this, but in every story you're deep in a tournament! Always! If this one doesn't work out, you'll go deep in another one tomorrow! And after that there will be another one! And another! They can keep busting you. You might even bust yourself on occasion. But you're going to keep coming back like the fucking Terminator. They can't kill you. Every day you're back at their throats! Every day they have to worry about you again! Everyone knows this but you. I wouldn't want you at my table. I wouldn't bet against your success. Now get back to that table and get at their throats again! That's your job!"

It's not exactly positive psychology when you're screaming it at someone and slamming their chest with a backhand, but it did pump him up. I'm happy to say this player is successful now. He has held on to that speech for years.

We all need friends who will pump us up like that. I didn't lie once during that rant. Everything I said was true. I framed it so he could see his assets. It's on him to work hard and go further. We can all help each other keep going when the road gets tough. Those are the kinds of friends we need in our lives.

Many people will not like it when you're trying to make positive changes in your life. They'll hate that you're changing because it holds a mirror to them. You will be drained by these people if you let them stay around you. But one friend who pumps you up without bullshitting is worth more than all the fair-weather friends combined.

Surround yourself with success-minded people who will fire you up when you're getting after it. Have fun with the process. You'll go much further than you ever dreamed of.



## CHAPTER 79

# BROADCASTING WINS

### Don't Do It

“The rich can pay a ransom for their lives, but the poor won't even get threatened.” – Proverbs 13:8.

This is going to be a short section. That does not mean it is unimportant.

Do not broadcast your wins. Ever. Keep it quiet. Real hustlers don't have time for the attention. They're too busy making more money.

Have you ever seen a lottery winner wear a mask when they receive the check? There is a reason for that.

You will be amazed who comes out of the woodwork once people find out you have money. You will be in the tournament registration line and people will hit you up for a stake. You will open your Facebook and email to hundreds of messages. It never ends. That's the banal part. What's truly worrying is someone targeting you for a robbery. Someone close to me was beaten and left for dead during a stick-up. He struggles with head trauma and depression to this day. He drinks constantly to make the pain go away.

Are you already in a situation where everyone is asking you for money? There's only one way to make it stop. Convince everyone you're broke.

Don't ever let it get to that point if you can help it. Stay quiet. Keep your graphs to yourself.

If you ever have a big public win, tell everybody you put all your money into long-term investments. “I couldn't get the money out if I wanted to. Sorry.”

## CHAPTER 80

# NEVER FREEZING A PLAYER WITH AN IN-POSITION CALL

### Let's Try This One

You are playing a \$500 buy-in tournament in Vegas. You raise to 2.5 big blinds from the hijack with  $K\heartsuit-7\heartsuit$ . It folds around to the big blind. The big blind player is a younger guy who has been trying to beat you all day. He's trying with all his might, but he has an inability to see what's coming around the corner. He's still learning. He can't keep everything straight in his mind. He often misses key elements in the hand.

He looks down at his hand quickly and triumphantly makes it 9.5x. You both started the hand with roughly 50 big blinds. You decide to take a risk and flat him.

The board comes  $J\spadesuit-J\heartsuit-3\clubsuit$ . He looks at the flop. He doesn't know what to do. He checks. What would you do here?

Bet 10% of the pot. See what he does. You froze him. From these shorter 40 or 50 big blind stacks, the player is facing all-in pots when any bets go in post-flop. He's trying to play seriously. He's not anticipating how often he's going to need to fold here post-flop when he misses and he has no plan.

This play doesn't come up much. Most people flat big reraises in position too much. Since people want to flat three-bets so badly in position, it seems a pertinent idea to discuss when that is a good idea.

If you want to freeze a guy up with a three-bet flat in position, you're looking for someone who doesn't know how to navigate a post-flop pot. They might check and fold too much on the flop. They might continuation

bet and then have no idea what to do on the turn, thus allowing you to make a small bet that gets them to fold.

You're looking for people who are clearly three-betting too much, who have compromised chip stacks, and have no idea what they're doing post-flop. That's quite the checklist. Those people do exist, but you can lose serious money calling huge reraises looking for them. If you would normally fold in this spot, that's fine.

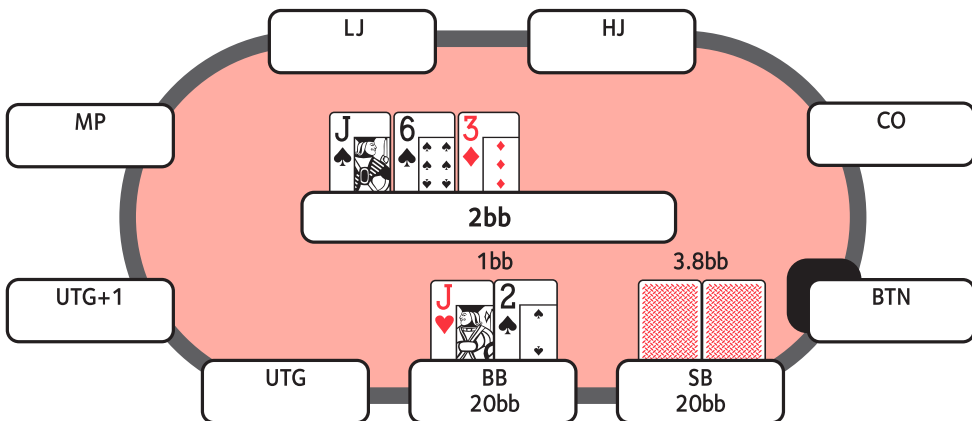
# CHAPTER 81

## NEVER TRAPPING IN SHORT-STACK SITUATIONS

### Continuing Action

You are playing in the same \$500 buy-in Vegas tournament as in the last chapter. You are deep in the tournament. You have roughly 20 big blinds. It's folded around to the small blind. He is normally an aggressive player. He limps on your big blind. He has around 20 big blinds too. You look down at  $J♥-2♠$ . You check back.

The flop comes  $J♠-6♠-3♦$ . Your opponent checks. You bet one big blind with your top pair. Your opponent goes to his stack quickly and makes it 3.8 big blinds to go. What do you do? (*Diagram 23*).



*Diagram 23*

Many players shove here 100% of the time, but why? What are we getting value from? Is he raising and calling with a six here? He's either trapping us with a big pair he limped with, he's playing fast with a jack, or he has absolutely nothing. He probably would have led with a flush draw so he could shove over our raise. We know he's aggressive, so he's likely to have tons of bluffs on this hit-or-miss board. Our hand is too good to fold in a short-stacked blind-versus-blind situation. We should continue playing, but the correct way is by letting him bluff at us.

## CHAPTER 82

# NEVER FLOATING VERSUS A FLOP CHECK-RAISE

### Another Hypothetical

Let's run another hypothetical from the situation we discussed earlier. We're not done yet with that aggressive player in the big blind.

Remember, you are playing a live \$500 buy-in tournament in Vegas. In this hand, you raise to 2.3 big blinds from the hijack with A♣-9♣. You have 40 big blinds to start the hand.

It folds around to the big blind. He is a younger guy who has been trying to beat you all day. He's trying with all his might, but he has an inability to see what's coming around the corner. He's still learning. He can't keep everything straight in his mind. He misses things. He calls out of the big blind.

The board comes 8♠-5♦-2♣. He checks. You bet two big blinds into the 6.1 big blind pot with your A♣-9♣. He raises to 6.1 big blinds after some deliberation.

What should you do here? You should call.

You see many disciplined, aspiring amateurs fold versus this check-raise. That is not the proper course of action.

Most players in the big blind are sitting ducks. They don't three-bet enough. They don't check-raise enough on the flop. They call down with garbage hands and fold when they miss. On occasion, you will play against a young gun who is trying to defend his big blind appropriately, but he will be spooked by it. Playing big pots out of position should scare any regular. He is trying to pick up easy pots when he can, but he doesn't want to get overly

involved. That's where you're going to come in.

In this hand, your opponent only has about 30 big blinds left after he check-raises. On the turn, the pot will be 18.3 big blinds. That is an awkward stack-to-pot ratio to work with. He will check often if he was goofing off on the flop.

Additionally, what is he check-raising on the flop? An eight? 6-7? Is he the type of player to slow-play big pairs? It seems more likely that he is trying to defend his big blind.

Your hand has overcards, backdoor flush draws, and backdoor straight draws going for it. It's good enough to flat a check-raise here. Freeze your opponent who is not prepared. See what he does on the turn. I bet he blinks.

# CHAPTER 83

## PLAYING GAMES WITH TOO MUCH RAKE

### This Is Not a Poker Chapter

We are not going to be talking about rake structure in this section.

There's plenty of great information about that on the internet. There are rake calculators, rake races, and rakeback. If you are playing cash games for a living, you should always know how much rake you're paying and how much rake you can get back by taking advantage of promotions.

You still want to pick the softest site you can. There was a time I was being offered 60% rakeback at one site and 27% on another. I picked the site that had 27% rakeback. It was a sportsbook that attracted the weirdest Russian punters I've ever seen. The other site specialized in offering rakeback to professionals. We were all getting 60% to 70% rakeback but we were trading coolers with each other all day.

If you're playing tournaments, you're almost always in a soft enough game to justify traditional rake. It's hard to find a tournament that isn't soft outside of the high-stakes world. Don't pay 20% of the buy-in as an entry fee and you'll be fine. 15%? Look at the field. There are some casino tournaments that are so soft you can justify that. With a 10% or 12.5% entry fee, you'll be fine almost always.

That is not the type of rake we will be discussing in this section. We are going to discuss rake in life.

I'll be brief. Everyone in life has an amount of pleasure they need to get to in a particular day. Do you know why we were all eating like lard asses



during the pandemic? We had nothing else to do. Human beings go insane if they don't have something to take their mind off the monotony. If there's not a basketball game on that night and if there's not a camping trip to look forward to that weekend, people need to make up the deficit. They eat more. They drink more.

Every human needs a way to get by. I have never met a man who doesn't have a vice. The vices we indulge in are the rake we pay in life. No one can escape it.

In the poker world, there is a line around the block of people looking to help you indulge. They know you belong to a specialized market. Poker players love to gamble. Poker players are willing to put money down on something that could turn to nothing. That's a pretty good market to cater to if you're selling sex, blood, and money.

Before you move to Vegas or some other big gambling city you need to have your shit together. How do you get through the day?

I have had poker players compliment me on my work ethic and my willpower. I have neither of those. I have learned how to rewire my addictive brain to my benefit.

Let me tell you my vices. Feel free to steal any of these if they work for you.

No one is going to exercise if it's boring. For years, I would go to a weight room in NYC with my friends. I would chug Dunkin' Donuts coffee before I walked in. We'd blow up the speaker system with death metal, lift heavy, and trade bullshit. There was zero willpower involved. I was chilling. I got a crazy dopamine hit whenever I combined copious caffeine with the head rush of lifting heavy.

Unfortunately, I learned the hard way that the Denver YMCA won't let me blast the Black Dahlia Murder on its speaker system. That said, I can still bullshit with people while I'm lifting. I can blast my music in my headphones. I can listen to podcasts when I'm lifting that I want to listen to anyway. Weightlifting gives me space to be myself and indulge what I like. That makes it something I want to do as opposed to something I have to force myself to do.

I quit drinking years ago. My brain still tastes seltzer water and thinks "gin and tonic." So I trick my mind. I chug soda water throughout the day whenever I'm being petulant and feeling disinclined to work. Once I get my "treat" I go back to work.

I will be an addict until the day I die. I will never conquer this demon

inside of me. I need to satiate it when I can. I do that with coffee in the mornings and tea in the afternoon. I drink too much of it, but it tricks my mind into thinking I'm indulging in something.

I love Netflix, HBO Max, NFL RedZone, and all that as much as anyone else. But it's not good for me to be sitting around looking at a screen all night. Even if you wear glasses to block blue light, you can still get a headache. The next day when I go to work, I'll be in a terrible mood. I won't play my best.

What I've learned is I can lay down and listen to audiobooks. My mind will accept that as entertainment. I'm not above draping a towel over my head so no one will bother me. I turn the playback speed up. I even have a cot in my office so I can lay down properly if I'm ever tired. Thirty minutes listening to a good Audible book can make me feel relaxed. I return books if they're not doing it for me. I'm looking for a high. If a writer is dropping knowledge, it's like listening to an unreal mixtape. You can feel your mind elevating as they go.

My mind accepts audiobooks as entertainment, but there's less downside to audiobooks. There's no headache from staring at screens. There's less fatigue. You're learning more.

As you can see, my vices are as dumb as anyone's, but they cost less and possibly have some beneficial side effects. We're talking coffee, weights, and audiobooks. Pretty boring shit. Pretty cheap rake. All I've done is rewire them to make them more addictive.

You need to have a system for everything before you get to Las Vegas or that city will eat you alive. Do you like pot or liquor? That's fine, but what system do you have around them? You probably don't want to do them every day. They're not as enjoyable when not taken in moderation. Do you do that kind of thing in social situations? Do you do that after a certain type of success? This all needs to be written down before you get there.

Is there a certain type of sexual partner you're into? You need to have that handled before you get to Vegas. Men are fantastic at wasting unreal amounts of time on flaky women in Vegas. If you can find a partner you're really into, put your time into that relationship. Treat your partner well. Make sure you vibe with them intellectually too so you're not pulling your hair out four months in. But lock it up if you're feeling good about the situation.

How do you get through the day? What's your thing? Stocks? Sports

betting? Women? Liquor? Cannabis? Netflix binging? Social media? What's your poison? What's your system around them? How do you keep it under control?

# CHAPTER 84

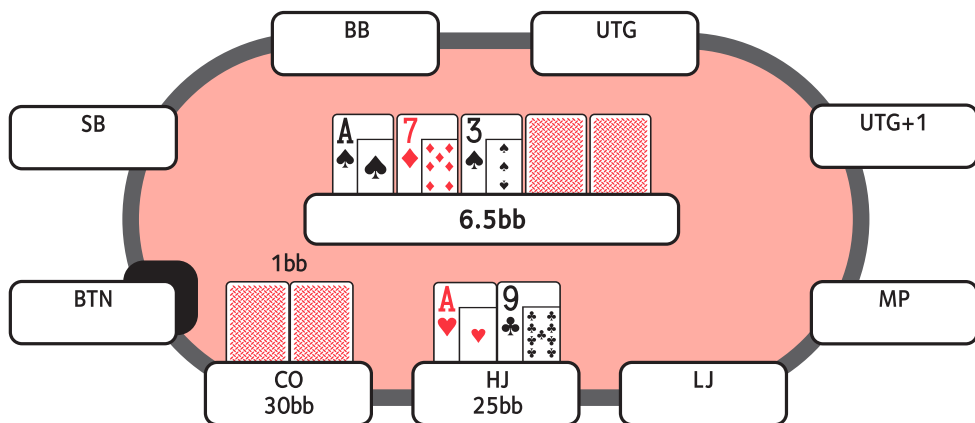
# LETTING SOMEONE BUY A TURN AND RIVER

## How to Beat Up Bad Regs

You are playing a \$330 buy-in tournament in Las Vegas and are at a tighter table full of middling regs. You have 25 big blinds in the hijack.

You decide to try a steal with  $A♥-9♣$ . You raise to two big blinds. The cutoff cold calls. He is an uncreative regular. You have him pegged as a nut peddler. He has 30 big blinds. The board comes  $A♠-7♦-3♠$ . The pot is 6.5 big blinds. What do you do here with  $A♥-9♣$ ?

Let's say you check. He now bets one big blind into the 6.5 big blind pot. What is your move? (*Diagram 24*).



*Diagram 24*

You should raise to four big blinds. Your opponent has clearly made a play to buy the turn and river for cheap. He is an uncreative reg. He would have three-bet pre-flop with A-K or A-Q. On the flop, he would have bet larger with A-J, A-10, A-7s, and A-3s for value. He knows you are checking many mediocre aces. If you have two big cards that missed, you're not calling anything. Why is he betting so small knowing all of that?

It's possible he is betting this small with an ace, but I haven't found mediocre regs to be that balanced. They typically do this with a hand that wants to see turn and river. It's mediocre pairs or suited connectors that want more cards, something like 8♦-9♦.

Don't call him here and check the turn. That's exactly what he wants. I've even seen guys check the turn automatically in glee that their play worked. Why would you give them that satisfaction?

## CHAPTER 85

# OVERESTIMATING HOW MANY DRAWS A PLAYER BETS

### This Is a Common Leak

You're in the same \$330 buy-in event described above. This time you have 10♥-8♣ in the big blind with 25 big blinds in your stack. You registered for the tournament hoping to play against recreational players, but so far all you have run into is mediocre regs. It's been boring trying to get money out of nut peddlers.

UTG+2 opens to two big blinds from around the same sized stack as yours. It's folded to you in the big blind. You call.

The board comes A♠-10♠-9♦. You check. Your opponent bets one big blind into the 5.5 big blind pot. Alright. You call.

The turn is the 5♣. The board now is A♠-10♠-9♦-5♣. You check. Your opponent now bets five big blinds into a 7.5 big blind pot. It's on you. What's your move?

Most aspiring poker players call here. They say to themselves, "He could be betting 8-7, Q-J, and two spades. That's a lot of draws! I have to call!"

That's one factor analysis. There's so much more going on here. This is a clear fold.

For one, whenever an uncreative reg takes a creative line, they always have the hand. It's never a bluff.

Secondly, why are we so sure he is betting all of those draws? Those are excuses we tell ourselves so we can call. We are not rational beings. We are rationalizing beings. We want to call here because it's more fun. Humans

abhor open loops. We want to know what he has. Folding sucks because we don't get to find out what he has and we are guaranteed to lose. It's more fun to gamble.

He doesn't have 8-7s most likely. Why would he open that from such early position? The same goes for Q-Jo. He could open those hands on occasion but it's not 100% of the time, so we can't count all those combinations.

Additionally, why would he be betting straight draws on this board? Our most likely hand, combination-wise, is a weak offsuit ace. We're never folding that hand on a 5♣ turn. Most players are probably not folding a 10 or a nine either in such a small pot when this blank turn card comes off. For the same reasons, why would he be betting a flush draw? We're not folding anything.

Thirdly, this hand isn't over once we call the turn. He might still hit something on the river. He could look at our capped weak range and shove all-in. It's unlikely he will do so but he still has all those options. That's a lot of variables to manage when you're already calling a larger turn bet with a mediocre pair.

This is a fold. Don't give nut peddling regulars credit for bluffs they never make. That's how they make all their money. They let you overestimate them and then they cash in.

## CHAPTER 86

# NEVER TRYING A DELAYED CONTINUATION BET

### A Small But Useful Play

You are deep in a \$215 buy-in tournament in Florida. You are on the money bubble for the tournament. You notice the big blind player is looking at the tournament clock constantly. He clearly wants to cash.

You raise with  $K\spadesuit-5\spadesuit$  when it is folded to you in the cutoff. You're trying to pick off that big blind. You have 20 big blinds. You raise to 2x.

The button cold calls. He also has around 20 big blinds. You don't know much about him. He's a bigger guy wearing a sweater and a trucker hat. He's been quiet but he seems to be having a good time. Regular? Recreational player? You don't know. The blinds fold. You are heads-up.

The board comes  $Q\spadesuit-7\diamondsuit-4\clubsuit$ . What do you normally do in this situation? What do you think you should do?

Let's say you check. Your opponent checks back.

The turn is the  $7\heartsuit$ . Now what do you want to do?

You should bet 1/3 pot. This is a great situation for a delayed continuation bet. When he cold calls you pre-flop, you need to be cautious. Many players will only cold call from that short stack with a tighter range. You completely bricked this flop. He probably wouldn't even fold a high-card hand on this flop. Checking that flop was a good idea. If he had bet, you could have folded and moved on to the next hand.

However, the situation changes once he checks back. If he was cold calling a tight range, he would have bet that flop most of the time. He would



have had primarily pairs and good high cards in his range. He would know you're folding a lot of the time from your chip stack. You can't exactly check-raise from such a short stack. It's a great green light for him. Why didn't he go through it?

The most likely explanation is he's not a grinder. He's playing this tournament for fun. He called pre-flop with a wider range than we first realized. He has a bunch of high cards and suited connectors and gappers that missed this board. Once he misses the turn as well, he'll be fine with folding. Your turn bet only needs to work 25% of the time. It's unlikely he will be defending 75% of his hands. Take the shot.

We can't always continuation bet when we miss the flop. One opportunity is usually after the big blind has flatted. They most likely have 30% or 40% of the hands. They have missed a lot. We should be betting most of the time. If someone cold calls us, that could be much tighter range, even 6% or 12%. If they cold called us from early position with more players to act behind, it's more likely they have a tight range. We should check more versus them.

If we throw in a delayed continuation bet bluff on occasion, in appropriate situations, it will make us harder to read. People won't know that we always bluff bet when we miss the flop. This will make it harder for them to raise post-flop as a bluff.

## CHAPTER 87

# NOT HAVING A WORK ETHIC

### We All Have This Problem

Most people get into poker because they think they're smarter than other people. They also don't want to work at a real job. Unsurprisingly, these people don't want to work very hard.

I was this way for years. I wanted the money. I didn't want to be the best. Now?

I still don't want to be the best. I still only want the money. But now I realize you have to work to attain the money. This is a competitive industry. There's a lot of intelligent and cutthroat people in it.

How do you develop a work ethic in this game?

The biggest problem most people have is that they think in grandiose terms. At the start of the year they say, "This is the year I am going to be a poker champion with \$1,000,000 in profit."

There actually is evidence that new year's resolutions work, but you have to go about them the right way. Whenever you hear someone say, "New year's resolutions are dumb because they fail 80% of the time" what they are truly saying is they succeed one time out of five. You have to ask yourself a logical follow-up question. What percentage of the time can people make changes to their lives if they decide to start on a random date? Is that number below or above 20% of the time?

The human mind likes chapters in life. When you move to a new city the mind thinks of it as a reset. When a new year begins your mind thinks of it as a reset. You can use these moments to make changes to your life, but you have to go about it the right way.

Instead of saying "I'm going to be a millionaire poker player this year"

what you should say is “I’m going to play focused poker.” Then every day you should follow a moderate goal to play focused poker. Every time you play poker you should write it down in a notebook. Each focused session is a vote for the person you want to be. We are what we repeatedly do, as Aristotle put it. We are what we pretend to be, as Kurt Vonnegut Jr. put it.

There is research that backs up that moderate deliberate practice each day will outperform cram sessions. What most people do when they pick a goal is they work like a madman toward it for weeks and then give up. If you pick a moderate daily practice goal each day you’re far more likely to continue improving for the rest of your life.

The other way to develop a work ethic is to tie the work to something greater than yourself. Many people are lazy and unfocused in their pursuits until their child is born. I personally found I stopped wasting time once I had to start caring for my mother. Perhaps there is an organization or charity that you are tying your efforts to. Having a cause bigger than yourself will keep you going on the days you don’t feel it.

That’s another thing that should be discussed. If I didn’t show up to work on the days I didn’t “feel it” then I would likely never show up to work. Most people believe that first you feel motivated and then you get to work. In actuality, recent research has indicated that you start acting and then you feel motivated. Action precipitates motivation. It’s not the other way around.

Another way you can develop a work ethic is to treat this like a game versus yourself. You’re simply playing a video game. When you play a video game you don’t get frustrated at the obstacles thrown in your way. That’s part of the game. You’re playing career mode on Professional Poker (Insert Year Here) from EA Sports. The graphics are incredible. The game makes you work.

Don’t compare yourself to other people. That will kill your will to work hard.

I always love asking people this question. Who was Franklin Pierce? Do you know? Did you read that name and immediately know? Did you guess? Franklin Pierce was the 14th President of the United States Of America. If no one remembers a U.S. President and what he did then why do you think anything a poker player does will matter?

Most people want to get out of the rat race. They dream that poker will give them absolute freedom from responsibility. I tell people all the time they don’t need money to do this. I have friends from my hometown who haven’t done shit in years. They’re broke as hell.

If you want to experience what that weightlessness is like save your money for a year and then take a sabbatical from your job. Literally nine people out of ten end up losing their minds after a month. They need to do something with their time. Men who spend that month outside of the country trying to sow their wild oats also end up finding the time to be hollow and meaningless.

We all have to work to participate in this world. It's strange to have to inform adults of this, but the electricity and heating that comes piping into their house isn't free. Groceries don't grow themselves. You need to provide something for everyone who provides you these goods and services.

The trick is finding some way to get your money without selling your soul. Office jobs run you into the ground because you're sitting all day and getting more anxious. Everyone else is sitting all day and getting pissed off. Everybody has to work late constantly because people waste time constantly in meaningless meetings and water cooler conversations.

If you enjoy listening to audiobooks then just do that all day. The way I went pro in poker is I worked a security job that required almost nothing of me mentally. I walked the grounds all day to assure people I was there if they needed me. I was on my feet most of the day so I was able to not put on weight. I read constantly on the job because there was tons of down time. I was still fresh when I got home so I was able to dedicate myself to poker. If I'd been working on the docks or in an office job I doubt I would have had mental energy when I got home.

If you have a job you can stand then you're doing much better than most people, even if you're just listening to albums and delivering food through DoorDash. No one knows who Franklin Pierce is for a reason. The vast majority of us are not important to the evolution of human civilization. It is a special kind of cruelty to always act as if someone could be the next Mark Zuckerberg if they weren't just so fucking lazy. That's exactly what many parents do to their kids.

Relax. If you're treating your family well then you're literally impacting the world the most you can. None of our jobs are that meaningful. None of us are likely to leave much of a legacy outside of our families.

As for poker? If you do this because you love the feeling of chips in your hands then you'll be fine. You and I will likely never be as good or as accomplished as an Erik Seidel or Phil Hellmuth. That's totally fine.

In performance coaching, one of the worst ways to ruin a person's performance is by pretending they could be perfect at all times. Parents do this

to their children constantly. They tell the child they're special and oh so intelligent. This sends the message to kids that they should be able to accomplish anything if they're just not lazy. The kid makes a pretty solid equity calc when he or she looks at the world and realizes it's actually pretty difficult to get ahead. The child has been told they will reveal themselves to not actually be intelligent or hard working if they don't accomplish everything they want. The child then clams up and doesn't want to try hard at anything. Why reveal to the world you're not the genius your parents said you are?

You can't do everything at once. The data is clear. Multitasking doesn't work. You can only do one thing at a time. If you're working on one thing then you're working on everything. Live in day-tight compartments. Each day have small goals that you try to attain.

I have often been complimented on my work ethic. Let me show you my schedule to tell you how I do it.

I wake up at 7:00 AM. I drink my coffee and read my Bible while I wake up. Then I write for an hour or two. I try to get 2,000 words down. Did you ever have to write a 2,000 word paper in school? It's not that difficult. That's all I do every day.

Even if I get done with a poker project I keep writing when I wake up. I was a freelance writer before poker. I have done ghost writing for different publications. I have worked outside of poker. Writing was always my first passion so it's what I do first thing in the morning. No emails. No cellphone. I get 4,000 weeks on this Earth. I'm not going to let them get eaten up by email.

After I get done writing I record one to two hours of poker training footage.

After that I study for one hour.

That's it. That's literally my entire process. Of course, I play poker on the evenings based on what are the best games going on, but if you practice enough the actual playing of poker feels like recreation. Training should be hard. Execution should be close to effortless. 99% of your decisions in the field should be automatic. Almost nothing in your actual sessions will approach the difficulty you put yourself through in practice.

What I just described to you is roughly three hours of work in the morning. It doesn't sound like much, but if you do the math it adds up. 2,000 words a day across 250 working days a year is 500,000 words. For reference, the entire *Lord Of The Rings* trilogy plus *The Hobbit* is 576,459 words.

One hour of footage a day equals 250 hours a year. That's why I have so many training packs, even free ones, on my site [pokerheadrush.com](http://pokerheadrush.com).

Most poker players do not study more than 10 hours a year. You can learn more in one hour of study than you can in an entire lifetime of playing poker. There are certain truths of poker that will only reveal themselves to you in the lab. A play can feel so wrong but clear every simulation poker software can run.

What's truly difficult about this schedule is not how long it takes. What's difficult is having the discipline to execute it day in and day out. That's why it's a good idea to start with something small and build up from there.

I still work once I'm done with this schedule. I tend to emails and business calls in my afternoons. I go to the gym so I can build the endurance that tournament poker requires. But if I'm having a terrible day or if I'm under the weather I'll just make sure to get these three things done. It takes me a minimum of three hours, but it adds up over the year.

You don't need to study for one hour a day. Most of my work is finding one concept I need to fix and spending an hour drilling it. Most of what I learn occurs in the first 5 to 15 minutes. Sometimes that's all I have time for. The rest of the time is spent solidifying the concept.

If you've ever watched a poker training video you know how this process works. You're wowed by a bunch of material but only one intriguing idea sticks with you. You have to rewatch the video at a later date to get the other ideas back into your mind.

Instead of wasting an hour on concepts you won't remember focus on one thing you want to work on and drill that. You don't need more than five minutes. Drill every day. Become the kind of person who can say, "I study poker every day." You need to cast votes for yourself to become that kind of person. Each day you're voting on who you want to be. Put in the time.

To make sure you get this study done attach your study habit to some other habit you have. Do you always take the subway to work? Watch a training video on your cellphone every time you're in the subway. If you're standing listen to a poker audiobook. Even if you can't drill the specific concept you wanted that day just keep the habit going. Give your poker game five minutes. That's all it takes.

Many people guffaw when I say that. "How could five minutes a day be all it takes?" Poker is a game that you can play into old age. If you are 30 and you learn one new idea for 10 years then nothing will surprise you at the poker table by the time you're 40. You will have decades left to execute with that knowledge.

In poker you make money by knowing more than the players at the table

with you. You don't have to beat everyone in the world. If you can play big games with bad players then you can feasibly make more money than Main Event champions. You need to work up to that though. It will take time in the trenches at your local casino. It will take many days of study.

Are you a successful poker player? That question can only be answered through action. Show us who you are every day. Never let a day go by without getting better.

## CHAPTER 88

# NOT PRACTICING DELIBERATELY

### Focus, Feedback, Fix It

I played basketball a lot throughout my childhood. I am terrible at basketball. The 10,000-hour rule is bullshit.

Let me rephrase that. The way people speak about the 10,000-hour rule is bullshit. Parents believe that if their children do any activity for 10,000 hours, they will become a master. But researchers who studied violinists playing for 10,000 hours also dispute this notion.

If you would like to read more on the topic, I recommend the book *Peak* by Anders Ericsson. I've read every book in this genre and this is the best bang for your buck.

Ericsson is the researcher most cited in this field. Even he will tell you the 10,000-hour rule is regularly misapplied. If you really think 10,000 hours of deliberate practice in specific domains can lead to mastery, you must be talking about domains with direct feedback and easy tests of competency. They must be linear and not esoteric. The jobs most of us do for a living do not follow the 10,000-hour rule. If you work as a consultant, for example, that takes a great deal of nonlinear thinking. It's also difficult to get direct feedback on your work. That would be a domain outside of these specific experiments.

All of that said, Ericsson makes a compelling case for how memorization, singing, and other domains considered talent-driven aren't exactly that way. He does prove that practically anyone can improve in specific domains



through deliberate practice. It's compelling stuff.

What most people miss are the specific steps it takes to get better at any skill. Ericsson sums it up as "focus, feedback, fix it." We will use my basketball skills as an example of how not to practice.

The NBA was amazing in the 1990s. My friends and I didn't have smartphones, so we spent all day imitating our heroes on different basketball hoops around the neighborhood. We played against each other. We played against kids from other neighborhoods. We played all day every day. And we all sucked.

I didn't realize how bad I was until my mom moved closer to Seattle. I was playing a pick-up game versus a kid who actually knew what he was doing. The guy could just score on me at will. At one point, I will never forget this, this kid got so frustrated he started trying to coach me up so the game would become more competitive. He'd call out "open lane" and tell me to drive. But I couldn't score or defend against him.

What happened? My friends and I had played basketball for thousands of hours, but we had never tried to get better. We would grab the ball and foul each other hard and throw up desperate shots every day. None of us ever tried to learn technique. I never even learned how to shoot properly. I'd throw the ball up using two hands.

There is exactly one thing in basketball I can do better than 99.99% of people. I can do this one stupid trick. I can spin a basketball on my pointer finger. Once it is spinning, I can transfer it to each one of my digits. I transfer it to my middle finger, ring finger, and then pinkie. From there I can transfer it to my thumb. I do the trick for kids all the time. They freak out when I give them a thumbs up and then throw them the ball. When people see me do this trick, they're astounded at how terrible I am at everything else related to basketball. I don't even remember some of the basic rules.

Why can I do that trick while sucking at everything else? That is the only basketball skill I ever applied "focus, feedback, fix it" to. I would be bored at school and I'd keep trying to do the trick. I'd focus on doing the trick. I'd get feedback by watching where the ball would fall off my hand. I'd work to fix it the next time I tried it.

I have played poker with people for decades who have not improved even 1% during that time. You don't want to approach poker the way I approached basketball. You can't learn through just playing. You need to focus when you play, gather feedback on what you could do better, and then seek to fix your leaks in your next session.

The problem with poker, of course, is that it's difficult to get direct feedback. You can't always see the cards at the end of the hand. You will never know if you made the right fold unless your opponent shows you their hand. Even if someone shows you a bluff, that doesn't help you much. They could be the type of player who never bluffs, so over time your fold would be profitable. They could just be showing that one bluff specifically because they never bluff. They are hoping to get called more in the future because of the advertising they are doing now.

When you play poker, you must deliberately practice. Focus during a session. Play fewer tables than everybody else. Pay more attention than the crowd. Challenge yourself. I used to record all my sessions to make sure I was paying attention. I would take verbal notes into a voice recorder so I could analyze my decision-making process later. Obviously, sometimes multiple hands would be occurring so I would have to wait until a slower moment to go over my thought process, but the effect was the same. Making sure I questioned why I did every play helped me not play automatic, brainless poker. Questioning my play consistently helped me play better, more focused sessions.

That is the best way I've found to focus more during a session. In live sessions, you can take notes, as we discussed in a previous section. Some professionals I know mark hands as they play and write notes. That's their way of focusing more. They make sure to highlight in particular the hands they feel they played poorly.

Once you are done playing, you will need feedback. Feedback can come in the form of statistics. You will be able to see where you're succeeding and failing specifically. What positions and plays work for you? Which don't?

Sometimes you need a professional to interpret the data and hand histories. That's where private coaching comes in.

Additionally, you can learn from a poker coach's training videos how to analyze the data yourself. Many coaches create packages of materials that show you how to analyze the hands and collect feedback.

Finally, you must fix the errors you find. In your next session, you must highlight one mistake you want to change. If you can do this every time you play, you will become unstoppable.

Yes, unstoppable. I'm not saying that to butter you up. In my experience 90%+ of poker players don't even bother studying. Of the 10% of poker players who do some kind of study, barely any of them actually improve. Most people treat poker as entertainment. They play for fun. They study for

fun. They read poker books and watch training videos the same way most of us watch sports highlights and analysis shows. We find the content entertaining, but we are not going to lace up our cleats and try out these tactics the next day. We're entertained, the information goes in one ear out and out the other, then the next day we're the exact same person.

I have been informed by many helpful readers of my content that I am not the brightest guy in the world. They tell me this as if I didn't already know that. I didn't go to college. I didn't get great grades in high school. My high school didn't even bother to tell me to apply anywhere. The junior college I applied to told me I needed to retake high school math.

But here's the thing: None of that matters. All that counts in this game is the humility to admit when you don't know something. There are tons of people who could be better than me and many other professional players, but they are not applying themselves. They act as if admitting mistakes and gaps in their knowledge is a weakness. It proves they're not intelligent. They hate that feeling. They'll do anything to avoid that feeling of inadequacy. So what do they do? They dream up ways to help them believe they are incredible poker players:

"If I had won that flip, I would have likely made the final table."

"I can't believe that guy won the tournament. He got gifted so many stacks. It's so obvious how he plays."

"If this one donkey hadn't called me with this garbage hand, I'd have had a winning session."

And on and on it goes. It's much easier to make statements like these as opposed to:

"If I'm so smart, why am I losing? I must be doing something wrong. What is it? How can I find that out? Why do I always need a flip to go deeper in a tournament? Why can I never fold on the river when someone makes a big hand out of their mediocre pre-flop hand? Why am I not building stacks early? Where can I be better?"

One line of thinking excuses you from hard work and makes poker easier. The other line of thinking is painful and makes poker hard. It's obvious why most people choose the former option.

If you treat life and poker like a series of annoying tasks, you will consistently be miserable. If you treat this like a video game that you're trying to get better at, it becomes fun.

I have zero poker talent. I'm writing this book for you because I grew up playing video games. I love the process of trying to get better at games. I

don't play Tetris for the glory. I play Tetris for the joy of playing Tetris. I play poker for the same reason. I love playing poker. If you're reading this then you love playing poker too. If you choose an enriching relationship with deep poker, then you can enjoy playing the game for your entire life. If you put zero work into the game and get mad when it pays you nothing back, you will quickly learn to despise poker.

More importantly, you need to train your mind for the good of your life. What was fascinating in Anders Ericsson's research was that they found clear evidence that deliberate practice helps you grow your mind. They examined the brains of London taxi drivers who had to memorize more than 25,000 streets over years and years of practice. They then compared those taxi driver brains with bus drivers', who had been working for the same number of years but had been driving fixed routes. They found noticeable differences between the minds of the two groups.

Everyone values visible muscles because they are cosmetically appealing. If we could see each other's brains and how they were growing, we would value them more as well.

I was told by a mentor that by the time I'm 50, I would start seeing huge differences in people. Health-wise, I can say that mentor was off by 20 years. I'm in my 30s now and I can see clear differences in people based on their health.

When I was 28, I could barely walk. I had messed up my back that much. It took years of therapy and weightlifting to fix my bone structure and atrophied muscles.

I talk to guys my age all the time who are still struggling physically. They have a hard time getting around.

What's even more fascinating is talking to guys my age who have brains that are turning to mush. I genuinely believe there is more strife in today's world because we are all getting dumber, me included. There was a time when watching movies and sports at home was considered lazy. Now you're superhuman if you can pay attention to an entire movie without checking your cellphone.

Look at what is happening to our attention spans. We can't even stand five or ten-minute clips. We need clips measured in seconds on Tik Tok.

I have talked to men my age who used to be stellar students. What has happened to their brains is wild. They can't focus on anything. Combine that with the fact everyone is sitting and ruining their backs? It doesn't paint a pretty picture.

To get our brains working again we need to find something that increases neural performance. Some people like brain puzzles and Sudoku. We should all pick poker because it's already an interest we have. We just need to dial up the difficulty a little bit at a time.

You don't have to go insane with focus, feedback, fix it. Play fewer tables. Look at your stats. Oh, wow, you're losing consistently when you call raises from the small blind? Let's try to three-bet or fold from that position for a few sessions. Then let's look at the numbers again.

None of that is rocket science, but 99.9% of your opponents will not be going that far. You'll be systematically shoring up your weaknesses.

This is the great equalizer. If you have drive and focus, you will go far in this game. Extraordinary, by definition, means greater than ordinary. Ordinary people are seeking fun and enjoyment. They are not focused on improvement. If you improve your game every day, you will, by definition, become extraordinary.

I've mentioned it before, but it's worth saying again: There is a difference between talent and skills. Talent is God-given. Talent is something you're born with. Skills are what you develop in the lab. Skills are what you develop in the gym.

The reason I called my first book *The Myth Of Poker Talent* is because there's far less real poker talent than people realize. Don't get me wrong. I played with Johnny Chan in Macau. That guy was spooky when he was on. He'd look at a guy and just know he was bluffing. I don't have that kind of talent and I never will, but that's not the point. The truth is I've played with very few Chans in my life, and I've been playing professionally for 15 years. Almost all the great pros I played against had to work hard to attain their mastery.

You can't say experience is the same as deliberate practice. Ericsson also discussed in his book how doctors would get worse with years of practice, not better. They would have to brush up on their studies and do new classes in order to return to their former precision.

I've played with poker players who were lights out when they were younger. A few years go by and then I play with the same guy again. To my astonishment, he is nothing like he used to be! He is shellshocked from running bad. He won't three-bet bluff anymore because he's so convinced it won't work. He calls pre-flop on every deal and hopes to hit the flop. He's become like everyone else. He never folds on the river because he's convinced everyone is bluffing him. He double barrels when a guy clearly only

calls the flop with a pair he's not folding. He overplays his big hands because he's convinced he's going to get outdrawn. He has more experience, but he hasn't benefitted from it. In a way, his experience has harmed him. He's a worse player than he was when he started playing the game with enthusiasm.

Take your time. Erik Seidel is 62. He could still kick my ass and your ass any day of the week. You have time. It's a marathon. It's not a sprint. Focus when you play. Get feedback from data analysis, hand history analysis, poker software, poker quiz videos, or any other domain that helps you. Fix the leaks you have in your next session. Rinse and repeat. Prove to yourself that you're meant for this game. Be honest with yourself.

Mistakes are puzzles. Solve them and receive the real gems of this life.

## CHAPTER 89

# NOT TAKING TIME OFF

### It's an Investment

You get 4,000 weeks to live on this Earth. How many of them do you want to spend grinding?

What's the point of having freedom from your job if you never cash in on it?

You will never get to see 99.999% of what this world has to offer, so FOMO as a concept is ridiculous. That said, you should want to cash in your chips at some point and get something out of this life.

The U.S. Army spends huge amounts of money on rest activities for its troops. Why? It knows the money is an investment. A rested army is an effective army. You can try to march your troops every day, but it isn't going to work.

When I was a kid watching the 1990s NBA, I'd see guys never take a day off. Karl Malone has more starts than any other player in NBA history. He also never got a championship ring. LeBron James and Kawhi Leonard now unashamedly take games off to manage their bodies. Both have championship rings.

If you ever get a chance, read the book *Rest: Why You Get More Done When You Work Less* by Alex Soojung-Kim Pang. With fresh eyes, Pang looked at the research done in the field of deliberate practice. He uncovered an unreported finding from those studies: that most elite performers also had deliberate rest routines. Many of them had hobbies outside their chosen field that helped them completely disconnect from their work. When they returned to their craft, they had fresh ideas and renewed vigor.

I have tracked my play for years. The quality of my poker play always falls off a cliff when I go hard for weeks and weeks without a break. Taking a break is a great way to boost profits.

Interestingly, there are more potent forms of rest. Rest days are essentially nutrients for your body. The better rest days you pick, the more of a power-up you receive in your poker journey.

When I'm in Las Vegas, I will have days I don't want to leave the rented apartment. I'll lay around all day watching NFL RedZone or baseball games. Unfortunately, while I enjoy my time doing this, it doesn't lead to the greatest poker play when I return to the felt. The rest is decent but the fact I'm not moving my body or shifting my eyes from a screen means the rest isn't the most regenerating.

The type of rest that tends to lead to the best poker results involves outdoor activities. Hiking is especially potent. You're moving. You're getting vitamin D from the sun. If you're with good people, you're getting social interaction. You're getting exercise that helps your back. It's much easier to return to a chair at the poker table after a day of hiking. If you fast while you hike and eat a large meal when you're done it's pretty close to heaven.

Some guys love surfing. I have never been able to catch a wave. I recently took some skiing lessons from a friend. That is an incredible form of rest. The altitude affects your mind. When you're going down that mountain, it is impossible to think about work. You need to be focused on the task at hand. Nothing else exists but the mountain and your next turn. That is as close to Zen as most of us can hope to get.

Another thing I'll do to get more deliberate rest is go to a park with my friends and girlfriend. Again, throwing a football or baseball around is about as close to Zen as most of us will ever get. Volleyball is great as well.

If you're looking for a group to hang out with, I recommend going to a local YMCA and joining whatever classes they have. I played rec league soccer in New York City without even knowing the rules of the game. No one was rude to me. Everyone was great to hang out with. I also took pickleball lessons and had a great time.

If you want to do something low-key like read a book, try to read an actual hard copy rather than an eBook, and get outside to read it.

I also find my poker results soar when I take random outings to places I don't usually go. Aquariums, zoos, art exhibits, museums, corn mazes, concerts, sporting events, whatever. They all work. Go to Trip Advisor and see what's going on. Don't even think about your outing. Just pick a day and do it.

Strangely, the more difficult the event is to get to, the more rested I seem to be on the felt the next time I play. My last skiing trip was a huge pain in the ass. I had the bright idea to go up to the pass on a holiday weekend. I



had to swim through people to get through a line. It took hours to get on the slopes. Once I was done skiing, though, I felt much more relaxed because I'd worked to do something outside of my home.

I talk to a lot of young men in this game who feel lonely. It's hard to date when you're playing all day alone inside your apartment. I always give them the same advice. Go join clubs and rec league sports. Go to every meet-up you can find. Use all those sites, like Meetup.com. Any time you get invited to anything, just go. You can always decline to go a second time. Eventually everybody needs to share their numbers for a group chat anyway. If you're planning on taking an outing as part of your rest routine, tell your group they can come with you if they like. If you go alone, who cares? You were planning to do that anyway. Be comfortable with that and no one will look down on you. If you own it no one cares. People take your lead.

In my experience, you meet much saner women through mutual friends and group outings. My girlfriend now is way out of my league. She told me part of the reason she's with me is because I was always inviting her on outings. I wasn't like every other guy saying, "Let's go get drinks." I was inviting people to do something different.

I used to be a workaholic. I didn't take a two-day weekend for all of my 20s. There were many times I was in the habit of not taking any days off during the week.

It was stupid. Work is how we provide for ourselves. It's not who we are. Everyone needs to work some kind of job to provide for themselves, but very few of our jobs are that important. If you travel through the rest of the world, you'll notice most people don't even ask you what you do for a living. They don't care. That's how little they care about work.

You get 4,000 weeks on Earth. Do what you have to do to get your money, but at least once a week do something for yourself. Take pictures. The memories pay dividends.

## CHAPTER 90

# LETTING SOMEONE CHAT TO YOU WHILE YOU PLAY ONLINE

### How To Avoid the Ultimate Irritation

“You know I’m not sitting here playing fucking Starcraft right?”

I’ve wanted to say that to many people when I am playing online poker. There is nothing more draining than trying to play poker while someone keeps talking to you. It’s like trying to study for an exam while someone is talking to you every five minutes. What’s even worse is that someone talking to you can cause you to miss key details while you butcher hands. If you screw up an entire tournament due to a lapse in judgment, you will have ruined hours of work.

It’s a peculiar feature of our society. If someone goes to an office early in the morning and then spends most of their day skimming Twitter, they are considered productive. If someone works at home and can’t speak with their family while they’re working, that person can be seen as negligent. I’ve lost count of how many times someone has expected me to drop everything at 1:00 PM on a Wednesday to shoot the shit. If I left my workstation at that time, I highly doubt there would be any sympathy for me if I wasn’t able to pay the bills later that month.

Sadly, sometimes you do have to make some hard decisions about who to include in your life and who to leave out. If you have a boyfriend or girlfriend who acts as if you’re being selfish when you’re working, you will need to iron that out in a conversation or counseling. If they still don’t understand you’re working, you will have to make some tough calls. Do you want the

stress of being considered a bad person every time you get on the computer to work?

I don't know where this comes from, but there are many people who truly believe you're not working when you do it at home. They can see on the screen you're playing several tables, but they assume you're playing a computer game with no money on the line. Even if you're word processing or looking over spreadsheets, some people will assume that you can take a break anytime they feel like interrupting you. They would never dream of visiting you at an office to talk to you while you're at work, but if you decide to cut down on the commute by working at home, suddenly you're a selfish person if you don't want to talk about nothing every 11 minutes.

There is one way out of this mess when you're playing poker. I have successfully used this tactic again and again.

Let's say you're playing a few tables and your spouse walks into the room to talk to you about absolutely everything inane that happened on a particular day. You have explained repeatedly that you are not available to talk when you're deep in a tournament, but your spouse didn't get the memo.

They approach you. "Hey honey, so, today..."

"Hold on a second babe. You see this guy right here? He's opening into five players. Now, those five players have three short stacks. So it's likely this player is opening a stronger hand than normal if he sees that. The problem is, DOES HE KNOW THAT? I can't tell! Let me look at his statistics. Hmmm. 24/21. That's a little reckless!"

"Hey...honey, that's...interesting, but..."

"So! He seems like the kind of player who doesn't care who is behind when he opens? Does that mean I should play my pocket sixes? Yes! I'm moving in. Okay on this table I have 10-7s in the hijack. I wouldn't normally open here, but do you see..."

"Honey, that's great, but..."

"Hold on! You see this? These players have no three-bet percentages! Even if they defend they will just call. I'm going to get a flop here if anything. I'm opening!"

"Honey, I really came in here to talk to you about..."

"Ooooh the button called me! Okay normally cold calling ranges in that position are a little tighter so I should be checking more often but this player is loose! What do you think babe? Should I check more or fire out more?"

"I'm going to go watch Netflix."

The more you can spam the conversation with poker jargon the better.

Just be sure to ask them how their day at work was later.

I have never had a family member or partner judge me for nerding out while I play poker. They assume I'm just amped up. If anything, they started to understand how difficult my job was when I was playing. They learned to be cautious when speaking during a large hand.

Essentially you want to sound like a kid geeking out about their Pokemon cards. None of us thinks much of that kid, but we sure as hell don't want to sit there and have an hour-long conversation with him.

If you can avoid this altogether, that really is the best strategy. But I have used this tactic in emergencies when I'm deep in a tournament and simply can't have a conversation about why I can't talk.

The best scenario to eliminate distractions is to have a rule with your family that when you're in your office, no one is supposed to disturb you. If there's an emergency, that is different. But if "emergencies" are occurring multiple times a week then something is off.

If you're working at home, it's a good idea to build in your breaks so your family can know when to see you. My personal routine is as follows: I wake up at 7:00 AM. I get a couple hours of writing in while everyone else is still asleep. I have coffee with my girlfriend or family members around 9:00 AM and take a break. After that I record some footage for my mailing list. When I'm done with that, I go to the gym with my girlfriend. There we get an hour to talk while we're working out. I catch up with her and ask how her life is going. When I get home, I work in the afternoon on the things that are less intense, such as emails or business calls. During that time my family knows they can get a hold of me if they need something because I'm in communication mode. Once the night comes and I'm playing cards, everyone knows not to contact me unless it's a short text.

Having set times you're available seems to help the most if you work at home. People will respect the boundaries you set if you keep to them. I don't even have my phone in my office when I'm writing or recording footage. People learn quickly I'm not answering at those hours. If someone does come into my office during those hours, I give a firm but polite, "I can't talk right now."

I have lived with people and romantic partners who did not respect my boundaries. They held back my success. I made it clear that this was a deal-breaker for me. If I can't do focused work, I can't do my job, which means I can't make a living.

Every successful person needs to eliminate distractions. Sadly, some-

times that comes in the form of relationships where someone is holding you back.

Most of the time, however, the person respects your boundaries but on occasion forgets how busy you are. At that point you simply need to communicate to them how much is going on when you're playing. That's where this tongue-in-cheek exercise of narrating everything you're doing at the table can help.

## CHAPTER 91

# TRYING TO PLAY THROUGH A LIFE DOWNSWING

### Real Life Matters

You can play through most issues in life, but not all of them.

Every poker player reading this will have to play through some tragedy at some point. They will have financial problems at their company. They will break up with their partner. Their child's health will be in trouble. They will be dealing with an illness of their own.

Everyone you see at a poker table is dealing with something. If they're not dealing with anything, at some point the world will catch up with them. None of us pitches a perfect game in life. Something always comes up.

You will need to be able to play through the pain. You need to practice more than everybody else when times are good. When times get bad, you will be able to go back to your fundamentals and play through hardship. If you lack this fundamentals-driven training, you will be lost when the life crises rear their ugly head. "Feel" players lose their touch when something internal is distracting them from the game. Fundamentals-driven players will always be able to read the table and make a more accurate determination.

That said, you will not be able to play through every hardship. Sometimes you will need to tend to your health or family.

I have stayed in this game for 15 years because I know when I don't have it. I don't bullshit myself. I know when a session is going to go terribly.

I have stayed in this game for 15 years because I know when things going on in my life mean I should move down or find softer games.

When I had to take care of my mother after her stroke, I couldn't exactly keep playing long tournament sessions. The competitive part of me wanted to get into the mix every day. The smarter part of me told me to play smaller games that allowed me to be more flexible. The smarter part of me told me to go back to private games.

I resisted having to make those changes with every fiber of my being. I played many angry tournament sessions where I was permanently on tilt. It didn't work.

Things got much easier after I finally got my act together. I took time off when I needed to take my mother to doctor's visits. I took time off when the responsibility of this life was weighing on my personal relationships.

It took years to sort everything out but thankfully I now have freedom to do what I want again. My mother is doing much better and living on her own again.

The combination of moving down and not playing when I was tilted by life helped a great deal. I could have played more angry, unprofitable sessions and dug myself a hole. Instead, I took time off when necessary and got my act together. Now I'm back in the game in the way I want to be. That was always the goal.

Many guys aren't as lucky as me. Their backers make them play through everything. They look for other ways to medicate themselves through their issues. They're never allowed to take a step back.

Don't do that to yourself. If someone passes, take the time to grieve. If your family needs you, cash in your chips and head home. The game will go on forever. You have time.

## CHAPTER 92

# TRYING TO REWIRE YOURSELF OVERNIGHT

### If You're Succeeding, Keep It Up

The vast majority of poker players lose money. If you're making money, keep trying to foster your skills. Don't completely gamble on rehauling your game overnight.

If you're making money as a purely exploitative player, don't try to become a GTO genius overnight. Explore the GTO material and start brainstorming on ways you can use it.

One of my favorite boxing trainers is Robert Garcia. I'm not a fan because of anything he does. I'm a fan because of what he doesn't do.

If you look at Robert Garcia's Wikipedia page, you will see he has trained a stupid number of champions. You will also see that he trains fighters with different styles.

There are only a handful of notable boxing trainers in the world who make considerable money. When a boxer comes out of a specific guy's gym, you can typically know what to expect. Certain trainers focus on defense. Other trainers focus on boxing. Other trainers focus on brawling.

Garcia seems to take a fighter as they are and work to improve them individually. He has defensive-minded fighters in his stable and he has bruising offensive-minded fighters. His job is to put them in great sparring and help them identify and hide their weaknesses. He doesn't try to completely change his fighters overnight, especially if he's getting them in their 30s. He shores up weaknesses in a realistic way and accentuates their strengths. His



gym has a sterling track record.

I get excited every time I see a Robert Garcia fighter in the ring. I know that I'm going to see a great version of that fighter. The fight is going to be great.

I was inspired by that approach when it came to my poker coaching. Many people ask why I don't use all the latest technology in my videos when I'm coaching players. The truth is most of that training doesn't resonate with working people. They're tired after a long day at work. They play small or medium stakes games online where their opponents are wildly unbalanced. It's best to take an exploitative strategy to war with those unbalanced players. If they're playing live, their opponents are even more unbalanced. Most of these casual, recreational players are not interested in balancing their range and creating a theoretically correct framework for the next 20 years. They want to play some cards that weekend and they want something that is going to improve their game right now.

These days, I play a much more solid style than when I started as a player. I won the \$250K guaranteed recently without running a single major bluff. I'm fine being a "game manager" style quarterback on the felt. I love reading the table and identifying openings that others are missing. I love moving my chips around and accumulating a stack slowly.

Do you think that's how all my players want to play? Absolutely not. Some are ram-and-jam action players. Some are tighter than me. Most have five to ten hours to work on their game over the next couple of months. They want a game plan that will get them more profits in a short period of time. They have no intention of ever turning pro. They will consider moving up once they start beating the local card room. They have a specific goal and they don't want anything to distract them. They're not interested in subtleties and intricacies and theory. They want to win now, damn it!

Does this frustrate me? Of course. I work with a GTO trainer every workday. I love knowing the theoretically correct play. I love to see how much I'm deviating from what is theoretically correct when I make an exploitative play. I love how the new software puts me in difficult situations and shows me solutions I've never considered. I find this work has led me to becoming an even better exploitative player.

Do you think most recreational players have time for all that at the end of the day? No. They want a quick game plan. That's my job. I need to be their Robert Garcia. If they're action fighters, I'm going to make them better action fighters. If they're defensive-minded boxers, I'm going to help them

work the perimeter and snipe their competition.

I created playbooks years ago that worked against mediocre regs. They were effective but they were tough to create. Poker has been one of the greatest loves of my life. I want to discuss its subtle nuances all day, but people don't have time for that.

If you're dealing with brawlers in the poker world, you will beat them with technique. If you're playing nut-peddling wannabe technicians, the way to beat them is to take the fight to them.

Most players now are barely losing to the rake or barely beating it. Most high variance players went broke a while ago. Versus bad technicians, the idea is to take the fight to them. My playbooks are designed for this. I can help you make a bad reg's life a living hell.

I squirm sometimes teaching those playbooks because they're so high variance, but according to all the thankful emails I get, the playbooks still work. If you're playing against people with more experience, the idea is to make it so they can't figure you out. Mediocre nut-peddling regs fold when a "recreational" player decides to wake them up with big bets. They assume the recreational player just picked up a hand. That's why attacking poker is so effective in those games.

In this book, I have worked hard to give you the fundamentals that have helped me make money for so long. My previous book discussed the attacking style that frustrates regs so much. The 100 chapters of this book have helped me provide more details on how to craft a solid game or attacking-style game.

What style should you employ? If you spend five minutes thinking about this, it can vastly improve the rest of your time in poker.

If you are playing online in huge tournament fields with tons of regulars, I'd recommend using the tactics we have discussed in this book. Take the fight to them more if they're mindlessly playing too many tables.

If you are playing online in tournament fields with mostly recreational players, I'd recommend you play a more value-intensive game. Don't run as many bluffs, but value bet relentlessly.

In loose cash games at a casino, you can get away with playing solidly all day. No one folds anyway.

If you are playing loose home games, you'll need to make it less obvious you're there for money. We covered how to do that in a previous section.

If you're playing live versus low-to-mid stakes regulars in Las Vegas, I'd recommend taking the fight to them. You will get more of your value bets

called after a while. Most of the regs play a boring nut-peddling, pot-controlling style. It's like their job is to spend as much of life as possible in a cardroom.

If you're playing live against recreational players in other locales, I'd recommend going with a more solid, value-intensive style with tons of value betting.

Are you making money at the game already? Let's try to accentuate your strengths before we work to hide your weaknesses. Do you feel like you work to exploit players more than anything? Then this book is perfect for your purposes. Keep finding as much work on exploitative poker as possible. We'll revisit GTO once you hammer out the best part of your game.

Do you feel like your best asset in poker is slowing the game down and thinking of everything? Are you not impatient at the table like everyone else? Can you think through ranges clearly and logically under pressure? Then go seek out the GTO materials that will feed the best part of your game. The more you understand the theoretical framework, the better you will be able to see the game. Your exploitative game will come in naturally once you start organically finding more inconsistencies.

If you're doing something that's working, do more of it. Don't let anyone tell you your game is weak and needs to be completely rehailed. If you're making money, you're already ahead of the vast majority of poker players.

## CHAPTER 93

# EXPECTING THE SPARK TO LAST FOREVER

### Puppy Love Versus Real Love

I talk to many poker players who tell me, “The game isn’t fun anymore.” They say they don’t feel the passion they felt when they first played. They want that thrill back. They want the game to be as fun as it was during their first home games.

I hate to tell you this, but in my experience that feeling never comes back. And that’s 100% okay.

What you experience at the beginning of your relationship with poker is puppy love. It doesn’t last. If you want to have a long career in this game, you will need to invest in a mature relationship with it. It’s just like any other relationship. Once the butterflies cease buzzing around in your tummy, it’s time to invest in what you truly enjoy.

All of life is like this. The boy who becomes a fighter pilot feels butterflies when he first sees a plane whizzing through the sky. He can’t have those same butterflies when he finally flies an aircraft. That would be dangerous. He still enjoys the process, but he needs to keep his head clear when he’s in the skies.

No one meets their spouse and has butterflies for 50 years. At some point, you need to invest in the real nuts and bolts of the relationship. Do you enjoy your time together? Can you continue enjoying your time together?

There is no one reading this book who was a bigger fan of poker than I was. Every competitive drive I ever held was channeled into poker.

I played football for 10 years until I found out I'd never be big enough to be an offensive lineman. My father helped me set up a heavy bag, speed bag, and double-end bag in our garage. He had boxed competitively when he was younger. He taught me well. The problem was the student. I couldn't get the footwork and form right. I always wanted to rely on power. I got to a certain age where I realized I didn't have enough of that to overcome my shortcomings. I just wasn't athletic enough to keep myself safe.

I wrestled for four years, but it became obvious I wasn't quick enough for that cerebral sport.

I played baseball. I always wanted to be a pitcher, but a familiar story reared its head. I had velocity. I had power. I couldn't control either.

The first time I saw poker on TV, every fiber of my being lit up. Here was a completely meritocratic game. Everyone got the same 52 cards. Your size didn't matter. You couldn't get a gig because you were the coach's kid. You showed up and you won, or you showed up and you lost.

I read every poker book in the local library system. Most of them were horrendous. When I got to David Sklansky's *The Theory of Poker* I read it three times back-to-back because I loved it so much. I finally knew what I had to do.

Every moment of my spare time was spent playing poker. I would show up to high school with four hours or zero hours of sleep because I was playing all night. Home games, casinos, online poker, it didn't matter to me. I wanted to play every format. I wanted to play every minute of every day or be studying the game.

I started this game more broke than 99% of professionals. I was renting my own place in high school. I was doing landscaping, fishing, and security jobs to pay my bills. Poker money allowed me to move into Seattle and play cards full time when I was a teenager. You would think I'd be the most appreciative person there was.

But I wasn't. I was entitled. I wanted the millions of dollars. I was frustrated that I repeatedly couldn't move up. It felt like athletics all over again. I didn't want to accept I had a ceiling.

I traveled the whole world trying to prove that I didn't have that ceiling. I moved to South Korea. I moved to Europe. I played every tournament and cash game I could. Then I got it. I made a major tournament final table in Italy where close to \$2 million was up for grabs for the winner. I lost a flip to start the final table. I was out.

The fight left me that day. I started playing poker obsessively, every

day, when I was 15. I turned pro out of high school at 18. When I was in high school, I'd go to school for six hours, come home, and play poker for eight hours. When I worked as a security guard, I would work for eight hours, come home, go for a run, and then play poker for another six to 10 hours. I had been burning the candle at both ends for six years to get to that final table. It was my dream. And in one flip the dream was over.

I didn't stop. I continued playing relentlessly. But something had changed. I had seen the big final table. I had sat at it. Small tournaments didn't feel the same. I lost my patience. I played poorly. I didn't get close to that kind of final table again for a long time.

My love for the game died when I saw players win tournaments with skills they had not developed. They would even tell me privately that they didn't feel they deserved the win. That's how lucky they had gotten.

My friends started making jokes about how often I got deep in tournaments and didn't produce. "All the chips go through Assassinato," one of them quipped. "Whoever wins a big pot with Alex deep will end up winning the tournament."

Of course, if I hadn't been so stupid, I would have realized the chips went through me because I never knew when to pump the brakes deep. I racked up major online final tables left and right. I even won championships of online poker. But true success eluded me because I was playing for ego gratification. I couldn't fold when I needed to. I didn't have the maturity of a real professional. The game gave me everything and I demanded more.

I have dealt with the same trials that embrace many professional poker players: drug addiction, alcoholism, divorce, and going broke. They were the best things that could have happened to me.

When I lost everything and hit rock bottom, I had to ask myself if I still wanted to play this game. The answer I felt deep inside was a resounding yes.

I had to ask myself if I would still love playing this game even if it meant I never made it to that top level. I had never asked myself that question before. To my surprise, every fiber of my being said, "Yes, play."

As I got sober, deepened my faith with Christ, and started shedding pounds at the gym I found my focus came back. I found that I had a blast playing even 50 cent tournaments. Thankfully, I found I still had game. I could get to major online final tables still. I could get to smaller final tables and educate my students.

I made myself play smaller tournaments and cash games to see if I truly still loved the game. It's hard to be truly present in anything. That's what get-

ting sober reveals to you more than anything. Addiction is a way to overcome overwhelming emotions. Those emotions come directly from being unable to handle your environment. You tune out what is bothering you when you're an addict. You try to overcome what is bothering you by indulging in your poison of choice. Gamble higher! Feel the jolt! Drink more! Get higher!

Once I started dealing with my personal bullshit, I realized the game always treated me well. I was the asshole in the relationship. The game had treated me just fine. The game had always allowed me to make a living. I was the deluded one, comparing myself with the top 0.001% of earners.

Thankfully, the game took me back. Many better poker players aren't as lucky.

If it wasn't for my students, I wouldn't still be in the game today. They were there for me when I needed them most. They pumped me up and got me playing again.

I never knew that I was a better coach than I was a player. I never planned to get into poker coaching. I literally started this way:

"Hey Alex. Could I hire you for a poker lesson? You seem to be doing well now. I'd like to pick your brain."

"No, man, I don't really do that."

"I'll pay you \$200 an hour."

"Okay, when do you want to do this?"

I was never brilliant like the rest of these cyborgs, so I always had to teach myself complex poker subjects in the simplest terms. To my shock, there was a huge market for my notebooks. Many casual players want simple strategies as opposed to the most complex and complete ones. I was given a job.

The more I worked with my students, the better I got at the game. I realized I truly loved the game at that point. I loved going to a coffee shop and chopping it up with a hungry young pro. I couldn't believe they were paying me to do what I loved. My mistakes had value. I could tell better young guns what mistakes to avoid. When retirees came into town to play some cards, I could help them find the best games for their comfort level and actually make some money.

The more I talked cards with players from 60+ countries, the more I learned about the game. Poker is a game of people. I might have spoken to more people who play poker than anyone else alive. All that knowledge about what they think and what they do when they play is immensely helpful. It allows me to compensate for many weaknesses in my game.

Teaching those hungry up-and-comers was an incredible stress test for my strategies as well. I would give them a strategy or play to work with and they would come back with questions. At first, I was alarmed that I wasn't prepared for some of their questions. I would admit to them, "I don't know the answer to that" and I'd look it up for them or I would contact my friends who are better players. As soon as I had the answers they were looking for, I'd break it down for them. I thought I had failed because I didn't know everything off the top of my head. More experienced adults calmly explained to me that no one knows everything off the top of their head. They were paying me so I could do the research for them.

That was when a light bulb went off. You play poker for the love of the game. You play poker because you enjoy this process. You play poker for the love of getting better. You play poker precisely because it's a game you can never master. If you love being in coffee shops with your friends working on hands then you've already won. The real salary this game pays is the adventure. The real salary is the anticipation you feel when you blow into a new town on a train or a plane. The real salary is getting to play.

There's an old baseball story. I have heard at least 20 versions of it. I will summarize my favorite version:

They asked a guy in his mid-30s why he hadn't given up. He was still kicking around the minor leagues. He had never made it to Major League Baseball. He was always in some one-horse town or another still trying to make it happen. It never looked like he was getting closer to his dream.

What did this guy say when he was asked why he didn't give up? "Look. I have a job back home waiting for me. I got my degree when I played college ball. My father will let me be an accountant at his company if I come home. I'm luckier than most of these guys. You're right. I should quit. But here's the thing. The day you quit this job and take off the uniform for the last time? That's the last day you could win. Every day I wake up and know I can still win. It's still possible. Things can still change. I still have a shot. When you officially quit? Everything changes. There are no winning days as an accountant. You can only lose."

I would have much more money now if I quit playing cards and went into business with some of my friends. I also would have hated every minute of it.

Once I realized I don't strictly do this for the money, that's when I started loving my job.

I do it because the true salary is having a chance to win. I love waking up every day not knowing where the game is going to take me. Most people don't have families who would support them in this kind of endeavor. Most



people don't have friends who would support them in this kind of job. I'm supremely lucky to do this. I can never stop saying how grateful I am for my family, friends, girlfriend, and students who support me in this game.

Every day can be different. Every day I can win. Every day there is a chance to catch another card rush. That is the true salary.

I don't even play live much anymore. The bright lights don't attract me like they once did. I don't do this for other people's recognition now. I love drinking coffee at my standing desk and playing multiple tables on my big screen while I listen to Spotify for hours. That's my real salary. I love playing a game for a living. I love competing. I don't mind losing anymore. The threat of losing needs to be there so I can feel pumped up when I win.

I have not watched poker on TV in more than 10 years. I don't even know who the new hot shots are anymore. I don't feel the exhilaration I once felt at the poker table. I never feel the way I felt at my first home games.

And that's okay. I have something deeper now with the game. I love chilling in my Vegas Air BnB watching RedZone after a long session. I love talking with my friends at the coffee shop about a new play or strategy we're working on. I love getting to travel to these different locales. I love having my system up while I play multiple tables. I love the endless process of trying to perfect my playbooks with my students as the game changes every day. I love poker.

## CHAPTER 94

# NOT LOVING THE PAIN

### The More You Sweat in Peacetime...

You need to be sick and twisted to love this game.

If you ever tell me a bad beat story, I always have the same reaction. I'll laugh in your face. It's genuinely funny to me. No one gets into a fight expecting not to get hit. No one should gamble for a living and expect not to get beaten up.

You need to love the pain of practice away from the table. You need to get a sick thrill from imagining your opponent staring dumbly into the pot as they get busted. You want them not to see it coming. That takes training. That takes work away from the table. You must live for the kill.

Enjoy drilling away from the table. Enjoy focusing on the pain. The fatigue and tilt should make you overjoyed. Everyone else would have quit by now, but you're harder than them. You're not built like that.

The more you sweat in peacetime, the less you bleed in war. You need to know no one can rattle your cage. It's a privilege when someone starts running their mouth against you. See if you can laugh. See if you can let your play do the talking.

We all have to pay our dues. I was once an emotional young kid. I took myself out of many tournaments and cash games. We need to get beyond that to play dynamite no limit hold'em.

You can't play this game for the money. You play because you love it when you don't even like it. You play because you love slinging chips. You play because you love that there's a chance you can go bust. Normal people in normal life seek stability. This is gambling. There is no stability.

There was a time once where I was deep in a tournament with another

professional. We had gotten into it with each other repeatedly. He won a huge pot at another table. I walked by to buzz his tower and give him a hard time. He was so happy about winning the huge pot he dropped the act with me. He laughed and joked with me for a minute or so. We talked like old friends. Then a couple minutes later we went back to going after each other. That's just how it is.

Casual observers thought this guy and I hated each other. That couldn't be further from the truth. I don't have many true colleagues who have been doing this for decades. I don't have many friends who have been supporting their families for decades from this game. Even when we have our differences, we tend to drop them over the long run. We have fun giving each other a hard time, but that's just how poker players are. We're competitive. We also tend to be men with deliriously inflated egos, so we're not exactly the least obnoxious beings you've ever spoken to.

But none of that matters. That player and I know what it is. He is so intelligent he would be worth tens of millions if he went into finance. I'm dumb with morals and I work hard. If I had gone to work for McDonald's, I'd likely be a franchisee with multiple stores now. Neither of us played the game like that though. We play poker year in and year out because it's exciting to get up for work each day. We love playing in different locales and grinding it out. We love the thrill of knowing we could lose it all at anytime. We love knowing this isn't guaranteed.

This game never promises you an easy living or any living at all. It promises you a life that never gets dull. That isn't a blessing to everyone. "May you live in interesting times" is a curse in many cultures for a reason.

If you get into this game seriously, you are getting into the most nausea-inducing gambling game there is. There is a reason many professional gamblers refuse to play no limit games. If you expect this to be an easy ride, you are foolish. You should expect to get the shit kicked out of you at least once every time you play. If you don't love the fight and hustling, don't even bother playing. Professional gamblers are not normal people. They want two salaries from their job. There's the money. Then there's the adrenaline. Live for the adrenaline and enjoy the pain. Realize the buzz comes from the potential of ruin. Find beauty in challenge and you'll end up with a balance.

Adapt these attitudes and you'll come out further ahead. Love the pain and hustle of it all and you'll be cooking with gas. You have no other option. If you expect perfection and symmetry from a game of chance,

you will lose your mind. I am not joking. I have seen it happen more than once. Proceed with caution. Know that you're built for this before you get into it.

## CHAPTER 95

# NOT TAKING MONEY OFF THE TABLE

### The Only Metric for a Professional

I was told a couple of anecdotes when I started playing poker that changed my life forever. I will share them with you today. Fair warning: I'm not sure which parts of these stories are apocryphal and what are true. I will do my best to cite my sources.

When I was in high school, I read an article by Mike Caro. He made the point that if you never cash out what you make at the table, you're just playing a huge tournament with yourself. You take the money from one night's score and roll it out on to a bigger game the next night. You do this forever until either you're broke or you have all the money in the poker world. I know which outcome is most likely.

Another professional told me this: "Look, [Player A] was always a great poker player, but he was a terrible poker professional. There's a difference. A great poker player can play the game right. A great poker professional can take money off the table for his family. [Player A] never took money off the table for his family. Millions went through his fingers."

"Who told you that? That whole anecdote?" I asked this pro.

"I think I heard it from Chip Reese at some point in an interview."

Chip Reese. Mike Caro. The Godfathers walked so we could run. We should heed their advice.

Many young players have asked me, "When can I call myself a poker professional?"

There is only one metric that defines a poker professional. How much money do you take off the table for your family? The more money you take off for your family, the more of a professional you are.

I have made every mistake in the book when it comes to professional poker, but I heard these Caro and Reese anecdotes early in my career. Whenever my sister needed books for college or my mother needed medical care, I paid out. It wasn't easy. I wasn't prepared for that when I was young, but it was worth it. I learned a lot about myself and my abilities through this process.

As I've mentioned many times before: I went pro at 18 and I'm headed into my mid-30s now. Could I have gotten further in my poker career if I hadn't spent so much money? Yes. Do I regret sticking my neck out for my family? Never. The Godfathers told me what the measure of a man is. I can look at myself in the mirror. I know I'm not just a gambler anymore. I have many faults, but not being a poker professional isn't one of them.

Let me add just a couple more words to what these legends have said.

Not all money you take off the felt for your family is equal. If you blow everything on getting your mama a huge house with a huge mortgage, that's different from getting her a rental property so she can earn some passive income.

Memories and education can't be taken away. I took my whole family to Prague for Christmas one year when I was playing cards there. That trip is still paying dividends. My mother and sister love to revel in the memories. If I leave this earthly plane, they'll have those vivid recollections to hang on to.

Education can't be taken from you. Giving someone an education is how you prepare them for success. I'm not just discussing universities here. There is technical school. There are apprenticeships.

The fun part of this game is what you do with the money once you start succeeding. You could blow it all. That's fun too. But what is truly rewarding is seeing how much you can take off the felt for your family. What is truly rewarding is seeing how much you can make that money work for your family. Can you set up passive income streams? Can you provide memories and education that will be with them forever?

I also believe that men start chewing on themselves when they don't have a purpose in life. We are wired for tribal politics. We are wired to fend for our family units. If you take a tribal male like that and throw him into a first world country today, he is going to be confused by the affluence. The only way to keep him from going insane is to give him a purpose.

I was a total dipshit before I had to start helping my family. I'm glad it happened. I never would have gotten my act together without that kind of responsibility. I'm grateful that Caro and Reese told me how to live my life right, even though they never spoke to me directly. I'm a much better player and man because of them. I hope their words can help you too.

## CHAPTER 96

# NOT DEVELOPING A WINNING CULTURE

### Culture Beats Strategy

Our brain is activated by another person's smile, frown, or complaint. We are empathy machines. That's why you need to create a winning culture. Culture beats strategy. Strategies can be a wish. Strategies can be a dream. Culture pervades your being. You are surrounded by your household's culture all day, every day.

We know that other people and certain media can bring us down. No one gets on social media or watches the news and says, "I feel great about my life now." It's the equivalent of eating mental junk food. The algorithms and news are designed to give you more of what you want. What we want is mental junk food. We want the dopamine hit of tearing someone down and feeling better than them. Unfortunately, new research indicates that partisanship can cause brain damage. If that's true, the whole lot of us have gotten a whole lot dumber over the past five or so years.

I'm not a bright man, but I'm pretty sure that brain damage doesn't make you a better poker player. If you're trying to be the best you can be, why would you invite bad team members into your circle?

"But it isn't my fault" doesn't count for anything in real life. Something can 100% not be your fault but it can still be your responsibility, as author Mark Manson notes. If you get hit by a drunk driver, that isn't your fault. But rehabbing so you can be there for your family again is 100% your responsibility.



It's fun to complain. It gives us a dopamine hit. It makes us feel righteous. It gives us an excuse. That's why it's so dangerous. It feels good. There's no way to resist it without deliberate thought.

There's a phrase that sports psychologists use all the time. "That sucks. Now what are you going to do about it?" Your response is the only thing that you can control about a situation.

Change the culture around you. It will change you as a person.

I was failing in my personal life years ago. I didn't have my finances or fitness in check. I was out of control. I paid good money to be mentored by people older than me who could show me the way. It was worth every cent. I paid to change my culture. My income quadrupled. I fixed my back and lost 50 pounds before putting muscle back on again.

It sounds impressive to say all that now, but there was no willpower on my end. Culture beats strategy. Whenever I was with my mentors, the culture was: "Work harder, show up, what are you doing to fix this? The first sign of a loser is an excuse. What are you doing to change this?" There were certain points they were going so hard on me I wanted to yell out, "I'm fucking paying *you* right?" They had me feeling like I was trying out for a sports team and they could cut me at any time.

Now, I understand why they went at me so hard. If you let your culture slip, everything goes to shit.

My girlfriend wanted to put something on Netflix the other night. "You want to watch *Last Chance U*?" she said.

I normally leap at anything football related. "Yeah sure," I said, then I caught myself. "Wait, is this the season about them losing their ass off?"

"Yes," she said.

"Then no, don't put that on."

It sounds eccentric, but why would I want to maim myself? Do you think I want to feel bad all night while kids watch their dreams disappear?

Why watch the news? Do you want to injure yourself? They're not going to propose any fixes. It's a giant bitching competition so tribes can feel better about themselves. How is that going to help anything?

When I was a teenager, I was a loser. I was a cynic. I was a vicious hater. I was a massive downer to be around. No one hung out with me. The best thing anyone ever did for me was tell me to my face one day why no one wanted to hang out with me. "Why don't you grow up? Stop bitching about everything. No one wants to be around that."

Now, people seem to love people like my old loser self. Everyone gets

online after a long, hard day of work to get into a bitching competition.

There are so many poker players who go broke because they never study. They think they're studying, but what they're truly doing is scouring the internet for someone to put their arguments into better terminology. They don't want to be confronted by any new ideas. That might mean they're wrong. I used to be one of these players.

Whenever I get on guys about changing their culture, there's inevitably a ton of resistance. Without fail it comes from the guys who never played team sports or did military service. If a guy got his ass handed to him when he was training to be a chef or a firefighter or electrician or whatever, he understands how the game works. Men sharpen other men like iron. They need to cut you down to make that edge. It hurts. If they're real friends, they'll do the work tactfully. If they're haters, they'll just look to shit on you.

Surround yourself with winners. Culture beats strategy every day of the week.

I'm with my girlfriend for a reason. She is allergic to excuses. She's obsessive when it comes to her fitness and diet. It's literally her job to stay in shape. I am hurting her earning potential if I ruin the culture around her. If I decide to skip a day at the gym, she starts looking at me differently. The message seems to be: "I thought you could keep up with me. I thought we were a team." Whenever I eat fast food in front of her, I am making her job and life more difficult.

I know the ideal strategy for health: Eat clean and work out regularly. A 7-year-old could tell you that. Why do people not apply that strategy? It's the culture around them.

I am not one of those people who wants to go to a gym. I do not often look forward to lifting weights. I am the guy in the gym who talks too much and spends too much time drinking the free coffee.

But I have not missed a workout in four years. Rain or shine, I am in that gym to lift weights three times a week. Why? My girlfriend changed the culture I live in. I don't get to date a girl out of my league and simultaneously skip leg day. It's deliberate practice for life. You aim for standards just outside your reach and create stakes. Losing the respect of my girlfriend is high stakes.

Every one of my coaches busts my balls. They've told me to my face that I'm a nut-peddler who bum hunts. One of my guys has been playing poker for three years as opposed to my 15+. He's told me to my face that he's a better player than me. What am I supposed to do? Tell him that hurts my

feelings given all the work I've put into the game? If what he's saying is true, what am I supposed to say? I need to eat my pride and learn. There's no other way around it.

I once had a business coach tell me to my face that I was horrible at running any kind of side hustle in the poker space. He was the one who found me the framework for my new training site and told me to start again. I had to scrap everything I had been doing for years and start over from scratch.

Do you think any of this is a delight to hear? Of course not. But that's the price of admission. The people around you will make you or break you. If you create a winning culture by only adding winners, you will succeed. If you constantly just flatter one another while whispering sweet nothings about bad beats, you will fail.

The game is always going on around you. When you watch TV, you should be watching the winners and identifying with them. What do you feel when you see Tom Brady? He's a professional entertainer on television. He's good at throwing an egg-shaped ball. You should respect the game and see if there's a lesson.

If someone puts on some whiny TV show, say, "Not in my house."

If you find yourself spiraling into anger and jealousy, catch yourself before it's too late. Every poker player has been there. You can't ask your brain to stop making emotions just like you can't ask your heart to stop beating. Just catch yourself. Say to yourself, "That sucks, now what am I going to do about it?"

If someone around you is not helping you improve, you need to lay down the law. You might need to break things off with them.

It's not comfortable. People will say you changed, but you don't have a choice. There is no other way to get where you want to be going. If someone just wants to make excuses and engage in confirmatory thinking, you need to change the culture.

## CHAPTER 97

# NOT TAKING CARE OF YOUR HEALTH

### The Holy Trinity

I'm only going to report to you what happened. I'll let you make a judgment call as to how to live your life.

Six years ago, my back was shot. My mother had her stroke. I didn't like how I was playing. I took some time away from the game to take care of my family's health and my own. I started spending a great deal of money on finding personal trainers who could help me strengthen my back. None of the fixes were helping. I read that Nassim Nicholas Taleb had fixed his back through weightlifting, so I pursued that.

After years of pain, my back muscles strengthened. I lost my tech neck and my energy returned. My energy at the table increased and I felt better about my poker play. My income got a huge boost.

Some of my friends in poker faced the same trouble. All the 10-hour days we had spent on rickety cardroom chairs had caught up with our backs. My friends took a different direction from me, however. They decided to play harder.

How are we all doing today? They have more money. I will not lie to you about that. They've also told me they'd trade a large amount of it to have the health I have. So who won? I'd call it a draw. What will truly determine how we fare is what happens in the long term.

They have confided to me that it is harder for them to play poker now. Their backs are constantly sapping their energy and bothering them. They

are better poker players than me because they've studied more, but maybe they don't feel 100% every day. Again, we're dealing with a draw.

When I look at projects outside of poker, I notice that I'm able to pursue mine much more ferociously. I feel more energetic each day now that my back is fixed. I lost many years to poor health and I'm behind now, but I'm able to seize on opportunities these days.

What kind of poker player should you try to emulate? Do you want to be like me or my friends? Remember, all of us have been successful.

The correct answer is you should want to be none of us. We all made massive mistakes. I paid tremendously to undo my personal mistakes. They're paying a great deal now to fix their own issues.

What you want to do is never develop these issues to begin with. That's why you must focus on the holy trinity of sleep, diet, and exercise. If you ever see a poker player in poor health I guarantee you he is neglecting one of these.

Do you ever feel depressed or agitated? Does this cause you to not play well? If you don't want to start your session on tilt then you must tend to sleep, diet, and exercise.

I was a bullshit macho man for years. I didn't think I needed a full night's sleep to play well the next day. One day, however, I noticed all my mentors who are 20 times more successful than I am were all freaks about their sleep. I noticed that every Sports Illustrated profile I read about a MLB, NBA, or NFL player's regimen included details on their freakish sleep regimen.

I decided to bite the bullet. When I moved to Colorado I gave my old mattress to a couple who were just starting out in NYC. I finally dropped a couple thousand on a real mattress after I spent a couple days researching what was right for me. It was life changing. I slept deeply every night from then on. I never realized how much energy my poor mattress was taking from me.

Diet is another one of these "no shit Sherlock" simple factors that everyone messes up. Pay attention to how you feel after eating a heavy meal. Pay attention to how you feel the next day. So many times how we feel is based on the food we eat. In my experience, the foods that make you the most tired and irritable at the table are anything processed, sugar, grains, and anything fried. You can eat an authentic wood-fired pizza from a real Italian place and get by the next day, but if you eat some processed Little Caesar's you can kiss your game goodbye. If you're cooking from scratch it seems difficult to make the food too unhealthy, but if you use all the processed packs of ingredients you get right back into the same boat.

Exercise doesn't have to be strenuous but it must exist. If you put a dog in a bedroom all day you would expect the dog to go insane and start chewing up everything. It's the same thing for you. Humans have made tremendous evolutionary changes to their body so they could walk for long distances. You're literally wired for that. If you can just walk and listen to a poker audiobook each day you will be ahead of most poker players.

As far as I know, I'm doing better than most of the guys I started playing poker with. Please feel free to copy off my paper. I did everything wrong for years and I paid dearly for the information I'm about to give you. If I had applied this formula from the start of my career I'd likely have five times my net worth now.

For sleep, spend a week finding a mattress that's right for you. Do research as to what works for different people. Use a store that allows you to return a mattress if it's not a right fit. I returned the first mattress I bought here in Denver because it wasn't the right fit. The replacement I got was excellent and has changed my life. Try to go to bed at the same time every night. Cut out caffeine at 2:00 PM every day. If that's too early for you try for at least 5:00 PM.

For exercise, just find something that's fun and you can do every day. The best bang for your buck is weight lifting, specifically squatting, bench pressing, and deadlifting. That works a ton of your muscles all at once. But if you even just walk each day and play the occasional game of golf, pick-up basketball, rec league soccer, or whatever you will be way ahead of most poker players. The idea is to be active every single day with something that is easy and fun.

For diet, I've never found calorie counting to work. Once I start eating I can't stop. I delay my first meal each day to make sure I eat fewer calories. If you're eating all your meals within a smaller window it becomes difficult to eat too many calories. I started by eating my first meal at 1:00 PM. I'm now getting into 6:00 PM territory and feeling good about it. You can still drink coffee and use it as an appetite suppressant in my experience. This is the only technique I've ever used that helped me effectively cut weight.

The fundamentals of dieting are fairly straightforward: Just don't eat processed foods. Baking fish is about the easiest meal you could ever do. Pair that with a vegetable each day and start your eating window with that. Eat what you want after that but typically the lean protein and vegetables will be so filling you won't even need any junk.

Don't be overly stringent. Eating out is one of the joys in life. You'll never

stick to a lifelong plan if it's too stringent. Just try to put better fuel in your gas tank when you have no reason to party.

To keep your back from ending up like mine get a standing desk and use it. I spent tens of thousands of dollars fixing my back. Many poker players I know who have spent that kind of money never ended up fixing their back. It causes them pain each day.

I have never met a poker player who stopped smoking pot who didn't report their results improved. The successful guys I know who do smoke pot or drink regularly will tell you the same thing. "You can bullshit. But you can't bullshit on the clock." If they partake they tend to not be playing the next day. They give themselves a day to recover. They also tend to never binge drink. "A gentleman should never have more than three drinks," is what they told me once. It seems to work for them.

If you're a caffeine addict stay away from the junkie energy drinks with tons of processed sugars. If you get coffee at the table try not to put sugar in it. That tends to be what leads to a crash later.

If you need a snack at the poker table stay away from the energy bars. They always have ways of hiding sugar in their product. That's how they get people to buy them again and again. I go with mixed nuts almost always. Bananas have carbohydrates but they do seem to provide a quick jolt of brain fuel. Apples seem to be the best thing in the world for you but I just can't bring myself to eat them enough.

As you can see, this advice isn't exactly groundbreaking. Nothing we're discussing in this book is that difficult to apply. The problem lies in human error. We are fallible humans.

Extraordinary by definition simply means better than ordinary. Ordinary people are overworked. They're distracted by what is going on with their kids, their job, their sick parents, their marriage, or a hundred other things. They aren't able to be consistent every day. If you can block out the noise and stick to your systems consistently each day then you will be, by definition, extraordinary.

The key is removing the need for discipline. Discipline is a finite resource that we are all depleting each day. Make it a rule to eat something lean and good for you before you eat anything else. Don't tell yourself you can't eat anything for fun. Just tell yourself you can only eat it after a salad. As for sleep, find paperbacks you love that you can only read in bed at a certain hour. For exercise, find something you'd do every day anyway.

Once you get the ball rolling it's like going downhill in skis. You don't have

to use your sticks anymore to propel you. You will just need to steer yourself because you will already have momentum. Once you are sleeping well then you have a much easier time eating well. Once you are sleeping well and eating well you will find it much easier to exercise. Once you exercise you will find sleep will come to you more easily. And the cycle will continue.

None of these ideas are my own. I consulted with a doctor for all of these systems. Please do not take health advice from professional poker players. Check all of this with your doctor to make sure it is right for you.

If you can apply these systems consistently day in and day out I can guarantee you that your ROI will increase. My income has quadrupled since I started taking care of all these small details. I was told by mentors that my income would go up at least 20% and they were right. When you have more energy on the felt you see more angles. When you're calm it's easier to find close folds. When you're at peace with yourself no one can get you off your game.



## CHAPTER 98

# NOT TAKING CARE OF YOUR FAMILY

### The Only Metric That Matters to a Man

I cannot overstate how much money and time it has cost me to be there for my family.

There were years I couldn't commit myself to the game.

It was all worth it. It made me get better at my job. It motivated me to study. It made me sober up. It made me into a man.

I am reminded of the Jewish proverb: "Ask not for a lighter burden, but for broader shoulders."

If a man becomes a billionaire but neglects his family, is he even a man?

I made hard decisions. I had to cut off people to correct my behavior. I had to pay for corrective surgeries before things got worse. It was all worth it.

I could have purchased multiple investment properties with the money I spent. Not everybody I helped even speaks to me now. It doesn't matter. The process taught me a hard lesson. The family unit is the source of personal power. When you are down, it is your family that is going to lift you up.

When I was up, I didn't want to take care of my family. The money it cost felt like a burden. But when I fell back down to Earth, they were the first ones to send me money on the road. They were the first ones to give me a place to stay. I wouldn't be writing this book if it hadn't been for them.

If you take care of your family, you will always have a back-up plan. You will always have someone in your corner. The crazier they are, the better. It makes for better stories.

When I was a kid, I saw a special on 50 Cent. I saw that he called his mom every day no matter where he was in the world. I wanted to be like him. So I started calling my mother every day on the tour, regardless of where I was.

I can't tell you how many times I would be explaining a problem from tour life to my mother and it would hit me like a rock how stupid my complaint was. Your family unit is a great way to bring yourself back down to Earth.

Could you imagine if your parents presented you an itemized bill of every dollar they spent on you as a child? What would that bill look like the day you turned 18? \$500,000? More?

You will probably never be able to pay your parents back for bringing you into this world and putting a roof over your head.

An older man once told me, "A man who gets to take care of his parents in their old age is blessed." I think I can understand now why he believed that. Once I started helping my mom and sister out it made me focus. I stopped messing around in my personal life. I got my act together. The results followed.

Another older man once told a friend of mine, "Every child is born with a loaf of bread under its arm." I've known many poker players who got their act together when they had a kid. That phrase didn't come out of nowhere. Even the guys I knew who said to me, "I'm not ready for this" found their way. They had to keep their mind clear and work hard. Sometimes they had to humble themselves. But they all found their way.

Poker is just a card game. Money comes and goes. Your family is the only thing that ever matters. The more you take care of your family, the better a professional you are. Stick to that metric and you will find that your focus and clarity will always be there.

## CHAPTER 99

# NOT ENJOYING THIS

### The End is the Beginning

It seems we have reached the end of the road. Thank you for reading to the end. Most people do not finish the books they purchase. You are different.

By the way, if you're reading this book in Barnes And Noble for free...I've been there. I used to cut class to read poker books at bookstores when I was broke. You won't get any grief from me. If you want to pay me back in some fashion, I ask only that you subscribe to my daily strategy mailing list at: [www.pokerheadrush.com](http://www.pokerheadrush.com).

I had fun writing this book. I hope you had fun reading it.

I didn't write this book to show you how smart I am or how good I am at poker. On the contrary, I'm fairly normal and I'm just happy to not work for the man. My goal wasn't to impress you with my technical knowledge or talk over your head. That doesn't help you. My goal was to get you as much useful information as possible. I tried to write in a conversational way so the lessons would stick with you for a long time. Advice from a friend will echo in your mind for years. An overly complex lecture goes in one ear and out the other.

My intention was not to tell you I do things right and that you do things wrong. I am merely a human guinea pig. I have made so many mistakes it is breathtaking. I wanted to tell you the results of my experiments and that's it. I'm sure in the coming years I will adjust my methods again and find certain plays no longer work. I am open to being wrong. I will let you know what I find out when I learn it myself. If you subscribe to my daily mailing list, you can get those strategic updates right when the game changes.

If you read this whole book and didn't enjoy how over the top I am, I'm

sorry I'm not your cup of tea. Please realize this is partially entertainment. This is not meant to be an ancient religious scroll that is infallible. No one is going to finish this book unless it's entertaining. If you don't finish the book, you won't get the moneymaking lessons I am trying to get to you. The way I am writing right now is not how I am in real life. Guys who design haunted houses aren't wizards. Guys who write abrasive poker books are simply designing another poker product.

There's a reason Netflix spends so much money on so much different content. It's impossible to create intellectual property that works for everyone. I create books that work for one set of the population very well. If you liked some of the topics I discussed, but want more clarification, there's a reading list in the next section.

Now that we got the housekeeping out of the way, let's discuss the final mistake all players seem to make. They forget to enjoy the ride.

No one is supposed to make money gambling. No one is supposed to travel and play a card game for real money. More than half the world doesn't own a computer. Seven hundred million people still live on less than \$2 a day. According to some studies, if you make more than \$34,000 per year, you are literally a global one percenter. If you are complaining about not making more, just know that the rest of the world sees you as a one percenter who isn't happy with their lot in life.

Do you want to know the full story of my girlfriend's grandfather? Howard Warren Baker has since passed. I will speak briefly about him because I can no longer run everything by him.

Howard Warren Baker, a two-time Purple Heart recipient, loved to play cards, but he didn't get to play cards for a living. Instead, he was a member of the 101st Airborne. He parachuted into Germany. He risked his life while watching his friends die. He got shot and was captured by German forces. He was a POW.

In the movies, we always see each side heroically fighting to valiantly defend their country. Howard Baker told me the real war wasn't like that. If you thanked this man for his service, he would tell you solemnly, "They made me go."

When Howard Warren Baker was captured, he got to talking to the German officer who was overseeing him and other prisoners. The German officer had attended Oxford University. He spoke flawless English. Howard and this officer started talking about the war. It became clear to them that neither of them wanted to be there.

That German officer proceeded to make sure Howard Baker and his friends were taken care of. When the Americans recaptured this position, Howard Baker went to bat for this German officer and his colleagues. He didn't want to see these guys get hurt.

None of them wanted to be there, but that is how most of human history has gone. Rich assholes make decisions for millions of people and send children to war.

Howard Baker was lucky, but many of his friends weren't. He came home from the war and worked hard for his family for the rest of his life, but he never shook the war.

I spent 10 years outside of the United States of America. I lived in Asia, Latin America, and Europe. I worked 100+ hour weeks of manual labor. I wish everyone could see what the rest of the world is like. You learn pretty quickly how good you have it in a first world country when you live outside of the States. I can't tell you how many countries I lived in where clean water didn't come out of the tap. I called the fire department in one country and they didn't even show up. My house almost burned down. I've been to multiple public hospitals that looked like something out of a horror movie. I've lived in countries where the unsolved rate on homicides was over 80%. That statistic got me nervous when certain people started learning what kind of money I had. If a robbery goes wrong, why not take your 80% shot of getting away with removing a witness? That's better than having K-K versus 2-2.

If you have high-speed internet, clean water, and a few bucks to play poker, you're crushing it. Turn your system up. Down something caffeinated. Life is good.

AI is not going to conquer poker. There are billions of dollars in it for the poker companies to figure out how to get rid of bots. Someone is going to figure out how to make that kind of money. Computer scientists aren't exactly stupid people. Humans can get quite clever when that kind of money is on the line.

Poker is a game played with people. It is a market composed of people. There will always be people who get incredible returns from markets, but most will struggle to project what other people are thinking or not thinking about any financial proposition.

Someone told me in 2006 that poker was dying. I've been hearing that shit every year since I turned pro that same year. Yet every year I play poker in Las Vegas and see something that stuns me. This year I had a guy raise all-in on the flop for 100+ big blinds with one pair after seeing a bet and a raise

from two different players. There will always be loose money in this game. I started this book by helping you identify the loose money in every game. People will always open too much and call too much from the big blind. Humans get too bored to play disciplined poker. No one has a work ethic. The game will always be profitable.

I love my job. I remember being a kid and losing my mind that I had to go to school every day. I was so bored sitting at a desk. I couldn't believe this had to be my life until I was 18. What if I wanted to travel? What if I wanted to play music? What if I wanted to go for a walk and see another city? How was I supposed to spend my limited time on this Earth studying parallelograms?

When I finally got into poker it felt like entering the greatest game the world has ever known. No one plays chess for this kind of money. None of us are athletic enough for professional sports. Even if we were, how much money are you really going to make playing basketball in Turkey? How long can you keep that up?

I grew up watching sports anime films, where the hero struggles for years before having any success. On his hero's journey, he runs into tons of unseemly characters who try to prevent him from succeeding. He travels the world and competes in distant locales.

I felt like poker was the real-world equivalent of those heroes' journeys. The point wasn't to be the best in the world. The point was to be in the game, taking the trains at night, meeting the local girls, drinking foreign liquor, gambling for real money. Who gets to live like this?

No one. That's who. Almost no one gets these opportunities. If you get to go deep in a live tournament once in your life, that is a blessing. Most people on this Earth will never get a moment that exciting. You must show gratitude for these opportunities through the effort you give.

I have made many mistakes in my poker career, but the greatest mistake I ever made was taking all this for granted. God gave me a huge wake-up call after that, and I thank Him for it.

If you want to be the best poker player you can be, you need to enjoy it. You're not competing against anyone else. You are studying because the movie is more exciting during the hero's training montage. Don't let anyone tell you what your journey should be like. Don't let anyone take this away from you.

I failed for years because I was afraid to admit to myself that I wasn't good enough. I didn't study because that felt like admitting defeat. I wasn't

showing the game enough love in those years. If I had swallowed my pride and thanked the game for even having me, I would have gotten off my ass and studied.

When I meet young guns on the tour, I always tell them, “Enjoy this. These are going to be the most fun and terrifying years of your life. One day your body will slow down and it will be tougher to stay on the tour. One day you will have dependents and you will have to stay home more.”

One of them asked me a great question: “How do I enjoy it in the moment?”

I didn’t know what to say. That was such a good question. Now I know what he should do.

Keep a journal. Every day, write down what you’re grateful for. That will help you feel the journey in the moment. When you reread your words years later, you will feel how far you’ve come.

Write down the smallest things that you’re grateful for. We’re all people of science, right? There’s plenty of research in this area. People who write down what they’re grateful for are calmer and more content. That will help you play better.

Take tons of pictures. Make sure to see every city you visit.

Learn to love this game and it will love you back.

Never forget where you came from. Never forget who helped you on the way. Show appreciation through the effort you give. The game is yours.

# CHAPTER 100

## RECAPPING THE 100 MISTAKES

### The List

These are the 100 key mistakes we discussed in this text. Reread this list carefully. If you can't recall how to deal with a specific mistake, reread that chapter.

I purposefully made this list less descriptive. If you can't remember the chapter after reading these brief prompts, it's likely you don't have the concept down pat yet. Go revisit that chapter and reread it.

If you fix these 100 mistakes, you will be well on your way to making more money at poker.

These are the mistakes that sink most poker players and end their careers:

- ◆ Going pro when there is no reason to.
- ◆ Not being patient and paying attention.
- ◆ Playing for recognition instead of money.
- ◆ Not doubling down when they have the best hand.
- ◆ Playing to be perfect instead of playing for the kill.
- ◆ Not working hard to slaughter the big blind.
- ◆ Not working hard to slaughter weak openers.
- ◆ Not paying attention to players on their left.
- ◆ Playing like a petulant entitled child.
- ◆ Playing as a narcissist by assuming you could play perfectly.
- ◆ Cold calling too much.
- ◆ Not using probabilistic thinking. Engaging in black or white thinking.



- ◆ Not cold calling with weak players behind.
- ◆ Not using large bets to isolate bad players.
- ◆ Not freezing out good players who have yet to act behind.
- ◆ Not betting big in multiway pots.
- ◆ Not check/folding to regs who just call.
- ◆ Not check-raising versus cold callers.
- ◆ Not using small bets multiway.
- ◆ Balancing when there's no need to.
- ◆ Not doing enough experiments.
- ◆ Ignoring the search for live tells.
- ◆ Not studying the right way.
- ◆ Not tracking their time for optimization.
- ◆ Not investing in the intangibles.
- ◆ Not playing back at three-bettors.
- ◆ Not paying attention to the entire table. Not reading the defense before plotting every post-flop play.
- ◆ Never buying the showdown. Focusing on being balanced instead of practical in a key spot that comes up constantly.
- ◆ Never going for thin value even when the situation begs for it
- ◆ Never considering a thin triple barrel with small bets when out of position versus an opponent who is unlikely to raise a turn bet as a bluff.
- ◆ Not networking to find home games.
- ◆ Playing like a total nit in home games and getting kicked out.
- ◆ Calling with garbage high cards only to fold the turn.
- ◆ Not value betting versus high cards.
- ◆ Not value betting with a high card.
- ◆ Failing to use basic continuation betting theory. Firing turn barrels when your opponent has already folded their high cards and is unwilling to fold their pairs.
- ◆ Believing the bad regs can play. Most bad regs have bad habits that reveal their hands. Can you remember the most common one we discussed in this chapter?
- ◆ Letting opponents dictate pot size.
- ◆ Never hiring a coach to help them with their weak spots.
- ◆ Never identifying which players are capable of folding one weak pair, even if it's the top pair.
- ◆ Not taking care of their pitching arm.

- ◆ Not bet/folding the river enough. Not thinking through a hero call before making one.
- ◆ Never turning a pair into a bluff.
- ◆ Never check-raising with a pair for value.
- ◆ Not using a GTO trainer.
- ◆ Not using an exploitative poker trainer.
- ◆ Not using an ICM trainer.
- ◆ Not drilling every single day.
- ◆ Not considering what your hand range looks like to the other player.
- ◆ Being results-oriented.
- ◆ Overplaying backdoor draws.
- ◆ Not continuation bet bluffing versus short stacks that cold call with weak unbalanced ranges and don't want to call a flop continuation bet if they miss.
- ◆ Not playing enough multi-table satellites.
- ◆ Not using artificial "outs." When your opponent can't have a flush draw, for instance, you can use the flush draw coming in as a reason to bet.
- ◆ Not hand ranging for yourself and your opponent throughout the hand. Not practicing this skill in your free time.
- ◆ Buying into entity-based learning as opposed to incremental learning.
- ◆ Not leading rivers out of position for value after an opponent bets small on the turn to buy the showdown. Always think through the ranges so you can get unorthodox value!
- ◆ Not raising turns in position when your opponent makes a weak lead. Raise for value and to control the size of the pot!
- ◆ Never over-bet bluffing the turn when their opponent is capped at garbage pairs.
- ◆ Doing the confused "value" bet.
- ◆ Not practicing what you "already know".
- ◆ Being unwilling to move down.
- ◆ Not playing ace high for value.
- ◆ Not diversifying your poker portfolio.
- ◆ Not paying your taxes.
- ◆ Never folding a big hand.
- ◆ Play poorly when you are tired and dealing with distractions.

- ◆ Not laughing at your opponents.
- ◆ Not wanting to be wrong a large percentage of the time.
- ◆ Not valuing mental training.
- ◆ Never wanting to admit you're wrong or you don't know something.
- ◆ Finding friends who confirm every play as opposed to helping you explore alternatives.
- ◆ Not taking notes on your cellphone.
- ◆ Going easy on a wounded dog.
- ◆ Not exploiting condensed ranges.
- ◆ Giving someone an undeserved showdown.
- ◆ Not being curious.
- ◆ Never defending the big blind properly. Do you ever three-bet bluff from this position?
- ◆ Not holding yourself accountable through bets.
- ◆ Not finding people who pump you up.
- ◆ Broadcasting wins.
- ◆ Never freezing a player with an in-position call.
- ◆ Never trapping in a short-stacked situation.
- ◆ Never floating versus a flop check-raise.
- ◆ Playing games in life with too much rake.
- ◆ Letting someone buy a turn and river.
- ◆ Overestimating how many draws a person bets.
- ◆ Never making a delayed continuation bet.
- ◆ Not having a work ethic.
- ◆ Not deliberately practicing.
- ◆ Not taking time off.
- ◆ Letting someone talk to you while you play online.
- ◆ Trying to play through life downswings.
- ◆ Expecting the spark to last forever.
- ◆ Not loving the pain.
- ◆ Not taking money off the table.
- ◆ Not developing a winning culture.
- ◆ Not taking care of your health.
- ◆ Not taking care of your family.
- ◆ Not enjoying this.

# SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

*Positive Poker*, Jonathan Little, Patricia Cardner, D&B Publishing.

*Peak Poker Performance*, Patricia Cardner, Jonathan Little, D&B Publishing.

*Purposeful Practice for Poker*, Dr. Patricia Cardner, Gareth James, D&B Publishing.

*Excelling at Tough No-Limit Hold'em Games*, Jonathan Little, Alex Carr, Rob Tinnion, Matt Brown, Jon van Fleet, D&B Publishing.

*Excelling at No-Limit Hold'em*, Jonathan Little, Phil Hellmuth, Mike Sexton, Olivier Busquet, Will Tipton, D&B Publishing.

*Exploitative Play in Live Poker*, Alexander Fitzgerald, D&B Publishing.

*Exploiting Poker Tells*, Zachary Elwood, Via Regia Publishing.

*Mastering Mixed Games*, Dylan Linde, D&B Publishing.

*The Mental Game of Poker*, Jared Tendler, Barry Carter, Jared Tendler, LLC.

*Applications Of No Limit Hold'em*, Matthew Janda, Two Plus Two Publishing LLC.

*No Limit Hold'em For Advanced Players*, Matthew Janda, Two PlusTwo Publishing.

*Modern Poker Theory*, Michael Acevedo, D&B Publishing.

*Play Optimal Poker*, Andrew Brokos, Kindle Edition.

*The Theory of Poker: A Professional Poker Player Teaches You How To Think Like One*, David Sklansky, Two Plus Two Publishing.

*The Myth Of Poker Talent*, Alexander Fitzgerald, D&B Publishing.

*The Elephant In The Brain*, Kevin Simler, Robin Hansen, Tantor Audio.

*The Art Of Hunting Humans: A Radical And Confronting Explanation Of The Human Mind*, Sidney Mazzi, Kindle Edition

*Irresistible: The Rise Of Addictive Technology And The Business Of Keeping Us Hooked*, Adam Alter, Penguin Books

*Rest: Why You Get More Done When You Work Less*, Alex Soojung-Kim Pang, Penguin Books.

*Thinking Fast And Slow*, Daniel Kahneman, Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

*The Undoing Project*, Michael Lewis, Simon & Shuster Audio.

*Range*, David Epstein, Will Damron, Riverhead Books.

*Late Bloomers*, Rich Karlgaard, Crown.

*How To Fail At Almost Everything And Still Win Big*, Scott Adams, Portfolio.

*Loserthink*, Scott Adams, Portfolio (TR).

*Antifragile*, Nassim Nicholas Taleb, Random House Publishing Group.

*The Black Swan*, Nassim Nicholas Taleb, Random House Publishing Group.

*Fooled By Randomness*, Nassim Nicholas Taleb, Random House.

*Skin In The Game*, Nassim Nicholas Taleb, Random House.

*Four Thousand Weeks: Time Management For Mortals*, Oliver Burkeman, Macmillan Audio.

*Dopamine Nation: Finding Balance In The Age Of Indulgence*, Dr. Anna Lembke, Penguin Audio.

*Scarcity: Why Having Too Little Means Too Much*, Sendhil Mullainathan, Eldar Shafir, Picador.

*Peak: Secrets From The New Science Of Expertise*, Anders Ericsson, Robert Pool, HarperOne.

*Principles: Life And Work*, Ray Dalio, Simon&Shuster Audio.

*Effortless: Make It Easier To Do What Matters Most*, Greg McKeown, Virgin Books.

*Forgetting: The Benefits Of Not Remembering*, Scott A. Small, Crown.

*Deep Work: Rules For Focused Success In A Distracted World*, Cal Newport, Platus Books.

*The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided By Politics And Religion*, Jonathan Haidt, Vintage.

*Super Thinking: The Big Book Of Mental Models*, Gabriel Weinberg, Lauren McCann, Portfolio Penguin.

*Peak Performance: Elevate Your Game, Avoid Burnout, and Thrive With The New Science Of Success*, Brad Stulberg, Steve Magness, Brilliance Audio.

*Man, Interrupted*, Philip Zimbardo, Nikita Coulombe, Brilliance Audio.

*The Logic Of Sports Betting*, Ed Miller, Matthew Davidow, Kanab Tech, LLC.

*F\*ck Your Feelings: Master Your Mind, Accomplish Any Goal, And Become A More Significant Human*, Ryan Munsey, Strong House Press.

*The Signal And The Noise*, Nate Silver, Penguin Books.

*The Hacking Of The American Mind: The Science Behind The Corporate Takeover Of Our Bodies And Brains*, Robert H. Lustig, Avery.

*Grit: The Power Of Passion And Perseverance*, Angela Duckworth, Scribner.

*The Coddling Of The American Mind*, Greg Lukianoff, Jonathan Haidt, Penguin Books.

*Ninety Percent Mental*, Bob Tewksbury, Hachette Go.

*Influence: The Psychology Of Persuasion*, Robert B. Cialdini, Harper Business.

*How Champions Think*, Dr. Bob Rotella, Simon & Shuster.

*Pre-Suasion: A Revolutionary Way To Influence And Persuade*, Robert Cialdini Ph.D., Simon & Shuster.

*iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy--and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood--and What That Means for the Rest of Us*, Abbey Beathan, Abbey Beathan Publishing.

*Extreme Ownership: How U.S. Navy SEALs Lead and Win*, Jocko Willink, Leif Babin, Generic.

*The QB: The Making Of Modern Quarterbacks*, Bruce Feldman, Crown.

*Everybody Lies: Big Data, New Data, and What the Internet Can Tell Us About Who We Really Are*, Seth Stephens-Davidowitz, Dey Street Books.

*The 5 Second Rule: Transform Your Life, Work, and Confidence with Everyday Courage*, Mel Robbins, Mel Robbins Productions Inc.

*The Happiness Equation: Want Nothing + Do Anything = Have Everything*, Neil Pasricha, G.P. Putnam's Sons.

*Stumbling on Happiness*, Daniel Gilbert, Vintage.

*How To Stop Worrying And Start Living*, Dale Carnegie, Maple Press.

*The Compound Effect: Jumpstart Your Income, Your Life, Your Success*, Darren Hardy, Manjul Publishing.

*Essentialism: The Disciplined Pursuit of Less*, Greg McKeown, Crown.

*The Practicing Mind: Bringing Discipline and Focus into Your Life*, Thomas M. Sterner, New World Library.

*The Only Way To Win*, Jim Loehr, Nicholas Brealey Publishing.

*The Motivation Myth: How High Achievers Really Set Themselves Up to Win*, Jeff Haden, Penguin Audio.

*Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*, Daniel H. Pink, Canongate.

*Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, Carol S. Dweck, Ballantine Books.

*The Talent Code: Unlocking the Secret of Skill in Sports, Art, Music, Math, and Just About Everything Else*, Daniel Coyle, Bantam.

*Bounce: Mozart, Federer, Picasso, Beckham, and the Science of Success*, Matthew Syed, Harper Perennial.

*Your Own Worst Enemy*, Ken Christian, Harper Perennial.

*Relentless: The Ultimate Mind & Body Challenge*, Tim S. Grover, Kindle Edition.

*The Power of Full Engagement: Managing Energy, Not Time, Is the Key to High Performance and Personal Renewal*, Jim Loehr Tony Schwartz, Free Press.

*Die Empty: Unleash Your Best Work Every Day*, Todd Henry, Gildan Media, LLC.