TREAT YOUR POKER LIKE A BUSINESS

A wise and inspiring guide to turning a hobby into an empire.

Dusty Schmidt
With Scott Brown
Foreword by Matt Bolt • Afterword by Nick Grudzien

“Dusty Schmidt (is) a model of entrepreneurial drive.”
— Sports Illustrated
TREAT YOUR POKER LIKE A BUSINESS

An inspiring guide to turning a hobby into an empire

BY DUSTY SCHMIDT
WITH SCOTT BROWN

Foreword by Matt Bolt
Afterword by Nick Grudzien

Imagine Media, LLC
Portland • San Francisco
For all the small-stakes grinders out there looking to get a break in life.

May you never learn to shuffle.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am deeply grateful for the following people, without whose contributions, guidance and encouragement this book would not have been possible: Nicole Schmidt, Matt Amen, Nick Grudzien, Matt Bolt, Jared Tendler, Michael Skelton, Rob Wise, Casey Martin, Johnny Mac, Jim Pellegrino, Jim Varnon, Taylor Caby, Ed Miller, Alex Huang, Jim Galfano, Dan Deppen, John McKenna, Daniel Briz, Derek Gardener, Andrew Brand, Johnny Watkins, Doug “Pairadiddle” Kreisel, James Taylor, PGAPro, Jianhua Li, Steve Wilson, Steve Odeegan, Michael Ashley, Jeff Conway, Tracy Hopper, Sara Brown, Robert Fields, Tom Knackstedt, Mike Ziethlow and Jeffrey Burkert.

I would also like to thank the following online players, who helped bring this book to the poker community: Tallskid, PokerTheorist, schaffemIII, CHPokerBrat, KreativeDal, sandtiger, wilneedheart, AceSweaty, totals, SpiderJ, trigpoint, tiltboy, Boum, dzikiljack, kalebra, masterholmes, pokege, betapro, WhiteMass, folkdsb, BigEd157, imnuts, fink494, sisnarf, joeyg50, scotchMist, TheRaguu, Ketlar, joeaugie, HighOctane, npiv, somervillejoe.
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Foreword, by Matt Bolt</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SECTION I</td>
<td>Treat Your Poker Like A Business</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>A Game Of Skill, Not Luck</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Why I Kept It Simple</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Comparable Professions</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Are You In?</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Starting Thoughts</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Assigning A Value To Your Time</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Practicing Effectively</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Managing Your Bankroll</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Knowing Your Margins</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Metrics That Matter</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Dealing With Variance</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Don’t Look At The Cashier</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Knowing Your Risk Tolerance</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Pick A Strategy</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Time For Expansion</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Determining Your Style</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>A Simple Approach To Adding Tables</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Knowing Your Expenses</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Protecting Your Capital</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Managing Your Emotions</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>Why Psychology Matters</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>Becoming A Grinder</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>Mistake Hate</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
24. The Ten Most Overlooked Mistakes  91
25. A New Set Of Results  93
26. Pressure Can Be Good  96
27. Having A Successful Relationship  98
28. The Importance Of A Good Diet  105
29. Goal Setting  107
30. Staying Disciplined  110
31. To Chat Or Not To Chat  112
32. Location, Location  114
33. Hours Of Operation  117
34. Tournaments Or Cash Games?  120
35. Equipping Your Computer For Maximum Profit  123
36. The Importance Of Rakeback  125
37. Taxes, Record Keeping And Their Impact On Bankroll  132
38. Don't Listen To The Critics  134
39. Must Reads  137
40. How Will I Know I'm Good Enough?  139
41. Telling Them What You Do For A Living  142

SECTION 2
Strategy

Ten Common Situations — And How To Play Them  146
Five Effective Plays That Are Underutilized  179
In Conclusion …  189
Afterword, by Nick Grudzien  194
FOREWORD

By Matt Bolt

There are two things you need to know about Dusty Schmidt:

1. He has no use for lazy. A lot of people get into poker because they’re running away from something. Dusty is only interested in people who are running toward something.

2. Even though this book presents a structure for you to apply to your poker business, Dusty’s is not a one-size-fits-all philosophy. He wants your game to evolve just as his did. Honestly, at the end of the day, I think what Dusty wants is for people to be happy. Poker liberated him from a life he didn’t want and opened doors to the one he did. I think he sees that possibility as existing for anyone who commits. But make no mistake: you have to commit. To Dusty, there’s a higher standard than dollars won, and that’s the integrity of your effort. If that’s there, success will follow.

I first met Dusty when I was selling pest-control services. Seriously. But it was actually the job I had before that — and how I came to leave it — that I think made Dusty feel he could work with me.

I graduated in Dec. 2005 from Winthrop University in Rock Hill, South Carolina, with a degree in management. I had my commencement ceremonies on Saturday, and started work for my stepdad’s roofing company in Simpsonville on Monday.
Since the age of 15, it had been preordained that I’d one day take over the business.

It was a great job by most any standard. My stepdad and I have a good relationship, and he created the job for me. There was no interview, no resume. I had no set responsibilities, other than sitting in the office next to his, looking busy and waiting for him to retire.

Oddly, I found myself jealous of friends who had far worse jobs than mine, because they’d earned the positions themselves. I knew I was blessed. But I also knew I needed to do my own thing.

So I took a job in outside sales for Orkin Pest Control. The sales experience and freedom were big plusses; my jerk boss was a big minus. Again, I found myself dissatisfied.

At the time, I’d never have thought I’d end up playing poker for a living, even when I was confident in my ability to be a long-term winner. I’m conservative with my money, and I just felt I couldn’t gamble to pay the bills.

My brother had introduced me to online poker. I’d been playing and improving, but had massive issues with tilt and bankroll management. I got a membership at Stoxpoker.com, which is where I first became aware of the legend of “Leatherass,” the grinder who at that time was just coming off achieving Poker Stars’ SuperNova Elite status in just eight months. His win ratio over massive sample sizes was totally unprecedented. I watched all of Dusty’s videos and read his blogs. Being naïve, I sent him a private message venting about my frustrations with my game.
I asked if he’d be willing to coach me.

Dusty is fond of golf analogies, so I’ll use one here. It was basically as though he’d just come off winning a major championship, and here I was a 15-handicap asking for a lesson.

I told him my story, and I think I struck him as someone who really wanted to learn and put in the work to be great — even though I didn’t envision poker as a profession at the time.

He was very nice and made me feel better about my circumstance. While he said he didn’t have the time to work with me, his good buddy Matt Amen did. I eventually traveled to Las Vegas to meet Matt and Dusty at the World Series of Poker in June 2007 and we hit it off really nicely.

I’d been making $500-$1,000 a month playing a couple of nights a week. Still, Matt hounded me to quit my job and play poker full time. "Why do you go to work every day?" he asked. "It’s so stupid." I had to admit, the freedom these guys seemed to enjoy was alluring. They were living the dream. Convinced, I left my job in late 2007, and was able to ratchet my earnings up to a modest $2,000-$3,000 a month playing .25/.50 NL. My expenses were $1,500, so I was getting by.

But complacency was seeping in. Like the guys in the movie "Office Space," my goal had been to not do anything I didn’t want to do. So I played video games, watched TV and went on trips. I felt like a 13-year-old on summer vacation. I quickly forgot that poker was my job, and I was falling woefully shy of the commitment I’d made to myself to play 30-40 hours a week.
In Jan. 2008, I went on a terrifyingly bad run. I had no financial cushion, and I was genuinely scared I was going to have to get yet another job to which I’d hate going every day.

I called Dusty in February and convinced him I’d seen the error in my ways. He said he’d be willing to work out a staking deal with me. His idea was for me to move up in limits aggressively and not worry about bankroll — what was his was mine. At that point, I’d never had $10,000 to my name.

There were provisions to our deal. In hindsight, the business-oriented, workmanlike structure that Dusty provided me with injected a great work ethic into my life that lasts today. Not only was I accountable to him; I was accountable to myself. I had to play 16,000 hands per week minimum. I could fall shy one week, but if it happened again the deal was off. He would review all of my hands with me. He taught me how to read, review and contemplate hands in my head. He also wanted me to email him five questions a week on topics with which I’d been struggling. We’d talk them out and let our minds wander. It was really invigorating. Now poker was at the center of my life, and nothing was going to stop me.

Because of his investment in me, I really wanted my results to be good. It would have been easier to lose my own money than to lose someone else’s, especially someone who’d been as good to me as Dusty had. I didn’t want to just mindlessly grind out hands. I wanted to make him money. There’s where my improvement came from. It was that deal with Dusty, and his requiring me to do the necessary work, that made me what I am today.
With no bankroll concerns, I went up to 1/2 NL right away. I was working diligently, and the results were immediate. After peaking previously at $3,000, I had my first $10,000 month in March. In April I made $20,000, and I made $30,000 in May. In November, I had a $100,000 month.

One problem I’d always had was leaving my results behind when I was done playing. A bad session would ruin my day, even my week.

Dusty recommended I work with his performance coach, Jared Tendler, whose thoughts on poker psychology also appear in this book. Jared helped me to rationalize variance and get over my issues with tilt. Now I can play longer and think more clearly.

Most importantly, Dusty got me thinking about my game in absolute business terms. My mentality when I lost, say, $5,000 was to think, "What could I have done with that amount of money? How could I have lost it?" But it was never my money. I needed money to make more money. I didn’t lose a nice TV — it was never my money to begin with. Money was not money, it was inventory. My bankroll was for buy-ins, not cars.

My most telling moment with Dusty came not when I was winning, but when I wasn’t. After taking in $30,000 in May 2008, I went through a stretch of 100,000 hands where I broke completely even. Dusty was getting killed on our deal. I was playing 20 tables at 2/4 NL and 3/6 NL. I had a big fear of moving up to 5/10 NL — the notion of losing $1,000 on a hand of poker was too much for me to bear.
Dusty called me and I was expecting him to say the deal was off. Instead, his reaction blew my mind. He said he didn’t want our deal to end, but he did want me to drop down in tables and move up in limits. I’d made no money for 100,000 hands, but in true Dusty form, his answer wasn’t to just quit. Instead, we analyzed things as business partners and found a better way. And as I mentioned before, we were both rewarded when I had a $100,000 month that November.

Our games have diverged this past year. I have a bit more gamble in me, so I’ll play fewer tables, but do it at higher stakes. I do much better when I’m challenging the limits. For him, the metric that matters is volume.

But I continue to install the business practices he taught me at the outset. And I continue to go all out whenever I’m at the tables. As Dusty would tell you, putting in the hours is pointless if the time spent isn’t quality time. Now I want to do everything I can to maximize my expectations for the time that I play.

You’re in good hands with Treat Your Poker Like A Business. With Dusty’s help, I’m in the business of trying to achieve my ”A” game all the time.

Matt Bolt is an instructor at Stoxpoker.com.
INTRODUCTION

This book contains some of the most important poker strategy in print.

A lot of people are going to hate it.

They’ll hate it not for the 15 strategy tips you’ll find in Section 2, but for the 41 chapters that precede them in Section 1 — the one titled “Treat Your Poker Like A Business.” The information in this chapter is distinctly uncool. It is totally without tips on aggressive play, how to put your opponent on tilt, or how to make great calls on big pots. You’ll not find a single bit of trash talk or chest beating.

Instead, these chapters are tied together by a simple theme: We are here to make money. This is a business. Check your ego at the door.

In the simplest terms possible, this book tells you how to play better poker, and turn that improvement into money in your pocket. Some view business concepts as being peripheral to long-term poker success. I see them as essential.

There’s a knowledge gap in the poker world that I’m hoping to fill with this book. To me, running your poker like a business and playing successful poker go hand in hand. Yet most people play poker much better than they run a business. They have ability, but no clear way to monetize it.
The modern poker player is like professional athletes were before agents came along. They played in stadiums packed to the gills; meanwhile, they made $10,000 a year. Today’s player knows he’s the attraction. Many ballplayers make more than owners do. That’s because they learned how to monetize their abilities. Because online poker is still very much in its infancy, the player who can turn his talents into money by running his poker operation efficiently can be a veritable tycoon. The fact is that some of the most important factors to your overall win rate have nothing to do with actually playing the game of poker, but rather how well you run your poker business.

I am a huge believer in poker training websites. In fact, I’ve been with Stoxpoker.com since its early days, and am proud to be an instructor there today. There is no doubt Stoxpoker.com and similar sites have revolutionized the game.

This book simply picks up where those sites end. They’ve made their members’ poker games better, but they haven’t necessarily taught them how to make money. Most people are unaware as to how they can take that second leap into monetizing their newfound abilities.

Some of you are familiar with the raw facts about my career. I’ve been called the “ultimate grinder,” which is how I got my screen name, “Leatherass.” It’s taken from the line in the poker movie "Rounders” that goes, "You don’t think that’s work, what he does? Grinding it out on his leather ass? No thank you.”

In the span of a five-year career, I’ve played nearly 7 million hands online over more than 10,000 hours. I’ve won over
$3 million during that period, and I’ve never had a losing month. In 2007, I made SuperNova Elite status in just eight months while playing high-stakes cash games exclusively. In fact, in a four-month period between Nov. 2007 and Feb. 2008, I made more than $600,000 in high-stakes cash games.

What you might not know is that five years ago, I didn’t know how to play poker. I don’t mean that figuratively. I mean it literally. I didn’t know how to play — at all. (I still don’t have a deck of cards in my house.)

But I did understand business. Some have presumed that I have a Rain Man-esque agility with numbers, or that I have a propriety supercomputer that runs algorithms at mind-bending speed. Nothing could be further from the truth; in fact, I actually consider myself to be poor at math relative to other pros, and marginal with technology.

In the beginning, the only thing I had going for me as a poker pro was my ability as a businessman.

I’d spent a lifetime around my family’s business, which had been passed down from my grandfather to my father and mother. The business distributes non-food items to grocery and liquor stores around Southern California. I joined the company on a full-time basis soon after graduating from high school, and stayed on for four years. Our sales quadrupled during my time there, and I helped oversee the company’s expansion from servicing small corner stores to larger grocery-store operations. I also learned a great deal about cash flow, watching your margins, maintaining inventory and smart growth.
There was only one problem: I hated it. Truly hated it. My relationship with my family was not good, the working conditions were abysmal, most of my customers were in dangerous neighborhoods, and my work day began at 4 a.m. and often ended well after dark. But more importantly, I had my eye on a larger goal: making the PGA Tour.

As a kid, I was one of the top junior golfers in the country, and I broke two of Tiger Woods’ records. I was the No. 1-ranked freshman golfer in the country in 1995 — in fact, one newspaper article referred to me as being Southern California’s “next Tiger Woods.” I was the SoCal high school golf champion as a senior, but my college scholarship fell through, which ultimately sent me into the family business.

By 2004, though, I’d recommitted myself to playing golf full time. I’d won five times on the mini-tours, and by May I was the top dog on the Golden State Tour. My dream of getting my PGA Tour card was well within reach. But then fate tossed me into the discard pile.

I’d been working part-time for my parents, and was servicing a grocery store when I felt an incredible pain in my chest. At the age of 23, I was inexplicably having a heart attack. Suddenly, I was in the hospital and the doctors were telling me I’d need at least a year in rehab. I could not do so much as one push-up.

My family refused to pay me during my convalescence. I limped back to work, but my savings were dwindling and my medical bills piled high. I was down to my last $1,000.
I was alone at my tiny Newport Beach apartment on Christmas when my good friend Matt Amen showed up at my door carrying an expensive golf shirt. "I’ll give you this shirt if you’ll give me $50," he said. I knew I could return it to Nordstrom’s the next day for twice that amount. He took my credit card, logged on to an online poker site, and put my $50 into his account. This was to be my introduction to online poker.

What I found blew my mind. There were tens of thousands of games spread across a variety of limits. We pulled up some of the higher stakes games and I couldn’t believe my eyes. One of the first pots I watched was an all-in worth over $2,000. Here I was, sitting in my bedroom watching two people play a pot worth nearly as much as my take-home pay for the month.

One of the players got lucky on the river and caught his flush card to win the pot. He then typed in the chat box, "Sorry," to his opponent. The opponent typed back, "No problem, dude. It happens."

It happens? Two thousand dollars seemed like all the money in the world to me. I also noticed the poker sites offered $500 bonuses if you played enough hands. I was in desperate need of cash. The next night, I put $100 into my account and began to play on my desktop computer. Meanwhile, the screen on my laptop displayed the rules of poker. I was just trying to break even and hang in there long enough to make the bonuses. I soon left my job, put my last $1,000 online, and began putting in 400-hour months playing for bonuses.

My early goals were to sustain my life and keep food on the table.
There were times when I honestly didn’t eat because literally all of my money was online. Even in the best of times, I skipped meals because I had to make $30 last a week. I was taking change to the bank and cashing it in, and eating off the McDonald’s Dollar Menu.

My first milestone moment was when I realized I was on pace to make $40,000, which was equivalent to the salary I’d been making with my family. I’d achieved financial independence, which released me in more ways than you could possibly imagine.

I moved to Oregon, where Matt was going to college. I rented a room from Casey Martin, the famous golfer who was nearing the end of his pro career. I barely left his house. Casey would come home in the afternoon and hear thud, thud, thud, which was the sound of me grinding away at small stakes. I was getting frustrated, but getting better. All the while, I was conscious of staying along a conservative path and within my business plan of smart growth. I was keeping a significant bankroll, playing few (if any) tournaments, cautiously adding tables, and staying conscious of the metrics that would tell me if my game was going north or south.

The sacrifice was worth it. Today I make about a dollar a hand, playing between 12-20 hands at a time on two monitors. I rack up about 1,200 high-stakes hands per hour and 7,000-plus hands in a given day. If I play 200 days a year, that’s 1.4 million hands per year. My ability to play at this level is not just a function of my poker skill, but my ability to scale my business in a smart and profitable manner. The two are intertwined.
My decision to enter poker was not based on any sort of natural ability, but rather my simply seeing its potential as a business. It was as arbitrary as deciding to direct the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra despite not knowing how to read music. If there was a $2,000 pot at the end and I could earn $500 bonuses along the way, I was in. The field didn’t matter — the business model did.

The freedom poker has brought to my life cannot be quantified. I set my own hours, work from home, and I’m my own boss. It holds the same potential for you. But to truly realize all of poker’s possibilities, you must learn to control margins, inventory and expansion. Your eye has to be on profitability, not Internet credibility. You are no different than any CEO.

I feel this book looks at poker in a way that no other has before. I absolutely feel my strategy advice will improve your game immediately. But my greater wish is that two or three years from now, you’ll reflect on this book and say it gave you the tools to ultimately improve your life.
SECTION 1

TREAT YOUR POKER LIKE A BUSINESS
For someone known as a professional gambler, I have very little gamble in me. About two years into my poker career, I got a tip that the quarterback in an upcoming college football game was injured and was not going to play — something that was not common knowledge. I was in Las Vegas at the time, and laid down the one and only substantial bet I’ve ever made on a sporting event. The next three hours were some of the most grueling of my life, and I was completely disgusted that I’d put myself through the agony over an outcome I couldn’t control.

I ultimately won the bet, but felt as though I’d lost for having laid the wager in the first place. This event also defined for me the essential difference between poker and conventional gambling.

Before you dedicate yourself to turning your poker into a significant income stream, it’s important you understand why being a poker player qualifies as a profession in the first place.

For something to be considered a profession it must contain two vital components: The game must be beatable, and it must be a game where skill is the predominant factor.

This question has become more than an academic one in recent years, as in October 2006, Congress barred the use of credit
cards for online wagers. Horse racing and stock trading were exempt, but otherwise the new law hit any "game predominantly subject to chance." Included among such games was poker.

To me, defining poker as a game of skill is actually quite simple. To do so, you just need to forget about winning at poker and think for a moment about losing. Is it possible to intentionally lose a poker game? Yes, of course. But is it possible to intentionally lose a game like roulette or craps? No, it’s not.

In games of chance, the participant cannot control the outcome. Whether your intent is to win or lose the lottery, your odds remain the same. The superstitious may disagree, but no matter how many times you pull the handle on a slot machine, your odds remain the same each time you put your coins in the slot.

But in poker, your actions can influence the outcome of a hand. You will absolutely lose if you choose to fold every single hand no matter what cards you hold. If you call bets with a hand that cannot win the pot, you will also lose every time. This is the difference between a game of chance and a game of skill.

It’s common knowledge among poker players that chance is a factor in any given hand, but over many hands poker skill will even things out, with the more expert players making a profit. At the higher stakes games I play now, I win approximately 55 percent of the time. If I play 20 tables at once, I expect to show a profit at 11 and lose at nine. This is a slim profit margin, but a profit nonetheless. If I were playing quarter games, my win-loss ratio would be about 80-20, meaning that if I played 20 tables, I could expect to win at 16 of them and lose at four.
There are some games that are skill games, but are not necessarily profitable. Take blackjack for example: It is most definitely a skill game because the outcome can easily be influenced through your actions. You can lose every single hand to the dealer if you just keep on hitting until you bust. Conversely, you can play mathematically perfect blackjack and do much better; however, the odds are stacked against any person who doesn’t count cards, and the game cannot be beaten in the long run.

In poker, we’re competing against other people in what I feel is the perfect marriage of chance and skill. A poker player is frequently all in with a card or two to come (and possibly several more cards to come if there’s an agreement to "run it twice"). There’s certainly a rush that comes when you are all in, especially given the aspect that chance will ultimately dictate in which direction the chips slide.

But if you’re a skilled poker player — or at least more skilled than the opponents you’re facing — you’ll more often than not have a mathematical edge on your opponent because you’ll have a hand or run a high percentage bluff that will that will have a better chance of winning the pot.

In poker, if you continually make good decisions and risk chips with the best hand more often than not, skill will be the primary factor in whether or not you win or lose money. Games of chance cannot make that claim.
Chapter 2

WHY I KEPT IT SIMPLE

*Treat Your Poker Like A Business* is pretty slight compared to many of the poker books out there. The chapters are short; the language is straightforward. It is this size on purpose, yet my greatest insecurity is that you’ll attribute its simplicity to laziness on my part, or that its lack of charts, graphs and equations will make you feel insecure, thinking “There should be more, shouldn’t there?”

What I can tell you is that as one of the all-time leading money winners in online poker history, this book is a highly accurate representation of my thought process. It’s the closest I can come to putting on paper exactly how my poker business grew to be so profitable. This is how I did it.

I could have written a thousand-page manual. I considered doing it, but ultimately decided a far shorter book would be more faithful to the truth about what goes through my mind. I feel I’m basically pouring water on seeds. My only goal is to get your mind stimulated and thinking about important subjects that go into win rate.

One thing I’ve learned from communicating with literally thousands of online poker players in person or online is that you are smart people. You deserve the latitude to interpret and assimilate the information I’m giving you however you want.
Much as I believe in the principles you’ll find here, I am an even bigger believer in intuition. A virtuoso poker player will have an almost artistic flair for the game, and that can’t happen unless I give you room to breathe.

As I often do, let’s equate this to golf. I felt like giving you a thousand-page book would have been like giving you 100 simultaneous swing thoughts. The more detailed the instruction becomes, the more the likely it is the athlete will disappear in favor of something more mechanical. What’s the fun in that? One size does not fit all, in golf, business or poker.

Matt Bolt is a great example of this philosophy at work. He started as my student, and in the beginning he did well to mimic my style of play. But as he grew, our games diverged. I play more hands per hour, while he plays fewer but is more inclined to play at slightly higher stakes. This is where he feels confident and secure. There is a common denominator between us, though, and that is a faithful application of the notion that we must treat our poker like a business. We share a commitment to long-term profitability based on forethought and purpose. Having a sound business foundation provides each of us with a liberating sense of security. That foundation allows the intuition to come out.

Further along, you’ll read chapters on how much I think you should play vs. practice. I come down heavily on the side of “play,” because I think winning is its own skill, and nothing sharpens skill like time at the tables. To give you a poker bible would be disingenuous, because frankly that’s just not the sort of book I’d read.
Just as successful poker pros can come from any walk of life, there is also room for a variety of poker books.

To write more would have hurt you more than it would have helped. I strongly believe that all the information you need to be successful is in this book.
Chapter 3
COMPARABLE PROFESSIONS

A live poker player can come from nearly any walk of life. They play by feel — one guy might play a little tight, while another might bluff like crazy. One might be a computer programmer, the other an artist.

Online pros are different. The top-end players are far more plugged into a system. We’re technically perfect, like golfers with perfect swings. Our goal is precision and total efficiency. We might not be able to scramble like a live player could, but we control the ball better and therefore decrease the need to recover in the first place.

I’m not saying we’re better. We’re just different. I play 1,200 hands an hour, while a live player only gets 25 or 30. Both represent solid career choices for those with the right skill sets.

Most up-and-coming online pros are dialed into a similar mechanism: they have a coach, they visit the same poker-training sites, they read the same blogs and sit in on the same forums. It’s as though someone took all of the best junior-high basketball players in the country and sent them to the same summer-long training camp: come the first day of school, those players are going to have great similarities in their games. The top 100 online players probably play 95 percent the same
way, with the remaining 5 percent representing little deviations that make us unique.

True, some of the best online players are MIT math majors or securities traders who’ve figured out how to beat the game. Nick Grudzien, the founder of Stoxpoker.com who wrote the afterword for this book, worked on Wall Street. But the reality is that top players come from all walks of life. I was a would-be PGA Tour player who worked for the family business. Matt Bolt sold pest-control. No one should feel discouraged from making poker a serious pursuit.

In actuality, stockbrokers and traders do the exact same thing I do: Based on hard data and intuition, I consider the possible variations of a deck of cards and I wager on those potential outcomes. They do the same, with businesses taking the place of the deck of cards. The difference is that with poker — save the small percentage of online players who are problem gamblers — you’re mainly just taking money out of a system that’s largely recreational. The vast majority of online poker players are spending money on what they consider to be entertainment.

Though I’ve never been a broker or trader, I can only imagine I’d sleep better at night knowing I took money out of someone’s recreational fund rather than his life-savings — in some cases betting on the outcome of companies that are cutting back jobs to look better to the people wagering on them. I don’t think either is an unethical profession, but I’d argue online poker has the cleanest lines.
Chapter 4

ARE YOU IN?

I’ve had quite a few friends who’ve come to me wanting to cultivate their poker into a significant revenue stream. Despite being given the very same system you’ll read about in the following chapters — along with my private coaching — they lost money. The culprit in these cases was invariably not their poker-playing ability, but their ability to manage life away from the tables.

So I’ll ask you the following: Before you so much as turn one more page, are you totally committed? As they said in Ocean’s 11, “Are you in, or are you out?” Poker is not a get-rich-quick scheme. It is not a money tree growing in your computer. But it is something that can liberate your from the shackles of 9-to-5 life, so long as you’re disciplined in honing your skill.

Everything in this book is extremely valuable, but means nothing without commitment. You might have the desire, the passion and the vision. You can want to crush the game, to wear that World Series of Poker bracelet. But day to day, there are distractions that are part of the equation. You have to work through them, or not work at your poker at all.

Your heart, your mind and your goals have to be congruent. Ask yourself, am I committed to the following:
• **Creating realistic expectations.** How much time can you realistically put into poker? Some people overvalue how much time they have to play. You’ll say, ”I can play 6 hours every night when I get home from work, seven days a week. So that’s 42 hours per week to play poker.” But you’re not accounting for those nights when you have to stay at work late, your social life or evenings when you’re simply exhausted. So maybe it’s 10–20 hours you can contribute to poker, not 42. Just as with any business plan, it’s better to be conservative.

• **Making a business plan that is very detailed.** Spend a good amount of time on it. If you’re going to spend six hours a week on poker study, how will that time be allotted? Is it two hours on books, two hours on videos and two hours on Stoxpoker.com threads? You want to be very specific so you’ll have something to which you can hold yourself. If you set broad goals, it’s very easy to deviate from them.

• **Calling a forum.** I’ll tell you right now there is a repetitive element of this book. Over and over again, I mention the importance of communicating clear goals to your friends and family so that boundaries and expectations are set early. You have to have an open and honest conversation about what you’re trying to achieve, why it’s good for the entire family, and that they’re still your priority. To do the inverse — going off and playing poker without the conversation — can be destructive and make an already stressful pursuit even more so. But saying it aloud makes the whole venture more real. This helps build accountability. It also allows your friends and family to pull for you and become sources of inspiration.

• **Knowing what’s best.** Your kids are very right to want to spend time with you, and you’re right to want to be with them. It’s great your friends want you to spend time on
Sunday afternoon. Those are healthy things. But a balance needs to be struck. You have to know what’s best for all concerned. It’s to their advantage that you ultimately become prosperous. The money, the confidence, and the experiences you have will benefit everyone. If you’re unclear about what’s right, then you’ll be pulled in all directions and your poker business will fall apart.

- **Forgoing temptation.** Creating a poker business with kids might seem hard, but doing it without them can be harder. The distractions are ample. There’s going out drinking, partying, spending what’s seemed like easy money on things you don’t need. All of this will derail your long-term prosperity.

- **Being proud of what you do.** I’ve heard it a million times: I can’t tell my father what I do for a living because I don’t want to let him down. This is a self-inflicted wound. Any man who spends 40–50 hours a week providing for himself and his family in a completely legal fashion should not feel guilty for two seconds. People are generally not consistent with their logic. When I was a mini-tour player, people would say, “You’re my hero. You’re doing something besides the 9-to-5. You’re following your dream.” But as soon as I started doing the same in poker, I was castigated even though there was no difference between the mechanics of the two pursuits. I would show up, pay an entry fee, play a game I was skilled at, and was paid based on the outcome. The only standard that matters is your own. You’ll hear me say it over and over again in this book: The man dignifies the job; the job doesn’t dignify the man.

- **Being the toughest boss you ever had.** You have to demand a level of commitment from yourself that no one else could. Think about an athlete you admire who’s in the gym right now trying to get just a little bit stronger, or the policy maker who’s working late solving a critical problem. You’re trying
to build a future, a career, a new life. Poker can be the job of your dreams if it works out. People who achieve great things know how to fully commit to a process. Mastery is its own skill, and you have to commit to nothing less as you set forth on this journey.

Are you in?
Chapter 5

STARTING THOUGHTS

Now that you’ve wrapped your mind around the total commitment that’s essential to taking poker to the next level, there are several hard-and-fast strategies in which to ground yourself as your new business gets up and running:

- **Dedicate yourself to one game.** Otherwise, you’ll find yourself spread out over limit, no limit, Omaha, tournaments, etc., all with mediocre results. It’ll take much longer to get good if you’re too diversified — you might as well be trying to achieve simultaneous success in baseball, soccer and hockey. It’s better to be a one-trick pony, especially at the beginning. That’s how winning decisions become automatic.

- **Set studying goals (and limits).** A proper ratio for playing-to-studying is 80/20. For every four hours you spend playing, you should spend one studying. (I’ll get into this more in a subsequent chapter). Many conscientious players ask me, “In the beginning, shouldn’t I be studying 80 percent of the time and playing 20 percent?” While these people have good intentions, I think they’re wrong. It’s like spending 80 percent of your time at the driving range and 20 percent playing golf. At the end of the day, golf is about getting the ball in the hole, which is something you can only learn to do by playing. Actual time at the tables gets your attention because it’s for real money. Poker is ultimately about beating your opponents. Winning is its own skill, one that you can only learn by competing.
• **Be patient and start at the stakes where you belong.** Remember, this is not Las Vegas. If you’ve played poker there, you know that 1/2 NL is about the cheapest game you can find, and most of those tables are filled with people who don’t know what they’re doing. But if you go online and play the 1/2 game, it’s probably as tough as the high-stakes tables—like playing 25/50 NL live. Vegas limits and online limits are completely different. You might say, “Topping out at $35 on a great night online at the 5 cent/10 cent tables doesn’t exactly get my juices flowing!” That’s a gambler’s mindset, and it doesn’t belong here. You’re not getting into this to brag to your buddies. You’re in it to make long-term money. We’re trying to make skill relevant in a world filled with chance, and to acquire that skill you need repetition, which you get by learning from the ground up. It’s like elementary school, middle school, high school, college, master’s degree, PhD. Be patient and start at the start.

• **You are investing start-up capital in your small business when you put money in your poker account.** And when you make your first “sale,” you reinvest that money in your company, too. Don’t run to Best Buy to get yourself something cool the second you win your first big pot. Again, this is not Vegas, where it’s all funny money. This is serious business. You need to remind yourself of this fact every 15 minutes: this is business, not a game.
Chapter 6

ASSIGNING A VALUE TO YOUR TIME

Here is one of the single-most important concepts you need to understand as you develop your poker business: Money should not be your primary focus. Money will come your way if you improve your poker skill over time. Money ultimately takes care of itself.

Time is what matters most.

Every time you sit down to play poker, it should be an exercise in aggregating the most quality hours possible. When you get away from your “A” game or spend time in the wrong game or at an unproductive table, you are wasting hours. If you’re a good player making five big blinds per 100, whenever you make a careless mistake costing you five big blinds, that’s an hour of your time that you can never get back.

You have two commodities your business can consider as inventory: time and money. This chapter is about assigning value to your time. A future chapter called "Managing Your Bankroll" will tell you how to assign value to your money.

Think of a salesperson who works on 100 percent commission. He wakes up every morning with no guarantees. He could go out
there and close every prospect he has, or he could get destroyed. There are no guarantees. But he has a certain talent that makes him better than the norm, and that talent shows up every day. If he goes on enough appointments, his talent — his "edge" over his competition — shows up enough times to become statistically significant. It’s a numbers game.

Your poker business is no different. Your specific windfall on any given day depends on how many poor players are playing, how you’re feeling, the quality of your decisions, etc. But the core of your ability is going to stay constant.

You basically need to look at your time as though you’re clocking in at an hourly rate. It’s not sexy to think of poker that way, but it’s true. Some days you’re thinking clearly and the games are good, so you make $1,000 an hour in that ideal circumstance. Other days might not run nearly as well, and on those days you may lose $500 an hour.

Overall, your average is $250 an hour. So if you spend 30 minutes watching a sitcom when you were supposed to be playing, you paid $125 to do so. The 10 minutes you spent following a silly Internet forum cost you about $42 (one sixth of $250.) I look at my poker business in exactly these terms. If I’m doing something else during the time I’ve set aside to play, it is absolutely costing me money.

I feel the best approach is to set a foundation for a schedule. For example, "I’ll play from 7 p.m.–midnight Wednesday through Friday, and 4 p.m.–midnight Saturday and Sunday. I’ll study from 8 p.m.–10 p.m. Monday and Tuesday.” This foundation
has me on the tables when it’s most valuable to play — typically, those hours when the American worker is off.

But you have to be adaptive. Maybe every fifth or sixth day, I’ll log on to check my email or look up the score of a ball game and see the games are outstanding. I want to take advantage of that, so I’ll play and do the best I can during that time. Maybe it’ll turn into a marathon day if it stays good, or I’ll just play until the tables aren’t good anymore. If the games are good, I’ll tape my eyelids open if it keeps me at the tables.

You have to accept the good games aren’t necessarily going to happen on your schedule. They’re not always going to cooperate with what you want to do. At the same time, if you kill it at a time when you hadn’t expected, you can reward yourself down the line.

People often ask me if there are a minimum number of hours they should be playing. Without giving a specific number, I’ll say you absolutely must be playing a handful of hours every week if you’re to consistently bring in any money and stay in touch with your game.

Again, if you have the skill that gives you an edge at a particular level, you need to play enough to make that edge statistically significant. For example, with all things being equal, let’s say that you’ll win 55 percent of your hands and lose 45 percent. That 10 percent gap between your wins and losses represents your profit. How much that profit grows depends on how much you play.

Also, the more you play, the more you compensate for variance
and hone your skill. You need repetition week after week. Like any sport, you need to keep striving to improve.

This brings us to the question of how much time you should spend practicing and analyzing your own game. Studying does absolutely have long-term benefits and I think you should do it.

But I also think you need to keep studying in perspective. (I discuss effective practice in the next chapter.) I refer to winning as being its own skill several times in this book. Winning requires improvisation, on-the-fly calculation, and management of time and emotion. This ability can only be honed by playing. I always preferred playing golf to hitting balls on the range, and my success seemed to support that decision.

I value the time I spend on poker as being worth a particular dollar figure; thus, when I spend time studying and not playing, it’s as though I paid a certain amount to learn that information.

Here’s an example: I make an average of $800 per hour. If I spend five hours per week practicing poker and not playing, that time is costing me $4,000 a week, or $208,000 a year. That’s a significant sum. If I’m going to devote those five hours to practice each week, I better be doing some significant improving.

If you spent 100 percent of your time playing and not practicing, you could improve 2–3 percent each month. If you played 80 percent of your time and practiced 20 percent, you might improve 5–10 percent every month — but you lost 20 percent of your playing time. Is that practice going to make up for the money you didn’t make when you could’ve been playing? For
some the answer may be yes. But it is critical that you approach the situation with this mindset. With some experimentation, in time you will figure out the best balance for you.

For the player whose win rate is nonexistent or relatively low, I absolutely advocate that 80/20 play/practice split. This is your business and we are trying to improve its efficiency, and the best way to do that in the early days is through practice. For every four hours you play, you should practice or study one hour. By doing so, you’re improving the overall value of your business, training yourself to make money five, 10, 20 years from now. That time spent practicing will have a compounding effect over time. Practice will build the long-term foundation for your business.

As your win rate improves, I recommend dialing back the practice in favor of more play. An awareness of your hourly rate will help you do an accurate cost/benefit analysis of the time you spend practicing and studying.
Chapter 7
PRACTICING EFFECTIVELY

Time is inventory when it comes to your poker business. Your goal is to improve the value of that time. While it’s hard to go wrong when you’re trying to improve your game, some opportunities are more valuable than others.

In other businesses, there are symposiums, trade publications and seminars. Some are better than others. If you choose to go to a local chamber of commerce lunch when you could have had lunch with Warren Buffett, that’s an opportunity cost. You may have learned a thing or two at the chamber luncheon, so it wasn’t a total waste of time. But it was the least best use of your time.

In the previous chapter, I said I recommend an 80/20 percent split in time spent playing vs. practicing for those with lower win rates. As your win rate increases, your practice time should decrease.

Here are ways to maximize your practice time:

- **Watch videos actively**: Go to Stoxpoker and CardRunners, which are by far the most reputable teaching sites on the Internet. Watch videos from the coaches who specialize in the game you want to master. Diligently take notes while you’re watching. I’ve noticed people watching videos who are treating it as though they’re just putting in time. They’re
like those students who show their faces in college and take C-minuses. That might get you your diploma, but it won’t get you anywhere in poker. You’ll get eaten alive. You need to hang on to every word these coaches are saying.

• **Simplify**: Now what do you do with your notes? You review them, and simplify them when you go to play. In reality, you can only focus on one or two ideas when you’re playing. When you can get everything mentioned by the coach ingrained in your game, you move on, but not before. It’s like a golfer who reads an article and tries to implement eight swing thoughts his next time on the course. Good luck! More than likely, his swing will look like a guy falling out of a tree.

I once had a guy write to me who said, "Hey Leatherass, when are you going to do a new video? You haven’t done one in a couple weeks." I wrote back and said, "I have a new video coming out in a week or two, but in the meantime I have 70 other videos on the site that can tide you over until my next release."

"I watched those, too," he wrote.

"How long have you been a member," I asked.

"Two months," he replied.

Don’t get me wrong, I felt extremely flattered that he watched more than one of my videos a day for two months. My best friends don’t even want to spend that much time with me. But there’s no way he could have digested even 20 percent of what I told him, let alone be able to implement it. It’s much better to take notes and slowly install what you’ve learned.
• **Use forums effectively**: One of my most common bits of advice is to suggest people study the situations they most commonly struggle with. That’s one thing that Tiger Woods does better than anyone: attack his weaknesses. He’s extremely honest with himself about where he’s falling short, and he practices that weakness until it’s a strength. These are commonalities among all greats, regardless of their field: they are unfailingly honest with themselves, and they address the areas where they’re coming up short.

If you look at 90 percent of forum posts, they’ll focus on these “cooler situations,” like a hand where they got set oversetted. I’ve got news for you: I’m going broke there. Phil Ivey and Doyle Brunson are going broke there. You are most definitely going broke there.

Instead, you should be focusing on the fact that you flopped middle pair or a draw on 50 percent of the pots you played, you had somebody betting at you, and you didn’t know what to do. You’re continually making that error. Most players make a dozen or so small mistakes every hour, and that is what’s holding them back from what they can be.

After every session, you should write down the smaller situations that bothered you, then post those things in the forums. Keep your eyes peeled for the response. Sure, you’ll get some jackasses who will poke fun at you, but who cares? You’re in the business of making money. If you wanted to make friends you’d be on Match.com. Don’t worry about the dummies.

• **Organize groups**: You should get people together who share your passion. I’m still in daily contact with my original group. They’re some of the best players around today, and we still email each other hand questions and get opinions. We live in Southern California, Northern California, New York, South Carolina and Oregon. That’s the beauty of the Internet.
If you really want to improve, go into the forums on Stoxpoker or Cardrunners and write a heartfelt letter to the community. Say, “I’m not very good, but I work really hard and I want to get better and learn. Who’s interested in joining me in an email chain, or IM group, or conference call twice a week?” You can cover more ground working as a group. One guy can watch one of my videos, another can watch Jared Tendler’s, another can watch Nick Grudzien’s, etc. You distill those videos down to their core two or three ideas, and pass the knowledge around.

You might end up improving and making some great friends — at least I did. Having that communication makes it a more exciting and less-lonely endeavor. You have a buddy system where you’re dragging each other up and working like a team. It’s not a long shot by any means that you could get this up and going. Trust me, if you pour your soul out there, you’re going to get more back than the sound of crickets chirping.
We’ve discussed time as inventory. Now let’s talk about money as inventory.

If you owned a widget business, you’d want to have enough widgets in your warehouse that you could fulfill a big order. Money is the inventory that allows you to sit down at a table when a fish is there and the odds are in your favor. Without that inventory, all else is moot.

My family’s toy business is a good example of ineffective inventory management. My dad would only keep 400 cap guns on hand because he wanted to keep our inventory low for the purposes of overhead. But once a month, someone would call to buy 1,000 cap guns in one shot, and we’d either have to turn that person down or turn something around really quickly. Most often we missed out on the sale. Similarly, if you’re cashing out your bankroll all the time, you could potentially not have the inventory to play a poor player when he sits down at a table, especially in the case of a fish who has decided to move up in stakes. That’s a big sale on which you’ve missed out. It’s found money, basically, and you don’t want to miss out on the opportunity to pick it up.

Maybe your regular game is a $100 buy in, and you saw a mega-fish in the lobby for a $200 game. Now he’s got $400 down and
the seat next to him is open. You could have position on him. But without the inventory, you’ve missed out on a big sale.

If you keep a constant—but—inadequate bankroll, you will go broke — of this I am 100 percent certain. Spending pieces of your accumulating bankroll because a long losing streak seems unlikely is a recipe for total disaster.

I’ve known many a winning poker player to go broke. They may start with $5,000, win $100,000 in three months, spend $80,000 and lose back $25,000. Now they’re broke despite having won $80,000.

I have a good friend who’s notorious for this. He’s been trying to be a pro for five years. But he has a few kids, and every time he wins $1,000, he says, “Wow, I could pay for my daughter’s music lessons or my son’s summer camp with this.” So he hits the “cash out” button, and he’s back to where he was at the beginning of the day.

True, he can pretend that day didn’t exist and start fresh tomorrow, and that theoretically works for the days he wins. But if you do that every time you win, and take your licks when you lose, you end up broke.

You need to ask yourself, “What’s my ultimate goal here?” Your goal is to make as much money as possible playing poker. You need the bankroll to play at the stakes for which you’re aiming. You need a six-figure bankroll to play at the high stakes, so if you only have $1,000 in your account, you have a long way to go. It’s a step-by-step progression.
You obviously don’t want to over-do it. You don’t want $50,000 in your poker account and $50 in your savings account. But you give yourself the best chance to succeed by having enough inventory to make the big sale when one comes along. Finding a balance that works for your situation is essential.

You want enough so your career can gradually progress up the stakes. If you have a comfortable balance in your poker account, you can more easily justify taking shots at higher-stakes games. If you cash out and are always on a short bankroll, it’s easy to fall into a scenario where you say, “There’s a great shot for me at the bigger games …,” and you deposit money from your savings online. Now you have your real-life money in there, and it feels like you’re losing a lot more than just the ups and downs you need to withstand as a poker pro.

When can you feel comfortable cashing out? There’s no perfect answer for everybody, because everyone’s financial picture is different. You might have extenuating circumstances where you really need the money, which is totally understandable.

Again, we get back to looking at this as a business. Statistics say that most businesses don’t make money for five years. We don’t want that, of course, so let’s reduce that figure to one year. We won’t expect our poker business to make money for one year, so for that period, you will not take money out of your poker account. This allows you to comfortably progress through the limits as your skills dictate.

As a conservative estimate, you want to have 100 buy-ins in your bankroll at all times. If you’re playing $100 buy-ins, you
want to have $10,000 in your account. This is a minimum. A more aggressive coach might tell you 20 buy-ins is sufficient. But I’m conservative, because I like to have plenty of money in my account in case I see somebody I like at a higher-stakes table. It also gives me a peace of mind similar to someone who just paid off his home. Is it the best way to invest your money? Probably not, but peace of mind should be a huge factor in your decision because you can only really play your best when you are comfortable.

I suspect many poker professionals will disagree with my conservative bankroll suggestions. Make no mistake about it, this is some of the most conservative advice you will ever hear. But I tell you this as someone who’s never had a losing month, never gone broke, and is one of the all-time money winners in online poker: I have never taken a shot at a limit for which I didn’t have at least 100 buy-ins.
Chapter 9

KNOWING YOUR MARGINS

You’ll need to stick with me a bit on this chapter. I promise you that I’ll get there, but I have to go around the bend a bit to bring the point home.

Growing up in my family business, I learned finding opportunities to increase our profit margins even the slightest bit could have an enormous impact on our bottom line. Say I increased our profit margin on a $4.99 doll from 10 percent to 11 percent by cutting down on our shipping costs. A 1 percent up-tick of roughly 5 cents doesn’t sound like anything significant, until you consider that we sold nearly 100,000 of them every year. Suddenly that 1 percent increase is netting you an additional $4,990. Not too bad. If we could make enough of those small increases to our profit margin, suddenly we’re maybe able to hire that one extra employee who could free us up to focus on long-term growth. If you focus on finding small edges here and there, pretty soon you’re looking at big profits.

Many people have criticized me because I tend to focus on things that were once considered peripheral. Increasing my profit margins 1 percent here and 2 percent there is a far cry from a poker game in the Wild, Wild West. But those incremental improvements, which I still seek today, are what made my poker business as healthy as it is today.
Poker is a game where we have to bet a lot to win a little, making it a thin-market business. But consider the following:

On a given day, I’ll have 20 tables going at once, and I play 20 percent of my hands at an average of one hand per table, per minute. So I’m playing four hands per minute. The average pot size for those hands is $300 or so, which means I’m playing $1,200-worth of pots per minute. That’s $70,000-worth of pots in an hour. If I play for 10 hours, that means I’ve played for a total of $700,000 in a day. I’ve chanced that I’ll lose or win $10,000, even though I’ve technically risked $700,000.

To me, poker these days is like golf was a century ago. Back then, no one thought about having your equipment just right, having a ball to suit your game, the importance of a pre-shot routine, etc. They just said, “Here’s the ball. Here’s the club. Swing.” These days every aspect of your game is broken down — driving distance, driving accuracy, greens in regulation, scrambling, putts per round — and to succeed, you need to fare well in just about every one of those facets. A century ago, you just needed raw talent.

In poker, I feel as though I’m advancing the nuances — which, if studied, can increase your profit margin — that will someday become the norm. There are lots of guys more talented than I am at poker, but I’m striving to be the “poker player of the future,” if you will, who focuses and measures himself based on how well he does in these smaller areas. A guy could steal a pot from me and say, “I outplayed Leatherass. So how does he make $1 million a year and I make $40,000?” My answer: look in the margins.
Margins are a mindset. Everything that you have read and will read in this book is not meant to affect a gargantuan shift in your game. They’re meant to increase your profit margin an unknown percent.

My advice might yield 1 percent here, 2 percent there. But when you add those things up, it makes for a very profitable poker player. Mine is not sexy advice — I’m not promising you that I know five ways to swoop in and steal a pot from Phil Ivey. But maybe you’ll learn a new play you didn’t have in your arsenal before, and maybe that play only comes up once an hour. But if that wins you a hand an hour, you’ll be looking at a new profit source that’s contributing to your bottom line. Also factor in that you have this new play, which detracts from your opponents’ ability to make decisions against you. That’s yet another profit source. Add another table and apply my advice — you get the picture. You’re gaining margin points where you’d not have before.

If you always keep your wheels turning and have your mind on margins, it will yield significant profit down the line.
Chapter 10

Metrics That Matter

Every company must choose specific metrics by which it can evaluate its progress month-over-month, year-over-year, and so on.

Your poker business is the same.

The single most important metric is hours played, and the second is dollars won. I’m a very process-oriented person. We’re in the business to make money, but we can’t always control that figure because there’s luck involved. But you can control the number of hours you spend on the game. If you commit to applying a process time and again over a number of hours, the dollars will follow.

This is your own business, and as such, you won’t have a boss telling you what time to be there or what time to leave. Most people struggle with this — if you play 40 hours a week, you’re a beast in the poker industry.

I commonly hear that poker is too intense to play it for a significant number of hours at a time. I buy this argument to an extent, because in terms of intensity, I’ve found little else that matches what a poker player experiences. You’re constantly being put through decision-making that matters, across multiple tables.
That said, it’s not life and death. Raise the bar little by little, and eventually you’ll become adapted to playing poker for extended periods. To start at 9 a.m. and quit at noon is simply not a hard day’s work.

Set time goals, and keep a log to make sure you’re meeting them. I’ll say it again and again in this book: You should have an 80/20 split for time spent playing vs. practicing. Practice time should decrease as you become more proficient; likewise, if your game is in dire straits, a 50/50 split might be in order. But you have to make yourself accountable for a total number of hours spent on poker.

Those hours must be filled entirely with quality time. If you’re capable of playing eight hands at once at your peak efficiency, you need to be there at all times. Saying, "I don’t feel like focusing today. I’ll just play two or three tables," is totally unacceptable. Would you tolerate an employee coming to you and saying, "I just wasn’t feeling it today, so I only went on two sales calls and blew off the other six”? If you normally play eight hands at once, but dial that down to two, you have to commit to play four times as much to make up for the difference.

Your whole life doesn’t need to revolve around making money. I certainly understand that. But if you’re reading this book, you’re interested in maximizing the value of your time, in which case you need to strive to work at peak efficiency.

Besides time played and money won, dollars per hour is the best metric, because it takes into account more factors than dollar per hand. I could achieve a great per-hand figure by playing
only when fish are at the table, or only playing one or two hands at a time. Dollars per hour better encompasses what I want to achieve. As I learn to play more and more tables at once, my dollars per hour should increase. But if my play diminishes because I’m adding too many tables, I’ll know that, too.

Some metrics can be destructive. Any metric that gets you thinking too near-term can take you totally off-course. It’s like a company that’s too beholden to its stock price and less concerned about its long-term health. Say you’re a shareholder in Apple, and the stock loses ground one day. You read an article that questions if Apple’s reign is over, and you sell your stock the next day. Lots of people manage their investments that way. But you should be comparing solid information grounded in actual company data against firmly established metrics.

Some people compare their performance against established pros. This is a common mistake. You might read that an average pro plays 23 percent of pots, and you only play 15 percent. You tell yourself, “I should be playing more pots. I’m too tight.” You start playing more hands, and pretty soon you’re finding yourself in positions you’re not comfortable playing. Let your game evolve and expand at its own pace.

Expanding our vision a bit, a metric that is incredibly destructive is peer recognition. Poker players are often jerks, plain and simple. You’re playing at a table against a bunch of people with their own money on the line. It’s not a friendly environment; it’s war. They will tear you down. Most of us will absorb that criticism. It’s human nature, particularly when you’ve not been running well. Stick to your guns and the metrics that matter to you. Everything else is just noise.
Metrics are your compass. They let you know if you’re getting closer to or farther from your goals. A good suggestion is to always spend 15–20 minutes before or after each session analyzing what went right and wrong during the previous session. Do the same thing at the end of each week, evaluating the previous seven days against your most important metrics.
Chapter 11
DEALING WITH VARIANCE

Of all the articles that have been written about me, my favorite was a piece that was done by John Garrity for *Sports Illustrated* in February 2009, because it included the following passage:

“Schmidt has acquired a mathematician’s detachment, a focused tranquility that allows him to manage tens of thousands of dollars on a constantly changing digital landscape. ‘I’ll go a hundred thousand hands without making money, but I’ve never had a losing month,’ he said.”

The tranquility Garrity mentions here was the grail I chased for the first few years of my poker career. You’ll read about the roots of my psychological turnaround in subsequent chapters, but suffice it to say, tilt was a significant issue in my life. What was leading me to tilt was a feeling of failure when I’d suffer a bad beat, when in fact that beat was just the normal variance that is part and parcel of poker. To make peace with poker is to come to terms with variance.

Variance is basically that which deviates from the norm, be it good or bad. In baseball, if a player has proven himself to be a .300 hitter three years running, then it’s reasonable to assume that in his fourth year he’ll also hit .300, with his hits being derived from a mixture of bunts, ground balls, line drives, fly balls and home runs. If that hitter has two hits in nine at bats,
and on his tenth at bat hits a line drive that is caught by the second baseman, that is bad variance. If he has three hits in nine at bats, and on the 10th at bat hits a blooper that falls between three fielders, that’s good variance.

Say you’ve historically won 20 cents a hand over a million-hand career. Minus any significant changes to your game or the poker landscape, you are probably going to win 20 cents over your next million hands, as well.

It stands to reason then that if you play 3,000 hands in a day, and you’re a 20 cent/hand winner on average, you should win $600 a day. If you somehow win $1,200, you’ve had good variance. If you break even or lose $600, you’ve had bad variance.

For some reason, we in the poker community tend to only look at the word variance as one that describes a bad run. But in truth, variance is both good and bad. For every 10 hands you play, two might invariably run well, two might run badly, and the remainder will be consistent with your skill level. Dealing with the two that run badly will have a lot to do with your long-term success.

When we cool off, our first instinct is to presume that something is wrong: “I’ve lost three days in a row. It’s my fault. I’m no good anymore.” Nothing could be less true. Great poker players can go 100,000 hands or more and not make money.

The newer you are to the game, the harder it is to deal with variance because you have a much smaller sample size. There have been a lot of guys who’ve quit their job after a couple hot
months, only to discover they were experiencing good variance. Likewise, many a poker career that would’ve been profitable never got off the ground because of bad variance at their outset.

In hindsight, I was very fortunate at the outset of my career because I ran OK off the bat. I had $1,000 between me and the streets, and I put it online thinking, "I guess we’ll find out if I’m any good or not.” If I’d run badly, God only knows where I’d be today. I was lucky to not be unlucky, that’s for sure. I was also fortunate that I didn’t run so hot that I got ahead of myself. All in all, I got a fair shake, which is all you can hope for.

How can you tell if you’re running good or bad? There’s no way to know definitively. But there are some tools you can use. Hold’Em Manager has a statistic called "$ (EV adjusted.)” The statistic essentially calculates your equity percentage of the total pot when you go all in, and compares it to what you actually won.

**Here is how $ (EV Adjusted) is calculated:**

Let’s say I go all in pre-flop with AA and my opponent has TT. I’m 80.5% to win a $400 pot.

80.5% x $400 = $322, so what it’s saying is on average I should win approximately $322 of the $400 pot when I go all in with AA vs. his TT.

- If I win, I would take the entire $400 pot, so I’ve won $78 more than I would have on average, in which case I’ve been pretty lucky. I’ve won $78 more than I should have in this spot (even though I might feel like this should have happened
because my hand held up. At the outset of my career, I always
thought I ran badly because I never recognized when I ran
well.)

- If I lose, I win $0, so I’m running $322 less than I would
  have on average, in which case I’ve been unlucky. Maybe,
  though, I’ve not been as unlucky as I feel because I wasn’t
  entitled to the $400, just the $322. I’m like the driver who
  gets in the first fender bender of his life at the age of 65, and
  feels unlucky. In fact, he’s been lucky, because statistically
  he should have been in an accident a long time ago. He’s
  been driving for about 50 years and this mild accident with
  no injuries is the worst accident he’s been involved in.

$ (EV Adjusted) tells you what should have happened. It is
signified directly to the right of the money-won column in your
copy of Hold’em Manager.

This isn’t a perfect statistic, nor is it the sole determination
of if you’ve been lucky, unlucky or normal. But it’s certainly a
useful tool in determining whether or not you’ve been running
good or bad.

I’m also a huge believer in hiring a poker coach who is or has
been a big winner in the game you’re playing. It’s a great thing
to do when you are running poorly (or running really well) so
you can receive a professional assessment of if you’re playing
well and running badly, or vice versa. Beyond just that, you will
surely pick up some helpful concepts that will result in improved
play — and an improved bottom line — for your poker business.
He’ll be able to give you a pretty good evaluation of where you
are with your game. The best coaches are at Stoxpoker.com.
Private message them and they’ll quote you their hourly rates, which generally range from $50–$750.
I have a good friend who was a longtime sales manager in the advertising field. He once told me that one common trait among his top salespeople was that they never looked at their numbers until the end of the month. That way, their effort stayed constant when times were good, and when times weren’t so good, they weren’t unduly pressured by the winding down of the monthly clock.

Though I’m not in sales, this is something I apply to my poker business. I am one of the few people I know in online poker who does not look at the cashier until the end of the month. I just don’t see the advantage in looking. If I’m playing well, there’s a good chance I’ll become protective of my money, just as a football team that’s ahead might go into a prevent defense, as opposed to playing with the abandon that got them the lead in the first place.

By not looking at the cashier, I stay committed to the thought process and what I’m trying to achieve. Results have been known to interfere with that thought process. Those who are running really badly, for example, might go up in stakes to chase their losses.

Even worse, a bad trend might make you feel like you need to
keep playing on and on, regardless of the stakes. If you’re losing, it might just be bad luck, or it might be bad play. Chances are certainly greater that your game is off when you’re losing money. Ironically, this is when people tend to play the longest. Because they’re down, they play longer when they’re not at their best.

Conversely, there’s an instinct to quit when we’re ahead, as if to say, ”I just made $10,000 in my first 20 minutes. Why don’t I go play golf?” But this is exactly when you should keep playing. That’s how you get to days where you make $20,000-$30,000. You keep going.

Strangely enough, when the games are bad and we’re thinking badly, we’re inclined to keep playing. But when the games are best and we’re thinking our best, we’re inclined to stop. Most of us play our longest sessions in the worst environments. I once heard a guy say, ”You know why I never lose at poker? I play until I’m not losing anymore.” Come to think of it, I hear comments like this all the time.

We’ve all known guys who’ve played 30 hours at a time until they get unstuck. That is completely unnecessary — you’d have won at the beginning of your next session if you’d taken some time to rest.

There have been months that have begun with me getting down $30,000. But I ignore the cashier. I don’t want to have to deal emotionally with the loss. Two or three weeks go by, and I’ll finally check the cashier, only to discover that I’m up $35,000. I’ll look at the history graph, and sure enough I was down $30,000, only to go on a $65,000 tear.
By not looking at the cashier, I always feel like a winner. This may be a psychological crutch, but it works.

As opposed to your cashier’s balance, the figure you have to keep in mind is your hourly rate. If that’s constant or trending upward, you know you’re improving as a player and your overall strategy is sound.

This advice applies so long as you’re following what I said previously of keeping 100 buy-ins in your bankroll. If you’re not to that threshold yet, you may have to check the cashier to make sure you’re not in any serious bankroll trouble.
Chapter 13
KNOWING YOUR RISK TOLERANCE

Part of growing your business is coming to an understanding of how much risk you can tolerate. Are you willing to take a step back in order to ultimately take two steps forward?

A lot of my answer to the question of risk tolerance has put me at odds with some in the poker community, because it gets to the essential core of what differentiates a gambling mentality from my own.

You should know that I’m conservative when it comes to poker and risk tolerance. The risk in being too conservative is that I might not move up in stakes fast enough. But it’s unknown if I’m going to succeed at those higher stakes. I’d rather make the mistake of netting only $60 an hour when I could have been making $80, than chasing that $80 and going down to zero. Ultimately, I am making money doing something I enjoy. I have no boss. I make my own hours. I don’t want to risk that so I can have bragging rights with my online peers.

If you have a mindset that you must move up quickly, and you manage your bankroll liberally, you’re setting yourself up for a really big mistake in the long run. That is a gambler’s mentality with which few people can succeed long term.
I look at poker not as a gamble, but as a skill. (And as you read in Ch. 1, I can prove that winning poker is a skill.) I want to make a small business out of that skill, and like most businesses, I don’t want to risk having to close up shop. Staying open is the goal first and foremost; maximizing profit is second.

I’ve seen people making deep six figures a year playing 5/10 NL and 10/20 NL games online, but who nonetheless have a mentality that they haven’t succeeded until they’ve made it up to the nosebleeds. They’ll risk crippling their businesses and their entire lives by getting greedy for money, notoriety, or both. In one bad night they could lose everything.

You could be setting yourself up for disaster.

I understand the allure of the nosebleed games. They’re positioned as being at the pinnacle of what we want to achieve. Maybe two years ago you were dreaming of a day you could take your shot at Phil Ivey, and now here’s your chance. It’s awfully tempting. I’d be lying if I said I didn’t dream about them myself. I’ve watched those games and thought about how cool it would be to win a hand and pay off my mortgage.

I have the skill to do that. But I don’t want to lose my house, either, and to me that’s a hell of a lot more important.

It’s entirely possible you might have the skill to take that shot at the nosebleeds. But that doesn’t make it the right thing to do.
Chapter 14

PICK A STRATEGY

You have to have a strategy for success when you open a business. The idea of being in business for yourself is a nice one, but until you have a plan for how you’re going to convert your idea into cash, it will remain just that — an idea.

You would never start a business where you bought an apple for a dollar and then sold it for 95 cents. You’d never make it. This is the equivalent of playing poker without a weaker player at the table.

If you’re at a table with five other pros of roughly similar ability, you are playing to lose money. You basically will trade money back and forth between equal players, while paying 5 percent rake for the privilege. That’s the equivalent of buying a product and selling it for a lower price point.

You might make money by accident if you’re just playing for entertainment, or just blowing off steam for an hour. But you cannot make an argument that — unless you are an absolutely superb player — it will ultimately be profitable to consistently sit at a table without weaker players.

Here is the counter-argument to what I’m saying: While those six players of equivalent ability may just be passing money around,
they are gaining valuable experience playing against top-level competition. Iron sharpens iron, as they say. You are also learning things about that competition.

My argument to that argument: First, you may be learning about them, but they’re learning about you, too. So it’s a wash. Second, there are good pros at every table. Why not play against them while there’s also fish at the table? Fish make it more exciting, in fact, because of the competition to get at that one guy.

Here are the best ways to tell if your table has a fish at it:

- **You are a regular in your games and you do not recognize a new opponent.** Nine times out of 10, if you are a regular in your games and do not recognize an opponent, he’s a recreational player.

- **You have that player marked as weak.** It’s very important to take notes on your opponents. The reality is you are very likely to see that person again and you should prepare for that moment by marking him as a weak player.

- **You notice an opponent whose stack size is greater than 20 big blinds, but less than 100 big blinds.** There are two types of people who play for a living: Those who play a short-stack style (they buy in for 20 big blinds and leave when they reach 40 big blinds), and those who play with a maximum buy in. With rare exception, if you notice an opponent who is sitting with a stack size not indicative of either a short stacker or someone who buys in for the table maximum, they are a recreational player. If you notice one of these players, grab a seat.
• **You notice someone limp in pre-flop to open the action.** There are a handful of good players with whom I’ve sat who make it a practice to limp in pre-flop, but that’s about it. Other than a few players here and there, my basic rule is if I see someone limp in, they are a fish until proven otherwise.
Chapter 15

TIME FOR EXPANSION

The question over moving up in the number of tables you’re playing at one time is akin to a company considering if the time is right for expansion. Will more locations equal more revenue? Or is less more, and will more be less?

When I was working for my family business, I remember having great business opportunities laid at my feet and getting excited about them. Then I’d look at our eight employees and realize — much as it broke my heart — that there was no way to grow intelligently to meet the demand.

So how do you know when adding tables equals smart growth? I’m constantly encouraging people to push the envelope. If you are able to play five tables as well as your can four, then you should; otherwise, you’re giving up 20 percent of your potential profit margin, which would be a huge mistake.

But adding tables can also be a slippery slope because if you keep adding one more and one more with abandon, you’ll eventually arrive at a point of diminishing returns where you’re not playing profitable poker anymore. It’s akin to someone having three hamburger joints that are doing great. So he says to himself, ”This is going so well, let’s open seven more.” But do you have the capital and manpower needed to run 10
restaurants? If not, it won’t be long until you’re not making any money at all.

There are a couple of ways to view expansion, poker-wise. Assuming you have the skills to do it, you can play more tables at stakes where you know you’ll do well and expect slightly less of a win rate. This enables you to reach the “long run” more quickly. This is key. If your results per hand are consistent and your goal is to play 100,000–150,000 hands in a month, playing more hands will hasten that yield. The fewer hands you play, the more subject you are to variance. By playing more hands, you start to minimize the impact of variance and skill wins the day. The profit margin you can expect by virtue of your skill level becomes statistically more significant the more hands you play.

The downside is you might be playing lesser stakes than you could be playing. You are probably not improving and thinking about situations as well as a guy playing less tables is doing. A lot of improvement comes from playing smaller tables and grinding on decisions. If you have 12–16 tables going on, life becomes more difficult — though it will take you a longer time to reach the “long term.”

It’s a virtual certainty that your win rate will suffer incrementally as you move up in hands. But if your dollars-per-hour metric remains steady or improves, you’ll know that your move up in simultaneous hands played has been a smart one.
Chapter 16
DETERMINING YOUR STYLE

Every company should have a mission statement — a brief encapsulation of core values to which the company should be tethered as it grows and changes. One thought — or in this case, one question — that I try to keep in mind as my game evolves is this: If I only had one table to play, and from that table I had to extract all of the potential money I could make from poker, what style of play would I choose? What would make me the most profitable? Would I be a tight-aggressive player, or a loose-aggressive one?

Here’s my answer: If I could play just one table, I would probably play around 30 percent of my hands.

At my present stakes, I play about 20–23 percent of my hands, spread over 12–16 tables — and sometimes as many as 20 tables. My rationale for playing 7–10 percent fewer hands is that I’m better off ditching the bottom third of the hands I’d customarily play in favor of seeking more profitable situations over a greater number of tables being played at once.

What you ultimately want to achieve is the perfect balance between playing too many hands and too few.

For example, let’s say you average a profit of $1 per hand playing
one table. You could probably continue to make that $1 a hand over four tables. You can play that increased number of pots and still focus clearly. But if you increase to five tables and beyond, things might start to feel chaotic and your performance will suffer.

In order to play more tables, you need to throw out those hands that are the least profitable. You might go from $1 to 75 cents per hand, because you ditched some of your hands, but it’s worth it if you play twice as many tables.

Let’s say your ideal poker strategy yields $1 per hand. That’s playing 30 percent of your hands, which you consider optimal. But you can only play that style on five tables at the most. Each table is yielding 100 hands per hour, so you’re playing 500 hands — and making $500 — per hour.

Your second-most ideal style is to play fewer hands with a simplified strategy. Your decisions are more automated, so there’s less risk and less reward. Now you’re yielding just 75 cents per hand, but you can play 10 tables. Now you’re playing 1,000 hands per hour, and making $750 an hour as a result.

So you see, a more simplistic style might make you less profitable per table, but could make you more profitable per hour.

This style of play has put me at odds with much of the poker community. I view poker as a business, and this is the safest and most profitable way for me to grow my business. But it’s a less audacious style, and that doesn’t square well with a lot of people in the poker community.
At the outset of my career, I chose to play my ideal style over fewer hands. I was throwing out $1-per-hand averages over samples of nearly 700,000 hands while playing 5/10 NL and above — and this was in the post-UIGEA (Unlawful Internet Gambling Enforcement Act of 2006) era, when the games got much tougher. When I posted my graph on Twoplustwo.com, some called it the greatest in online history.

(The nosebleed games came around two years ago and changed everything. Now some guys make $200 a hand, but hardly get any action. Most make less than I do netting 75 cents a hand, as the games are far more abundant at the stakes I play.)

I still felt I could become more profitable per hour, but knew I’d need to forsake style to do it. I adopted the style I’ve described here, and as a result, began making less per hand — which made me look like I was getting worse as a player. But now I’m playing up to 20 tables and my hourly rate has steadily increased.

There are some pitfalls to the conservative style I’ve described here. Those who play more tables tend to play fewer hours, either because they get a sense they’ve accomplished what they need to in less time, or more commonly because of the intensity that comes with multi-tabling. Also, some players fall into the trap of making their games too automated. When these decisions get easier, they challenge themselves less and fail to scrutinize their decision-making process; thus, they don’t improve as players. I constantly keep this in mind as I move toward a style that maximizes my profit potential per hour.
I encourage people to experiment. Try playing a little tighter over a large sample of tables and see how it feels to you. Then try playing less tables than you are used to, but become more involved in pots and watch the action closely. Remember that the earlier you discover your optimal playing style, the more money you will make over the course of your career. You may sacrifice some money at the outset by experimenting, but you’re building toward a sound business practice that will serve you for the rest of your time in the poker business.
Chapter 17

A SIMPLE APPROACH TO ADDING TABLES

As one of the only successful mass multi-tablers at high stakes, I’m probably uniquely able to help you in negotiating the process of adding tables. How many you play really boils down to how you process information. Looking at a screen with tables flashing everywhere is not unlike being a quarterback. You need to be able to see the field and make quick decisions in a dynamic game. The field in this case is the cards you are being dealt. You need to develop an eye for which decisions are a priority in the moment.

Your focus should be first and foremost on the hands you have going that represent important decisions. When you see pocket aces or a flush draw or a fish limp into the pot, your attention should go straight to that spot. All of the other hands can wait, and once you make those important decisions, you can dart your mouse across the table to quickly go fold, fold, fold, fold, fold, fold, fold, fold across the tables for the hands that are obvious folds (like being dealt 2 7 offsuit). If you accidentally time out on a hand you were folding anyway, it’s no big deal. From there, just rinse and repeat.

Once you attend to your important decisions, you must not rush them. You typically have a lot more time than you realize, and you can always click the time bank if necessary (or download a script
that automatically clicks it for you, which is what I recommend). I use a simple mental checklist that I have on my computer screen for when I arrive at an important decision:

- What do my opponent's actions mean?
- What is the best action to take vs. his range of hands?
- Consider all of your options carefully before deciding and make sure to take lots of deep breaths

While these tips will help you, the single greatest way to add tables is through sheer repetition. If you play full-time for 2-3 years, you will have seen so many of the same situations that your decisions will become mostly automated. Once decisions become automated, you will spend less time them, which will free you up to add even more tables.

If you treat your poker like a business, you wouldn’t want to spend that time any other way.
Chapter 18

KNOWING YOUR EXPENSES

One terrific aspect of poker as a business is the low overhead. There are several investments that I recommend making, but even with those included, it’s a business where the margins can be 99 percent. Not bad.

It’s much like being a day trader. If you have the capital and a computer, you can trade all day. And if you’re trading billions, that $9.95 Ameritrade fee doesn’t affect your margins much.

In terms of equipment, I (strongly) recommend getting a comfortable chair, which will pay for itself and then some. You also want a computer monitor that is big enough to handle what you’re trying to do. If you’re just playing four or five tables, a conventional laptop or desktop monitor is fine. But if you get into serious multi-tabling, you’ll want to get a high-resolution, 30-inch monitor. Playing 12-20 tables as I do, I have a dual-monitor set up with two 30-inch screens with a resolution of 2560x1600. (It’s important you get the highest-resolution monitor possible if you’re looking to effectively multi-table.)

In terms of software, Hold’Em Manager (which costs $80 for the professional version) is an absolute must. It’s a fully featured hand-history program that provides statistics on yourself and your opponents. Another necessity is a membership
with a training site like Stoxpoker.com or CardRunners.com. Memberships run around $299 for the year. But if you play on Full Tilt and go to TrulyFreePokerTraining.com, they will pay for your membership to Stoxpoker or CardRunners.

The brevity of this chapter is good news for you. There are very few costs associated with playing online poker for a living. Other than taxes, you get to keep everything you earn for the most part. Not many businesses can say that.
Chapter 19

PROTECTING YOUR CAPITAL

The American businessperson’s increased awareness of the fallibility of our financial institutions mirrors what poker players have long known: you must keep your money with someone reputable. I say this from personal experience, as I was burned for a five-figure sum when a fly-by-night poker site I frequented dissolved overnight.

Your capital is your inventory, and there’s a huge risk not only in losing money, but also your time invested if the site you’re on shuts down tomorrow. You’ve invested time getting reads on other players and getting acquainted with new software.

Having to migrate from a site you were comfortable with to a new one is something you really don’t want to do in your career if you don’t have to. It’s not unlike having to move storefronts if you own a retail business. In poker, the notes you’ve developed, the time you’ve invested developing reads on your opponents, your familiarity with the software and the financial loss make having to switch sites a much bigger deal than you might realize.

A handful of decent-sized sites go under every year, as do countless others that were start-ups. Personally, I’m not comfortable playing anywhere besides Poker Stars and Full Tilt. A few years ago, a site popped up called Eurolinx and my
friend swore by it. I put $10,000 on there, got a funny feeling and cashed out. My buddy was stuck for $250,000 when they eventually shut their doors.

You could be forgiven for taking up a new site on its enticement offers, but you’re taking a big risk.
"We’re shutting it down! Everybody go home, we’re shutting it down!"

When I worked for my family business, my dad was famous for losing his cool over setbacks small and large, which would lead him to storm through our warehouse, waving his arms and yelling the aforementioned order at the top of his lungs. Production would come to a screeching halt and there were big financial ramifications, all over a temper tantrum.

Based on that experience, I came to pride myself — be it in business or golf — on not making a bad decision as a result of being angry or frustrated. But that veneer started to crack a bit when I got seriously into poker. While not as bad as most, I still had big issues with tilt. I virtually reverted back to my early days as a kid golfer, when it was not uncommon for me to toss or snap a club.

Playing poker, I busted two laptops and at least 25–30 mice. I put a small hole in my wall, and nearly made a much bigger one when I threw a chair across my office. This wasn’t fair to my wife, nor to myself — particularly given that I was only a couple years removed from the heart attack I experienced at 23.
I was playing poker 8-10 hours a day, 29 or 30 days a month for three years. During that period I probably blew up 30 times. While that was maybe only one blowup a month, it was one too many, because it was costing me money, my sanity and my dignity.

My breakthrough came in 2007, the year I was going for SuperNova Elite status on Poker Stars. Heading into Fall, I was coming off four or five months in a row when my computer was a virtual ATM. I might have experienced three or four losing days each month, but I was otherwise winning around $3,000-$5,000 a day.

Then the wheels came off.

I hadn’t started going for SuperNova Elite status until April, which gave me three fewer months with which to work. Even with my success earlier in the year, I knew it was going to come down to the final days of December, and the grind was starting to get to me.

Three weeks into the month of October, I was down $30,000 — a totally uncommon position for me, as I’d never experienced a losing month in my entire career. I looked within and realized much of the reason for my collapse had to do with the diminishing quality of my hours spent playing poker.

This is where my experience as an athlete paid off. I knew there was a huge correlation between the mental game and physical performance in golf. Why wouldn’t the same be true for poker?

I remembered a great guy I’d met during a golf trip to Bandon
Dunes earlier that year. His name was Jared Tendler, and he was a specialist in mental performance for golfers. I asked if he could apply some of the same principles to poker, and though he didn’t know the game well at the time, we began work immediately.

The impact of his lessons blew me away. I sensed myself becoming so much more productive, and felt I wasn’t alone in the emotions I experienced over the game. I’d been wrestling with understanding what was luck and what was skill in poker. Jared helped me reconcile myself with the fact that this job is one in which my fate is not entirely in my hands — an unfamiliar notion for a guy who’d willed himself to become one of the top junior golfers in the country despite a lack of otherworldly ability.

More than anything, Jared taught me acceptance. If I was to play so much as one more hand of poker, I had to get it through my head that there would be good luck and bad, but if I played long enough with a clear head, skill would eventually win the day.

Prior to working with Jared, my perception of loss was so much more heightened than that of victory. Almost every time I played, I walked away feeling as though I’d lost. When I’d win, I’d say, “Well, that should have happened.” But when I’d lose several all-in pots, well, that sense of despair would linger for hours, if not days or weeks. It was not uncommon for me to go an entire month without looking at the cashier. At the end of that month, I’d guess I’d won maybe $20,000 at best, only to discover I’d actually won in excess of $100,000.

The results were off the charts. I came out ahead in October, had $100,000 months in November and December, and
made SuperNova Elite status with three days to spare. The improvements just kept coming, and in Jan.-Feb. 2008, I made $350,000 combined for a total of more than $600,000 in winnings over the first four months of working with Jared.

People always ask me, what specifically did Jared do for you? Can you teach me what he taught you? My response is to draw yet another parallel to golf: I know how to swing the club, but I can’t teach you to swing like I do. Some people are born teachers, and Jared is one.

So while I considered trying to relate the things he taught to me about the mental game, I decided instead to simply turn the next five chapters over to Jared, himself. What you’ll read here are some general concepts that will not only help you get over your problem with tilt, but will also give you an edge in turning your mental game into an advantage.

Without further ado, here’s Jared Tendler:
Chapter 21

WHY PSYCHOLOGY MATTERS

*Treat Your Poker Like a Business* is all about finding edge where players don’t often look. Dusty knew psychology was one of those places from his days playing professional golf and hired me for help with tilt. Realizing how much the mental part of the game was costing him (money and otherwise), he got in touch with me and put in the work. The results, as he mentions above, were dramatic.

Psychology is a frontier with huge potential for your game. Plus, since there are so few players really taking psychology seriously, in a sense this part of the game is juicy.

Whether reducing tilt, improving focus or training for the zone, improvement in psychology actually happens in the same way as poker strategy. When you first started in poker, so much was unknown and you probably couldn’t imagine how much could be learned. But the more you played and studied the game, the more advanced and involved it got. The key is having the right information, and since matters of the mind are not always obvious, I’ll try to make it really easy for you.

While mental and emotional skill cannot replace actual skill in the game, it does give you a new set of options to improve and gain an edge. Here are eight (of many) things you’ll learn as you focus on poker psychology:
• **The Tilt Opportunity.** Few players realize that mistakes made on tilt, be they strategic or mental, are not caused by tilt itself. Tilt simply reveals them. Essentially it strips your skill set naked and provides evidence of weakness. Many players blame tilt, when tilt is just telling you what to work on. Dusty didn’t know this at first, either.

• **Variance Happens.** The question isn’t whether variance will knock on your door; it’s how you’ll react when it does. Whether it shows up as a cooler, bad beat, downswing or heater, variance can mess with your mind and toy with your emotions. Responding to the (un)certainty of variance is tricky, and that’s why I have a job!

• **Making Progress.** Taking one step forward and one step back is actually how progress goes. While frustrating as all hell, it’s only made worse by expecting something different. The key is to make each step back shorter by eliminating weakness, so when you naturally step forward again it actually takes your farther.

• **The Zone Isn’t Random.** The holy grail of performance isn’t some mystical place that comes to you out of nowhere; it happens for good reason. The Zone — that place of ultimate focus, perfect presence, and great play — can be boiled down to its essential ingredients and served up at will. Dusty was shocked by how often it happened once tilt was out of the picture.

• **Being CEO.** Working for yourself can be tough. On the surface it seems easier to not have anyone to answer to, but that’s what makes it hard. Learning the skills of running your poker business starts with responsibility for every decision you make. It is a skill to learn like any other, and taken that way helps you avoid thinking it should be easy.
• **Rise of the Emotions.** When you know how to use it, emotion becomes an asset to your game and not a liability. Emotions have a language of their own. Think of me as your interpreter. Players often think emotion is irrational, but as it turns out emotion shows up for predictable reasons. This doesn’t necessarily mean some deep-seeded issues from your past; it can be as simple as just hating mistakes. There are hundreds of other simple reasons where your logic is what turns out to be irrational, and you have emotion to thank for pointing that out.

• **Moving Up.** A move up in stakes is often seen as a sink-or-swim scenario, but it doesn’t have to be so stressful. The solution is in the strategy. Consider taking shots not just to prove that you can hang, and instead: 1) Use the pressure to identify your weakness; 2) Study other players to learn what they do; 3) Figure out how to play better. Since it is your skill that matters most, focus on gaining it rather than just the end result.

• **Life and Poker.** When I first met Dusty’s wife, some six months after our work began, she thanked me. With Dusty no longer tilting like before, she could barely tell the difference between days when he lost money from days he won. Their life wasn’t radically different. There were just more good times to enjoy. Plus, with Dusty’s anger no longer impacting his life, the thought of having to quit poker never came up again as it had in the past.
Dusty is the ultimate grinder, and he’s constantly asked how he can possibly play so much poker. (Over 1 million hands a year and 7 million in the past four years). Some see his as a freakish talent, like some sideshow act at a carnival; others want to be taught.

Ask Dusty to explain it and you’ll get half an answer — and not because he’s holding back. He just doesn’t know entirely how he does it. Dusty is like top performers in other sports who have tremendous ability, but lack the full picture of what makes them so.

If you want to grind like he does, it’s not enough to understand what Dusty can do now. You need to know what got him here. It didn’t just happen; it was something on which he worked day after day.

Grinding is a skill reserved for those willing to do the work. It isn’t something that Dusty, nor anyone else was born with. It was learned. Here are some characteristics you’ll find in grinders:

1. **Dedication.** Few realize that Dusty’s ability to grind out monster poker sessions came from his days in golf. Hitting thousands of golf balls a day requires the same level of dedication that poker does, only he’s been practicing golf...
since age 8. Dedication requires consistency, especially when things get hard. Whether you’re running great or terribly; whether you’re tilted and can’t focus, confused and full of doubt, or moving up and feeling the heat, dedication means plowing through day after day no matter what comes your way.

2. **Drive.** Dusty was willing to work his “leather ass” off because he had dreams of being great. Whether in golf or poker, when he put his mind to something, he wanted to succeed at the highest level. Drive like that lead him to grind like few others. You don’t need to shoot that high to grind, but you damn well better be driven by what you want.

3. **Endurance.** Grinding requires mental endurance comparable to the physical endurance needed for running a marathon. It’s important to look at developing mental endurance in much the same way that you would do it physically. When Dusty burst into poker, he already had the mental muscle for marathon sessions. Too often players think grinding is easy, expect too much, and burn out quickly. If you expect too much too soon, your mind will crash just as your body would if you tried to run 26.2 miles when you comfortably could run only five.

Instead, think about building your mental muscle steadily from what you can do, not what you should be able to do. So if it’s easy to play a 90 minute session, then increase it by 10-15 minutes. Once 100 minutes becomes easy add another 15. Repeat.

The word "grind" makes it sound like something that’s hard. It isn’t for Dusty and that’s the point. Grinding is easy once you get there.

4. **A willingness to be pushed.** Building mental muscle means you have to push yourself through times when you’re tired,
tilted, distracted, or for whatever reason having a tough
time. Few realize these times are where the learning to grind
happens. Quitting is easy. Learning to grind is hard. Push
yourself like a coach would to get over the hump, and then
grinding gets easy.

5. **Getting rest.** To run farther you need bigger muscles, to
grind longer you need more neurons (the brain’s muscles).
Muscles and neurons grow bigger when resting, not when
training. If you want a bigger brain, you need to train. Then
you need rest.

Rest means taking time away from poker and getting proper
sleep. And after days where you really push yourself, get even
more rest. Your brain needs it.

6. **Being automatic.** Of all the decisions Dusty makes at the
table, less than 3 percent require thought. With 7 million
hands to work from, there are few situations that challenge
him. Most are automatic.

Decisions that require thought use mental energy. Dusty
grinds hands easily because he’s like an energy-efficient light
bulb, using just a fraction of the energy that most other
players do. He can play longer, play more tables, play more
hands without nearly the energy that it takes you to.

Making your decisions automatic without playing 7 million
hands is complex. Two easy ways to get there: 1) Continually
be focused on eliminating easy mistakes; 2) Review hard
decisions. They have a lot to teach you.

7. **Removing mental mistakes.** Issues like tilt, anxiety, focus,
motivation, etc, can be pushed aside to grind, but only for
a short time. Aside from the havoc they create in your game,
they are colossal wastes of energy. If you want to play massive
amounts of hands, they have to be gone.
Chapter 23
MISTAKE HATE

Players often hate mistakes because they are a sign of failure, lost money and lost confidence.

In reality, mistakes are part of learning. If you already know what’s correct, you aren’t learning.

Mistakes are made when you are learning. When you are learning, you are improving. If you aren’t making mistakes you aren’t improving.

And in poker, if you aren’t improving, you’re getting caught by players who were previously weaker than you.

Mistakes are necessary. The question isn’t whether you’ll make mistakes, it’s how often you make the same one before you learn what is correct.

Dusty has learned to love mistakes. He knows that mistakes are opportunities to improve. Improving means more money, more confidence and more enjoyment. It wasn’t always this way. He just needed to know the truth.
Chapter 24

THE TEN MOST OVERLOOKED MISTAKES

Among the many mistakes players make, these ones most frequently fly under the radar. Eliminate them and poker gets surprisingly easier.

- **Premature realization of skill.** Like the other premature problem, this one also blows. Skill is only proven when it shows up in big pots, tilt sessions, running bad, higher stakes, or whatever is the toughest spot for you. Otherwise, keep working. You haven’t learned it yet.

- **Missing the small positives.** Big improvements are a result of hundreds of small ones. You’ll stop working on something if you don’t see progress. Often it’s there; you just have to look smaller.

- **Pressure to improve fast.** A car stuck in the mud sinks faster the more you step on the gas. Better to be accurate than to go faster.

- **High expectations.** This is a problem only because of how bad you feel when falling short. Rather than just expect something to happen, figure out how to get it.

- **Blaming emotion for poker mistakes.** Emotion reveals mistakes in your game. It doesn’t cause them. Sure emotion needs to be dealt with, but it’s not an excuse to skip out on work.
• **Confusing winnings with earnings.** Stick money in your pocket too soon and poker is likely to take it back. Avoid this fight by deciding when you’ve actually made a profit, and not just had a temporary victory. This management issue is something Dusty discussed earlier in the chapter "Bankroll Management,” but it can’t be stressed enough.

• **Being a baller in your own mind.** Believe the hype in your own mind and you’ll have no motivation to work your way up. Do you really think you’re the only one who imagines being a top player? The ones that are there stopped dreaming long enough to prove it.

• **Bluffing yourself.** There are hundreds of ways you can lie to yourself. Make poker simple for yourself and stick to bluffing others.

• **Quitting instead of tilting.** Quitting is a mistake if you then pretend you didn’t tilt. Cashing out before you have a blow out means you actually tilted. Thinking otherwise is an illusion.

• **Mistakes fix themselves.** Knowing what not to do doesn’t mean you know what to do. Decide what is correct and focus on playing that way.
Chapter 25

A NEW SET OF RESULTS

Being overly influenced by results can cause a rollercoaster of emotion that seems perfectly aligned with your graph. Knowledge of variance isn’t enough to stop the emotional ups and downs that some say is just a fact of poker. This chaos is maddening, confounding, and downright vicious. It takes some to the brink, while others go over.

Desperate to break this cycle, players use strategies that numb, detach or desensitize them to the emotion tied to money or results.

Still, removing emotion from poker is not an option. In fact, it’s a colossal mistake that fails to consider the real problem, and may cause unforeseen and potentially long-term damage.

Dusty was a master at avoiding, but the rage buried within him eventually became hard to ignore. With a growing pile of broken computer equipment in his closet, he knew something had to change or he might bust out of the game.

Breaking this habit really wasn’t that hard. It just required a small change in how he viewed results.

Results provide feedback so you know how you’re doing. Without
feedback, learning is impossible. It’s not whether you need results. It’s which ones to consider.

To most people, the word "results" means something tangible, like money, wins and losses, win rate, hourly rate or any other statistics that are easy to calculate. While clearly important, to break out of this cycle, as Dusty did, requires a set of results that measures skill and improvement.

In the long run, it’s the quality of your mindset, emotions, focus, strategy and others that produce your profit, so evaluating your game along these lines matters more than short-term money. Focusing on these factors doesn’t remove the importance of money, but it does broaden the definition of results to include:

- How well you played overall
- Quality of your thinking
- Quality of decisions
- Number and size of mistakes
- Quality of focus ("The Zone," autopilot, distractions, boredom)
- Length of time spent focused and playing well
- Length of the session
- Ability to manage emotions, focus and thinking
- Ability to work through a tough mental or emotional spot
Take these or others that are important to you, and after each session take a few minutes to review and write out how you performed. At first they will be hard to measure, but with practice you’ll get better. Before the next session, taking a few minutes to focus on the factors you’re measuring ensures you’ll care about more than just money.

For Dusty, recognizing the quality of his decision making, focus, and emotional stability was especially important on days when he lost money. It gave him a broader measure of the results from the day, which taken with progress previously made along these lines, made losses seem temporary. The victory of the day wasn’t measured by profit, but by the quality of play.

By shifting Dusty’s focus to skill and improvement, two-outers and coolers hurt much less, and his overall play improved. He is one of hundreds of players I’ve worked with directly or through my videos who have made significant improvement. I realize this may seem too good to be true, but the progress is real. It does take work, but if you try it for a month, I know you’ll at least make some progress.

For more information about Jared and his coaching visit him at Jaredtendler.com. You can also go to Stoxpoker.com to watch his videos and ask him questions in the forum.

Poker psychology, like all of psychology, has parts that are universal to all players and many more that are individual. To get a more detailed sense of how to make poker psychology a profitable part of your game, watch Jared’s videos, and keep an eye out for his forthcoming book.
One thing that I’d like to add to Jared’s comments is this: the purpose of his advice and mine is not to eliminate pressure from your game. Rather, it’s to put pressure in its proper context so when it does arrive, you can identify it and use it to your advantage. Winston Churchill said, “A kite flies highest against the wind, not with it.” I believe that when greeted properly, pressure can elevate the performance of just about anyone, including poker players.

As Jared said, you can train your mind so you have a psychological advantage on most of your opponents every time you sit at a table. I’d venture that 90 percent of all people experience a performance decline when under pressure. You can have an edge in all phases of life if you can somehow see yourself into that 10 percent whose performance rises under pressure.

Chip Kelly, the football coach at University of Oregon, says, “Pressure is what you feel when you don’t know what you’re doing.” I agree with him to the extent that for that 90 percent, pressure probably descends into chaos. But that is not a universal truth.

Take Tiger Woods, for example. For as much as he’s accomplished, I feel he’s done nothing relative to his ability.
His skill level dictates that he should win every tournament like he did the 2000 U.S. Open at Pebble Beach, where he won by 15 strokes. But I think it’s more fun for him to need to birdie two of the last three holes to win, or to have to protect a two-shot lead on Sunday.

I would venture that if you looked at Woods’ performance on closing holes (which are the most difficult on the course) when he must perform to win, his scoring average would actually be better than on the holes prior. In other words, if he somehow sensed his back was against the wall from the first hole Thursday to the last hole Sunday, I’d venture to say he’d shoot in the 62–65 range every day.

So how does this relate to poker? Much of this book looks at things objectively, as though we’re experiencing the game in a pressure-free vacuum. But that is not the case; in fact, most of us probably experienced a heightened sense of pressure the moment we made that first deposit online.

I feel the ability to cope with that pressure is an actual skill that, if honed, can separate you from the competition in the near term, and will keep you in the game long term. With practice, you can become one of the elite 10 percent who lives by the mantra of NBA player Stephen Jackson: “I make love to pressure.”
Chapter 27
HAVING A SUCCESSFUL RELATIONSHIP

We’ve all heard it said, “Don’t take your work home with you.” But what if you work from home? And what if that work happens at odd hours, is immensely stressful, and features financial swings of your own money?

Needless to say, maintaining a relationship as a poker pro (and with a poker pro) requires some adjustment. On this front, I find myself in the same position I was in when discussing poker psychology, in that my perspective probably isn’t as valuable as that of the person who helped me through this phase of my life. My wife, Nicole, is infinitely wiser and more articulate than I am in all cases, and specifically on this point. In fact, she wrote her graduate thesis on having a relationship with a poker proven route to getting her Master’s degree in conflict resolution.

So here — for one chapter only — is the lovely and talented Nicole Schmidt, otherwise known as “Leatherwife”:

I’d like to start by saying that I can’t speak for all women or say what works for all relationships. What I can say for certain is that sitting down with your significant other is the key to success. Every couple should allow for an open forum for each of you to say what your hopes, expectations, and needs are in the
relationship. Dusty and I were very lucky to find each other, but we didn’t have everything figured out on day one. We trudged our way through, tried some solutions that didn’t work, got in a couple of fights, and after two years finally found what works for us.

I can say with confidence that when we did get into fights or came to a solution that didn’t work, we figured out that there was a big miscommunication. The miscommunication is often times someone not being forthright about his or her needs. Why waste your time on trying to appease the other person when, in a month’s time, neither of you will be happy and you’ll be back to square one?

If your dominant conflict resolution style is to accommodate, compete, or avoid, you are respectively ignoring your needs, ignoring the other person’s needs, or ignoring the issues altogether. The preferred way to deal with these conflicts is to collaborate together and make sure that the issues and the relationship are valued equally to achieve a “win/win” solution you can both be happy with. You guys like graphs, right?

Now to the specifics. Like I said, I can only tell you what worked for Dusty and I. I’ll go in some sort of chronological order one might experience in a poker-playing relationship...

“So what do you do for a living?”
I know I’ve said you can come up with all sorts of fun job titles to make yourself sound more “respectable” or “reliable” to other people. While I think that can work to get you through awkward social situations by telling white lies to acquaintances,
I do not recommend this for dating. You need to see the other person’s honest reaction to your honest job title: online poker player. Say it loud, say it proud, and explain what that means to you.

Having confidence when you talk about it is key. If you sound ashamed of being an online poker player she’ll read ”degenerate” right from the start. I had my doubts when Dusty told me this was his job. I really thought he was just getting by on some trust money or his parents paid his bills, etc. In fact, I thought this for quite a while.

He didn’t have much of a track record at the time, and of course he didn’t show me his graph on the first date. But I thought he was a great guy regardless; there was no need for me to end the relationship because I was unclear on his career. Second thoughts about a poker player are normal, but dumping a guy purely for that reason is not cool. It’s not like he said he was unemployed and he’s still paying the bills somehow, so I stuck around, got to know him better, then I saw the graph.

I don’t recommend putting on a front or buying a car just to prove your wealth. You wouldn’t want the kind of girl who cares about that stuff anyway, in my opinion. As far as a girl asking how much you make — that’s insane and she wouldn’t ask a stockbroker/fireman/school teacher that question. I would question the girl’s motives if she’s that forward about your income. I think you can be honest about your lifestyle without giving specific dollar amounts.
Understanding Poker as a Career

This is the toughest spot, especially when you are just starting poker as a full-time job. When you don’t have Hold’em Manager stats to back you up, how do you explain variance, win rates, etc? Outside of drawing-up elaborate math equations and projected dollar amounts, take it one step at a time. I remember when I was 11 years old and my uncle and grandpa started explaining football to me. They started with the basics, but then continued with “passinterferenceoffsidesfalsestartfacemaskhorsecollar” practically in one breath. I got really frustrated and didn’t like football very much. When my aunt explained it, she said, “All you need to know is you get four chances to make 10 yards. If you keep doing that, you’ll make it all the way to the end zone and get points.” I learned the rest from there, but it was nice to have a simple base of knowledge to work from.

It’s also difficult to marry/date a poker player when you are naturally risk averse. I had this idea before I met Dusty that the safest way to live your life and pay your bills was to go to school, get a steady 9-to-5 and never let it go. I understand this mentality because I’ve been there.

But if I’ve learned anything in the last few years, it’s that nothing is a sure thing. Stock markets crash, businesses go bankrupt, and 9-to-5s can disappear from layoffs and downsizing. Once you understand that poker is as sure a thing as any other job, it’s great to sit down and consider the positives of being a professional poker player. Happiness in a career is so monumental for long-term success; if you enjoy poker you will work harder, play longer, and be more successful with a smile on your face at the end of the month – most of the time. The flexibility in schedule,
being able to work from home, and being your own boss are very nice luxuries most don’t have.

**Getting through the tough times**
If you follow Dusty’s blog at all, you probably know that he is "the unluckiest online poker player ever.” He "gets so shafted” and it’s "worse than any other online pro that ever walked the face of the earth.” It can be scary and emotionally draining to hear about every single bad beat, every single day.

Wives and girlfriends often experience a verbal thrashing; even if Dusty isn’t mad at me, he just needs to vent to someone. Even when I didn’t understand poker very well, it helped him to talk about the hands, and I would say, "Ugh, that’s ridiculous, what a donkey,” and he would eventually calm down. I will say, at least in our case, there is absolutely nothing you can say to make a poker pro feel better. I am a fixer and problem solver, but when you try and boost their ego or confidence it can really backfire.

I learned early on not to give advice or encouraging words; just commiserate and disarm. This is something to discuss with your significant other. Perhaps you have a specific way you’d like her to deal with bad beats or bad sessions. Maybe you’re the type of person who needs encouragement, or maybe you just need someone to listen. This is specific to the individual and it would help to give him or her a game plan when you’re about to throw yourself off a building. How can they best talk you off the ledge?

**Spending time together**
Spending time together is another issue that requires a collaborative effort on both sides of the table. If specifying poker
time works best for everyone’s schedules, then by all means try it. There will always be the need for flexibility on everyone’s part — if poker time is over at 8 pm, wives can’t stand at the door tapping their feet at 8:05. Also, be realistic about the timeframes you give to your significant other. Don’t try to make me feel better in the short-term by telling me poker will end at 10 pm, only to find you giggling at 2+2 forums at 11:30. Certainly forums, posts, and studying hand histories are very important, but make sure this is added into your projected work time for the day and be honest about it.

It’s very clear to me that when Dusty is on tables, he is out of commission. I know firsthand that, although he would love to multitask and have a fulfilling conversation with me about my day, he won’t remember a word I said after his poker session. I can’t ask him to do anything but play poker when he’s on tables. Just because he’s at home and readily available in the next room does not mean I have the right to go in there and bitch at him about leaving the toilet seat up. It’s just not the time, and the conversation won’t sink in, even if I wanted it to. This is very important. I’m no Suzie B. Housewife, but the only thing I ask Dusty while he’s on tables is what he wants for lunch. Any pressure outside of that is negative EV for both of you. You’re welcome to bitch about the toilet seat later.

As far as how much time we spend together, it’s negotiable. I pretty much let him know when big events are going on and he won’t be able to play that day at all. If that’s the case, sometimes he’ll play extra hours for a day or two in order to take an extra day off. I have my own life and my own friends, so it’s pretty easy for me to make my own plans if he is going to play poker all
night. Just be forthright with each other about how much time you need to spend to be happy, and you’ll make it work.

Sometimes that changes. When Dusty was going for SuperNova Elite in 2007, I knew I wasn’t going to see him much at all that year and it was really depressing for me. But I knew it was an investment and we spend a lot more time together now.

Do whatever works for your family. Like any other job, you have to find the sweet spot between time and money. Even when you are playing a lot of poker, it is nice to know that you are doing it for the two of you to have a nice life together. I used to think Dusty was playing a ton of poker (especially during Elite) for some sort of personal gain or recognition, but when we talked about it, I realized he’s just working hard so we can take those vacations together and enjoy each other in the future.

You really just need to be firm about your hours. The time away is negotiable, but here’s a scenario: There are 168 hours in a week; 56 hours are spent sleeping and 50 hours are spent working (figuring for eight hours of sleep a night and a 10-hour work day five days a week). That leaves around 60 hours a week for free time. After you’ve spent some time pursuing whatever recreational activities make you happy, you should leave it up to your significant other as to how she would like the rest of the hours spent. If she wants you to run errands with them, ask her if that’s how she wants to spend your time off, or would she rather do dinner and movie later that night. You don’t know what the answer will be, but you’re getting your poker time in while being flexible and fair to her needs.
Chapter 28

THE IMPORTANCE OF A GOOD DIET

Should you become a poker pro, your body will effectively become the machinery for your new business. If you want to maximize your machinery’s effectiveness, you’ll want to give it premium fuel.

Playing extensive amounts of poker lends itself to a bad diet. It’s a sedentary life, filled with long hours playing late at night and in the wee hours of the morning. You need a strong will to not fall into bad habits.

A poor diet can have a massive impact. My diet was exceptionally poor at the beginning of my career — pizza, Cheetos, Cheese-Its, Pop Tarts, you name it — and my income suffered significantly. I was unable to play effectively after the first 2-3 hours of a given session, which meant I either wasn’t playing at my best, or it was necessary to take breaks to regroup before my next session.

Not insignificant was the blow a poor diet laid on my psyche. I quickly ballooned from a 170-pound athlete to 210 pounds of pure sludge. No one can possibly feel good about himself when his body is headed in that direction, and that influences everything, including poker performance.
My poker career (and overall quality of life) really turned around when I started consulting with a professional dietician near where I live in Portland. He gave me the following advice:

- First, decide for how long you intend to play. This dictates how you go about planning your meals. If your intention is to play an extended session of 5–6 hours or more, preparing your eating schedule is crucial. If that’s the case, have a big meal before you play. (A big meal doesn’t mean super-sizing your drive-thru order, but rather should include a lot of quality food that is filled with protein, natural sugars and good fats. Such a meal would include eggs, avocados, peanut butter, nuts, turkey, chicken, fruits and vegetables.

- When you go to the market, only shop the perimeter of the store. The aisles are typically where the junk food is located, and that type of food won’t do your poker game any favors. Processed foods are going to make you sluggish. The edges of the store are where you find fresh food.

- Prepare all of the snacks you will need to sustain your energy levels while playing, including water. Make sure you have plenty of food next to you while you play. I recommend fruits, vegetables, nuts, cottage cheese, smoothies, and protein shakes.

- Eat periodically while you play to sustain your energy level.

Remember, every decision you make is important, and "the long run" doesn’t care if you were tired or hungry or even starving. Poker is one long session and you need to play your best each and every time for best results.
Chapter 29
GOAL SETTING

A business is only as good as its goals. If you’re not setting goals, then success is just a happy accident. Your goals are the bulls-eye that your company is heading toward. Without goals, you’re aiming with your eyes closed.

There is bad news and good news when it comes to being a poker pro. The bad news is the competitive standard has risen immensely over the years. A guy who made $50,000 playing online poker today would have been top 20 in the world 15 years ago. Doyle Brunson and Johnny Chan, who held sway 20 years ago, probably sit back and laugh at the game they were playing back then. They used to get 200 entries for the World Series of Poker; now they get a million people just trying to qualify.

If I were to liken it to golf, there were not very many people breaking 80 in poker two decades ago. Now a pro has to shoot 68 every day or not even bother.

The good news is that it’s never been easier to ramp up your poker game to a competitive level. There might have been only a few books on competitive poker as recently as 10 years ago, none of which stack up to the quality of information available today. Trying to get information was brutally difficult, so most players had to figure things out on their own.
Now you can plug into a system. You can take a beginner’s course on Stoxpoker.com; meanwhile, Full Tilt Poker has 9 million games you can get into on any level and they’ll pay for your instruction if you sign up through Trulyfreepokertraining.com.

So the information and opportunity is out there, but you’ll have competition. The victors are ultimately the ones with the self-motivation to stay up an extra two hours to play, and maybe miss out on chasing girls on Friday or watching an NFL game on Sunday. Those who set goals and are personally accountable to them are the ones who succeed.

In the beginning, you have to set studying goals. For example, commit two hours a night to studying after work, and to ultimately study one hour for every four you play. When you’re not making money, poker success feels like a pipe dream. But studying is what you need to do.

Once you get in a good rhythm as far as playing goes, you should set goals for hands played, managing your bankroll, not tilting, etc.

But so much about poker success is a function of time. In his book *Outliers: The Story of Success*, Malcolm Gladwell wrote that someone can’t be considered a master in his craft until he has spent 10,000 hours in its application. Nothing can hasten those 10,000 hours for a poker player like playing.

I find the most effective goals to be time-related. When I play, I set goals for time and hands played. For example, if I want to play 15,000 hands in a given week, and I average 1,000 hands per hour, I need to play 15 hours per week.
There’s no driving range for poker. In golf, you can hit two buckets a day and spend an hour on putting. That practice has a vague resemblance to actual competition. The same can’t be said for poker. Once you’ve wrapped your mind around the concepts, it’s really just time playing at actual tables that will net the most success.
Chapter 30
STAYING DISCIPLINED

You’re effectively self-employed as far as your poker business goes. You are your own boss, and if you’re going to be successful, your boss needs to be the biggest jerk in the world. Discipline is everything.

Not only is this your own business, but it’s also one in which you work from home, where your wife, kids, and roommates share your workspace. To make matters worse, you’re conducting your business on a platform that doubles as an entertainment system. In addition to poker, you can be playing video games, streaming video, checking scores, reading emails, or instant messaging.

No one can succeed and be distracted. If you’re going to make a go at this poker thing, it needs to be just you and the tables — period, end of story. It is illogical to indulge in distractions. If you want to be a success, why would you look at that stuff?

Here are some elements of my process that I use to stay focused.

- **Push the envelope on the number of tables you play.** If you have time to look at websites, you can probably add more tables.
- **Take notes.** Write down what other players are doing when you’re not in the pot. Watch them as intently as if you were playing the hand.
• **Shut it down.** Don’t even bring your phone into your room. Disable your IM account, and refuse the temptation to open your email. You can’t expect others to respect what you do if you don’t respect it yourself. By going into an environment where you can’t be reached, you’re telling others that this is serious business to you.

• **Tell people in advance not to distract you.** Set boundaries. You have to make others respect what you’re doing. If your wife, girlfriend or buddies are interrupting you, it must be because they think it’s a reasonable thing to do. Establish this boundary clearly in the beginning, and they’ll understand quickly that you’re serious.

You don’t just want to be a basic player. You want to be great, and to be great, poker has to win the battle over everything else that competes for your attention.
Chapter 31

TO CHAT OR NOT TO CHAT

The best employees are those who are the last to know who said what about whom, who’s sleeping with whom, or who’s looking for a new job. That’s because they’re too busy working.

I have a similar sensibility about turning on the chat at tables while I’m playing. The dialogue can be hilarious and even informative. But on the balance it amounts to office gossip, which means it’s a distraction. Knowingly introducing distractions to your small business is illogical.

Any sort of crosstalk can steal your attention. Throw into the equation that A) You took money from these people, and B) It’s an anonymous forum, and you have a recipe for negative energy.

What is the upside to turning the chat on? You could pick up some valuable information if your opponent is talking a lot. And if he doesn’t usually chat a lot and now he’s a motormouth typing in all caps, there’s a decent chance he’s on tilt and you can take advantage of his state of mind.

But even this upside can be a downside, strange as that may sound. Let me explain. Let’s say you run into an opponent who you’ve identified through the chat box as someone who’s on tilt. As a result, you keep the chat box open to see what he is saying.
While you are paying attention to him, you’re missing events on your other tables. Is there more value in your preoccupation with one tilting player than there is in the potential losses you’ll probably suffer at your other tables? The answer is likely no.

I’ll sometimes turn on the chat just for fun, and I’ll often get around 100 people trying to talk with me. Twenty might be pros wishing me luck that day, or telling me they watch my videos. Another 20 are telling me they hope I have another heart attack, or just simply that they hate me. It’s very difficult to take anything positive from that.

There’s just no way to know for certain what you’re going to get when you chat, so it’s best to just turn it off when you’re at a regular table.

My advice changes when you’re playing heads up, however. I always have the chat on when I play heads up, because there’s a decent chance my opponent will be asking me to play him at one more table, or to move up in stakes. If I’m playing him heads up, that means he’s probably a weaker opponent and so I definitely want that action. And if that sort of player is going to move on because I’m not keeping him entertained, then by all means, I chat. I don’t want him to leave, so I’ll encourage him, and when he loses, I’ll say, “Oh, man. I’m sorry. That was a tough beat.” It might make him inclined to stay.
A universal truth in business is "location is everything."

A universal truth in poker is "your weakest opponents are your best customers."

How do these two truths fit together? Every time you take a seat in poker, you’re picking a location for your business. One of the great things about poker as a business is you get to pick the best location for your business every time you play. Say you opened a steakhouse in what you perceived to be the best location, but that same day a Morton’s and Ruth’s Chris both opened in spots with better traffic and their prices were better than yours. Wouldn’t it be great if you could just move that restaurant somewhere else tomorrow? This is the beauty of poker.

Choosing which tables to join is the foundation of poker success. In the old days, you put your name on a waiting list for a table with bad players, and your turn came around quickly. But today there are 12 people piled up on the waiting list before you even know what happened. That’s because there’s now software that lists bad players and will tell you when they come online. Everyone has this software.

I’ve read in forums on TwoPlusTwo.com that say I’ve somehow
created a proprietary software that’s quicker and more nimble than anyone else’s, because “no one gets to fish faster than Leatherass.” The funny thing is, I don’t use any software at all. In fact, if you ask anyone at Stoxpoker.com, I am notoriously bad with computers, which makes the supercomputer rumor all the more laughable.

I just look to the lobby and have a good system for monitoring it. I keep a really keen eye on the lobby, because the table selection software has a delay on it of several minutes, so I can usually beat people to position by doing it manually. You know what they say: If you want a job done right, do it yourself.

Here is how I monitor good and bad players:

• I put a note on every bad player so they’re marked when they show up on the screen. Full Tilt has a color-coded system, so you can mark them with a different color based on if they’re tight, aggressive, good, bad or really, really bad. But I only mark the bad players so they pop out to me right away. I assume everyone else is a professional, and I’m generally right. Keep in mind, this system works especially well for me because I’m at higher stakes, where there are fewer players I have to track. I’d recommend taking notes on all of your opponents at the lower levels where there are more players to monitor. At a bare minimum, keep track of those who are fish.

• I’m not afraid to walk away from a table when I don’t have position. Ideally you want to sit to the immediate left of the bad player. You want to isolate him. Fish tend to fold or call, and it’s just you and him playing the pot. You want to play him head-to-head as often as possible. You want to act as he acts. But if you’re not in position, and another good player
is, chances are he is going to re-raise you every time you get to the fish. These situations are incredibly unproductive, so I just get up and leave. Success in business is as much about the opportunities to which you say no as those to which you say yes. Wasted effort is wasted time, and wasted time is wasted money.
Chapter 33

HOURS OF OPERATION

A business essential is that you be open when you’re bound to experience the most commerce. A coffee shop wouldn’t open its doors at noon; nor would a bar close up shop at 6 p.m.

A general rule of thumb is to strive to play poker when Americans are not at work. True, poker is a worldwide enterprise, so you can technically play at any time of day. But the United States contributes by far the most players to the online game, and so afternoons, nights and weekends — on the American clock — are prime poker hours.

Sunday is the best day because that is when Poker Stars and Full Tilt Poker host their tournaments. They put up millions in guaranteed prize money each weekend, which attracts tens of thousands of people to just those tournaments alone. When you factor in cash games, there tend to be 250,000-500,000 people on both Poker Stars and Full Tilt Poker on Sundays.

That’s almost double the traffic of a typical Tuesday afternoon, which means double the amount of recreational players, and probably more. True, it works both ways. There are more pros playing Sunday, so you’ll have more competition — and more pie, too.
The harsh reality of this business is that to achieve optimum performance, you need to play at times you’d rather be doing something else. I’m no different. After work and on weekends, I’d love to be out with my wife or buddies, or just hanging out watching a football game and checking my fantasy team.

But it’s a sacrifice worth making. You’re trying to make lots of money, and the weakest opponents are going to be online at those hours when you’d rather be doing other things.

I recommend reorienting your schedule so your “weekends” just happen on another day. Make Tuesday night your night out with your girlfriend, and Wednesday the day you golf and hang out with your friends.

This may not always be practical of course, but the for some a compromise of playing poker half of the time on traditional weekends and spending time with family and/or friends the other half may make sense. The overall idea is that you want to, at the very least, strive toward playing the bulk of your poker when the games are at their peak.

I learned this concept very early in my career by reading a book called Theory of Poker by David Sklansky, who wrote, ”You should prop open your eyelids with toothpicks if the game is good enough.” David is right. This is the type of dedication you need if you are going to be the best poker player you can be.

That structure can actually be comforting, because you can rest assured your life will have balance. There are ways to have your cake and eat it, too.
An added note: Holidays are hands-down the best time to play. There is typically more traffic than on a typical Sunday, plus there tend to be more recreational types online who are playing while sipping a cocktail. Christmastime is the best holiday to play, probably because people have received their end-of-year bonuses.
Chapter 34
TOURNAMENTS OR CASH GAMES?

Every business needs to know where to invest its time and money, which represent its two key commodities. As far as my poker business goes, I invest my time and money in cash games.

I’m often asked, how do you overcome the allure of tournaments? It’s not easy. As a cash-game player, you’re grinding out hard decisions all day, every day. There’s no glamour to it. True, I play high stakes, where you can say, “Hey, I won $20,000 today.” But for most small stakes grinders who are just trying to make a few hundred dollars each day, it’s not terribly glamorous at all.

Tournaments are where the glory is. If a lot of people get into a weekend tournament, first place might be $300,000–$400,000. That’s a ton of money — a house, basically. That type of day is not remotely possible playing cash games. If you start as I did, with only $1,000 to my name, it’s really hard to turn away from the pull of the tournaments.

But success in tournaments is almost entirely predicated on luck. Chance is a factor in any given poker hand, but over many hands poker skill will prevail and make a profit. That’s good news for the cash-game player, who gets thousands of repetitions online. But what does it mean for tournament players?
Unlike cash games, tournament blinds and antes go up every round. This forces players to play hands to keep increasing their stack sizes. If they fail to build their chip stacks, eventually the blinds and antes will be very large in comparison to the chips the player holds. When this happens, chance becomes more of a factor than skill. The player will usually need to select a hand to go all in with pre-flop (skill) and hope (chance) it holds up. In other words, he’s looking to get lucky.

The one-day structure only heightens the need for luck to win. If it’s a large-field tournament or if the rounds have a short time limit, luck becomes an increasingly large factor.

Skill does not count for enough in a tournament. If there are 10,000 players in a tournament, a great player’s odds of winning are better than 1-in-10,000. World Series of Poker champion Dan Harrington once made a great analogy: “Tournaments are basically a lottery,” he said. “Some players are so poor, they’re in the lottery but don’t have a ticket. Maybe the average player has one ticket. A really good player has two or three tickets, and a great one has five or six. But you’re still in a lottery.”

This means you’re leaving too much up to chance in a tournament. In business, would you waste your time and investment on a sales call where chance was the primary factor in the success of the call? No, you wouldn’t. That’s why I’m a cash-game pro. My skill wins out more often than it doesn’t, which makes me consistently profitable.

Tournaments detract from the main goal, which is to make a consistent income. I spoke earlier of the importance of becoming
a specialist, a one-trick pony. If you’re playing tournaments, you’re focusing on different types of poker. There’s a lot that can go wrong, and the only thing that can go right is you get lucky.

The thing about being a tournament pro is your entire year boils down to a small number of events. A cash-game players’ graph will go up and down a lot, but it’s most likely always trending upward. A tournament player’s graph is all over the place.

Over the period of a year, a cash player who won $300,000 would have a graph that’s always going slightly upward. He’ll lose $8,000, then win $10,000 — slow and steady. A tournament player’s graph is going to usually trend slightly downward with an occasional massive spike. Ultimately chance will play a huge role in how often and to what degree his spikes occur.

For live players, tournaments are the pinnacle and the allure only increases. The fame is incredible. If you can bluff Phil Ivey on national television, you’re a hero for life. But for me, anyway, it’s just not worth it. You won’t become well known doing what I do, but the objective here is to make a living, not to have everything at risk. If we’re talking about running a business as efficiently as we can, it’s best that you stay in cash games.
Chapter 35

Equipping Your Computer for Maximum Profit

When a business is considering the purchase of new equipment, it evaluates whether or not that equipment will make the company more profitable, and how soon that will happen. If the benefit of having the equipment outweighs the cost, then it is generally smart to proceed with the purchase.

Equipment (including software) purchased for poker generally has an exponential return on investment — and fast.

Consider the purchase of a new computer, which might cost $1,500. The speed of the new computer might make it possible for you to play four tables instead of six — a 50 percent increase which will enable you to quickly recoup your investment.

Investing in your equipment is investing in your game. It doesn’t take a big number to get paid back.

I strongly suggest you also invest in a software program called Hold’em Manager (www.holdemmanager.net). It’s a poker analytics tool that will help you increase your win rate and get you moving up in limits. It’s incredibly useful because it essentially tracks every single aspect of the game you could possibly imagine. It’s a super-stats machine that measures not only your game, but
your opponents’ as well. If it were somehow applied to golf, HEM would be able to tell you with what frequency you’d hit a ball on the green from a buried, downhill lie 36 yards from the cup. Should you have a question like “If I bet into this guy, how often will he fold,” HEM will tell you. It calculates the odds of every potential outcome. I feel it’s the single best tool to monitor the progress of your game, as well as to keep the records you’ll need at tax time and when you check your income against the cashier.

I use HEM a little different than most. I feel that no software can make decisions as well as a human can. If I play poker against guys for three years, no computer is going to tell me something I don’t already know about them. I still use HEM to monitor my own game, and I also use it to test a certain hypothesis I have about a guy. Poker is a dynamic game, and when push comes to shove, I always rely on my own instincts over computer data.

The small-stakes version of Hold’em Manager costs $55, and the pro version costs $80.
Chapter 36

THE IMPORTANCE OF RAKEBACK

Online poker rooms take a small portion of each pot to finance their operations. This is referred to as the "rake." Rakeback is a portion of this that you, as a consumer, can claim back through an affiliate. This is essentially like adding 30 percent to your bottom line. It is a no-brainer — found money, essentially.

For people who play frequently, rakeback can keep you going. The full-time player can net between $4,000-$7,000 in rakeback each month — enough to cover living expenses if you go 30 days with just a break-even performance. This is what kept me going in the beginning when I was playing 400-hour months.

Here is the key: In order to get rakeback, you need to set up your account with Full Tilt or whomever through a rakeback-referral website. Do not get a new account at a poker site by going through the site directly. You will not get rakeback this way. You have to go through a rakeback site. Below I have details about how you can sign up for rakeback at my site, DustySchmidt.net. But first, a bit more information.

The following analysis is done by my good friend, Michael Skelton. A native of Australia, Michael’s played Limit Hold’em professionally, coached numerous players, written
many a forum post, and currently works as the production manager for Stoxpoker.com. He also writes a killer blog: www.rolledontheriver.com.

Here’s Michael:

To figure out how much rake you have paid and, in turn, how much rakeback you will receive, poker sites use a formula called Monthly Gross Revenue (commonly referred to as MGR). MGR is your rake paid, minus any deductions. Deductions vary from site to site: Some sites deduct bonuses, others deduct a portion for store purchases (FTP), and others deduct payment processing fees (FTP, Cake, and AP/UB for US based players). Poker rooms fall into two categories for calculating MGR: Dealt and Contributed.

**The 'Dealt' Method**

When a poker site uses the dealt method, they are splitting the rake earned from each pot amongst each player that was dealt into the hand. Because of this, the amount of MGR earned from any particular hand can be calculated quite simply, using:

\[ \text{(Amount Raked)} / \text{(Players In Hand)} \]

So, for example, in a hand where $10 was raked, and six players were dealt in, this formula would be:

\[ 10/6 = \sim1.66 \]

Assuming that this hand played out on Full Tilt, where the typical (and maximum) amount of rakeback a player is entitled to is
27% of the calculated amount, then the return is worked out using the following:

\[
\frac{\text{AmountRaked}}{\text{PlayersInHand}} \times 0.27
\]

So our previous example becomes:

\[10/6 \times 0.27 = 0.45\]

**The 'Average Contributed' Method**

The contributed method, as you may have already figured out, only credits us if we actually contributed money to the pot (and, therefore, the rake). Essentially, the MGR is split evenly amongst each player that contributed to the pot. From this information we derive a new formula:

\[
\frac{\text{AmountRaked}}{\text{PlayersWhoContributedRake}}
\]

As an example, let’s assume we were in a hand where we folded in the small blind. The rake for the pot came to a total of $10, and there were three people that contributed. Our MGR for the hand would be:

\[10/3 = \sim 3.33\]

and based on this, our rakeback for the hand (at a rate of 27%) would be:

\[10/3 \times 0.27 = 0.9\]
The ‘Weighted Contributed’ Method

Although this is by far the least popular way of calculating MGR, it does exist, so I felt it should be included. This method of calculating MGR is not favorable for tight players because they’re not involved in enough hands to make it work for them.

With the weighted contributed method, each player receives a portion of the rake that is proportional to how much they contributed. A player who folds pre flop (and who wasn’t in the blinds) gets nothing, while the player(s) that put in the most money get the largest percentage of the rake.

Should I choose a site using the dealt or contributed method?

Whether a site offers dealt or contributed rakeback shouldn’t influence your decision too much (you should focus more attention on the quality of play, software, etc); however, if you were to use this as a deciding factor, then as a basic guide dealt rakebacks favour tight play (the typical tight-aggressive player), and contributed rakebacks favor those playing lots of hands (heads up play, for example).

A summary of sites and the method they use for calculating MGR is shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Betfair</td>
<td>Contributed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bodog</td>
<td>Dealt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cake Poker</td>
<td>Dealt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cereus</td>
<td>Contributed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entraction</td>
<td>Contributed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Tilt</td>
<td>Dealt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Deductions:

Full Tilt

Typical deductions from Full Tilt include bonuses, Full Tilt store purchases, allocated values of freerolls, and Ironman store purchases.

Spending Full Tilt Points (FTP’s)

Every 200 Full Tilt points spent incurs a $1 deduction (or $0.005 per point) from our MGR. If we purchased an item from the store for 7000FTP’s, the deduction from our MGR would be:

\[ 7000 / 200 = 35 \]

This should not be confused with rakeback, which is the direct cost to us, the consumer. To work out how much rakeback we would lose on this purchase we need to multiply this value by 27% (in this case the actual amount of rakeback you would lose is $9.45).
The Ironman Promotion and Ironman Store
Everything in the Ironman store incurs a MGR deduction of some kind, except for the purchase of $26 and $75 tokens. Using Ironman medals to purchase Full Tilt points will not affect MGR or rakeback; however, our MGR will be affected when we use those Full Tilt Points.

The mid-year Ironman bonus awarded by Full Tilt is not deducted from our MGR, and purchasing a bonus from the store will not incur an immediate deduction. However, as we clear the bonus purchased from the store, the cleared bonus money is deducted from our MGR.

Boss Media
Boss media, another popular network, uses the contributed method for calculating MGR. They don’t deduct bonuses, and tournament/SnG fees are added onto MGR. However, spending FPP’s will incur a deduction of 0.25 per FPP from our MGR.

In addition to this, a player must clear €100 in MGR to be eligible for rakeback in any given month. So if a player has cleared €100 in rake, but had spent 1FPP within the month, then they might fall below the €100 MGR requirement and not receive any rakeback for that month. It is also worth noting that this total does not carry over to the following month, and will be lost if you don’t clear the minimum requirement in any given month.

Cake Poker
As a relatively new policy, Cake Poker uses the dealt method, and doesn’t make any deductions from MGR. It should be noted;
however, that Cake Poker does not allow the use of a heads up display, which may discourage some users from playing this room.

Microgaming / Prima
The 30 percent offer currently on offer from Microgaming/Prima is based on gross rake, without any deductions. Prima uses the dealt method.

Now for the fun part:
I have a special program through Hold’Em Manager’s proprietary rakeback site, which connects to about a dozen rooms. (Obviously, there’s a portal to purchase HEM software, as well.)

Just go to www.dustyschmidt.net, and click on our Hold’Em Manager Rakeback promotion. If you sign up for rakeback through our site, we’ll send you a free copy of "Treat Your Poker Like A Business, Vol. 2," due out in Summer 2010.
Chapter 37

TAXES, RECORD KEEPING AND THEIR IMPACT ON BANKROLL

A key in transitioning poker from a hobby to something more serious is your record keeping. Not only does this keep you prepared when tax time comes, it also lets you see how you did month-over-month and year-over-year.

I keep records for all of my hands on Full Tilt and Poker Stars, and flow them into Hold’em Manager, which is a dual-purpose software. It breaks my play down from a statistical standpoint, and it also provides me with all of the tax information I might otherwise keep in Quicken or similar software.

Tax codes differ, and obviously vary considerably outside the United States. I’m in no position to give tax advice. But I can tell you about tax preparation insofar as it impacts your bankroll management.

It’s easy to look at your poker-account balance and think you get to take all of that money to your bottom line. No, you don’t. When you work for someone else, your paycheck comes complete with taxes taken out of it. That’s not the case when you have your own business.

I advocate having two bank accounts. When you cash out from
your poker account, take out the appropriate amount for taxes and put it in one account, with the balance going in the other. For example, if you cash out $10,000, and your tax bracket dictates you get to keep $7,000, then you need to put the $3,000 for taxes in a separate account and do not touch it until tax-time comes.

So how does this affect bankroll management? We talked in an earlier chapter about needing to have enough money for 100 buy-ins in order to move up in limits. If you’ve just reached that threshold, but have not yet paid your taxes, it means you don’t yet have enough money to move up in limits. This may be viewed by many as being exceedingly conservative, but it’s the way I’ve done things throughout my career and I have no regrets.
There’s a saying in business that goes, “The higher you climb, the more you show your ass.” The better your business does, the more people are going to be gunning for you, and the more exposed your faults will be.

A lot of we online players forget that we’re playing poker, a game that used to incite players to shoot one another in the Wild, Wild West. The game was a macho thing, a guy thing.

Over the course of more than a century, it’s evolved from the "Tombstone-esque," gold-rush era into the present, where players are pushing the edges like day traders. It’s increasingly become an intellectual pursuit. The common denominator between the two eras is there’s big money involved, and in the end you’re playing against real people, not screen names.

The more professional you are, the less inclined you’ll be to engage in banter. When I get bluffed, I say, “Oh, man, I better revisit my EV calculations to see if I made a mistake. Maybe I need to adjust my equation. Did I misjudge this guy’s range?” But my opponent might very well be saying, “That’s right, I bluffed you, you son of a bitch.”
There’s one critical thing you have to remember: you have one person rooting for you, and that’s you. As you become more successful, it’s going to be at the expense of the guy sitting next to you. He’s not going to like it — and he’s got a means of expressing that displeasure that is immediate and anonymous.

In the poker community, there seems to be one specific way of going about your business that’s cool, and all other methodologies are distinctly uncool. The cool way is to log on, play loose, be aggressive, talk trash, try to put your opponent on tilt, and make great calls on big pots. You move up in stakes, you get in ego contests, you go broke once in awhile and build it all back.

My method — slow and steady, with an emphasis on sound business principles — falls very much into the uncool category. I’ve suffered the slings and arrows for it, almost from the second I appeared on the poker radar. I was putting up numbers no one had seen before at my stakes: 10 big blinds per 100 over massive sample sizes. I was mass-multi-tabling and still putting up the best win rate of anyone ever, even those who played fewer tables at once. Rather than seek to imitate what I was doing, the critics were deafening in trying to tear me down. It was the exact opposite of anything I’d experienced before, as a pro golfer or as a businessman.

The advice in this book will invariably make you the most money — I’ve proven that over 7 million hands — but it’s not cool advice, at least to the poker mainstream.
The online poker culture is a strange one. You have to understand going in there will be criticism along the way, and that criticism will only increase as you get better at what you do. It’s driven by jealousy.

Don’t waste a lot of time on forums and block all the chat. Chasing credibility online is a losing proposition. Just stay the course.
Chapter 39

MUST READS

As in all businesses, your time is money. Everything you do outside of poker must be examined against the standard of what you could be making playing poker. The considerable time it takes to read a poker book can cost you exponentially because it took you away from the tables. Because we’re striving for maximum efficiency, that book can no longer be considered a diversion — it’s an investment.

I read a number of poker books as I was beginning to learn the game, some of which helped me immensely. Others weren’t worth the paper they were printed on.

For a book to be valuable, it must first and foremost be written by someone credible. There are many books out there by players who simply had a good tournament that happened to be televised by ESPN, and they became famous as a result. These players should not be considered authorities on the game. Ask the instructors at Stoxpoker.com or Cardrunners.com if they would recommend a particular player’s book. You want a book written by someone who has been a long-term winner in the game that is featured in the book.

Along those lines, make sure the book is about the specific game or games you are trying to learn. Early on, I made the mistake
of buying books focused on cash games when I should have been focused on tournament poker or vice versa.

(The same thing applies to watching poker on TV. If you are a cash-game player, I would not advise you to watch a tournament on TV with the intent of learning new strategies. Cash-game poker and tournament poker are two entirely different beasts, and trying to bring a play you saw on TV to your cash game is rarely going to be a good idea.)

My favorite poker author is Ed Miller, who’s an owner and instructor at Stoxpoker.com. He’s an absolute genius (with degrees in both Physics and Electrical Engineering from MIT), and is a former software developer for Microsoft.

All of Ed’s books are good, but I’d especially recommend Small Stakes No-Limit Hold ‘em, Professional No-Limit Hold ‘em, and No-Limit Hold ‘em: Theory and Practice.
Chapter 40

HOW WILL I KNOW I’M GOOD ENOUGH?

How will you know you’re successful enough to make this your full-time profession? It’s important to define success — and then re-define it.

My definition was unique. I was coming off a heart attack at the age of 23, waking up at 3 a.m. to drive a truck and make deliveries to ungrateful clients in horrible neighborhoods. Meanwhile, I was barely making ends meet financially, and was at the mercy of a boss/father for whom I was losing respect by the hour. For a guy who just months before was on the cusp of the PGA Tour, this was not the life of independent means that I’d sought for myself, or for which I’d worked so hard. Instead, I had $1,000 in the bank and no prospects of improving my situation significantly by way of my existing job — yet every day I worked there was a pride-swallowing, soul-devouring exercise in futility. I was at the desperate hour.

At that point, simply having a white-collar job where my mind was valued would have been considered a success. To make money working at home on my computer was pure bliss. If I could make just a bit more money than I had been working with my family — well, that was off the charts.
But a funny thing happened. Once I started doing it, the job didn’t seem that great after awhile. There were 10 more steps to climb to get where I am today. I wanted to be the best, and once I got there, I started reconsidering my definition of success again. Now my success benchmarks are based on how much I can do for other people. You should constantly be re-evaluating the meaning of success as it applies to you.

Specifically, when will you know you’re good enough to leave your job and make poker a full-time profession? You have to be a little careful about being too high or too low in relation to the goals you set, because luck is a major factor in poker. You can get very lucky for weeks. If you have a job making $500 a week, and you get on a run and make $5,000 in one week, don’t walk away from your job. You always want to assume it’s luck until proven otherwise. That’s called minimizing your risk. What you don’t want to be is the village idiot who burns his bridges after two good months of poker, only to realize he’s not good enough yet to support himself playing the game. That could crush your confidence forever.

Being a poker pro is not an easy thing to do, and it can seem like much more fun than it ends up being. Patience is the strongest virtue. There is a big difference between playing for an hour or two a night, and playing every day for eight hours — at odd hours — along with all the other adjustments you have to make to your lifestyle.

Nothing can pull you down like failing at something that was perceived as stupid in the first place. If you’re a great college football player and you take a shot at the NFL, people understand
that progression. But when you take a chance on something as poorly understood as online poker, failure can result in ridicule. You need to be humble, and you need to be damn sure you’re good enough before leaving your 9-to-5 behind.

So how do you quantify “good enough”? If you’re a tournament player, you have to have some very good results for a year or more before you leave your day job. Because of the way tournaments are structured, you can get lucky and collect a $60,000 check on any given weekend. You could make more in a day than you could in a year at your job. But it should take you a long time to sort out what is luck and what is not. You need to consistently be getting good tournament results, making money over a period of a year or more.

Cash games are different. Slow and steady wins the race. As a means of setting the bar, I’d recommend you be playing .50/$1 or above, with a win rate according to Hold’em Manager of four big blinds per 100 over a period of 100,000 hands.

It’s not a perfect science, but this can serve as a general guideline. There are many factors you will need to consider, namely your lifestyle. How much you need to earn from poker will vary greatly from person to person. If you are a bachelor living in Thailand your nut is a lot smaller than someone with a spouse and three kinds living in Manhattan. But if you can beat your games for at least four big blinds per 100 over a period of 100,000 hands, you will typically be ready for a jump into the pros.
I recently made a fairly sizable donation to a non-profit organization near my home in Portland, Ore. The foundation’s executive director was kind enough to thank me by inviting me to golf one afternoon. The round took place a few weeks before the birth of our first child, Lennon.

As we strode to the tee box, the director asked me, “So, when your daughter is old enough, what are you going to tell her you do for a living?”

“What do you mean?” I asked, a bit dumbfounded.

“I mean, you can’t tell her you’re a pro poker player,” he replied laughingly. “You can’t tell her you’re a gambler.”

The question took me aback. Apparently my “ill-gotten” money was good enough for him to accept my donation, but dirty enough that I couldn’t tell my daughter how I’d earned it.

Although the perception of a poker professional has drastically improved since the time I first began playing, it’s inevitable that people will not always be thrilled with the idea of you being a professional poker player. (I can only imagine what it must’ve been
like for guys like Doyle Brunson and Chip Reese, who undoubtedly took a lot of flak from people for what they did for a living.)

Thanks to the World Series of Poker virtually running on an endless loop on ESPN, poker is now thought of in a much higher regard than it used to be. But things are still not where we’d like them to be in terms of mass acceptance.

When I first started playing for a living in 2005, virtually everyone I talked to thought I was out of my mind. I hated it when people asked me what I did for a living. I used to reply sheepishly, "Well, believe it or not, I actually play online poker for a living. I know, it’s weird, right? But, hey, it’s paying the bills so far."

I would cringe while I said it and pray the person I was talking to wouldn’t lecture me. I soon realized that a tentative reply was the exact opposite of what you want to say.

My advice — same as my wife’s — is to say it loud and proud. It’s important to believe in what you are saying. After all, if you don’t make it sound like it’s a good job, why would you expect anyone else to think it?

If you say with a smile on your face, "I play online poker for a living and it’s the best job in the world to me," your chances of getting a favorable response increase a hundredfold. Rather than being the guy people are quick to make fun of, you’ll be the envy of the room. Ultimately, people admire the independent spirit that it takes to strike out on your own in such a bold way, and they generally wish they had a bit more of it inside themselves.
I’ll end this section as I began it, by reminding you that the man dignifies the job; the job doesn’t dignify the man.
SECTION 2

STRATEGY
Chapter 1

TEN COMMON SITUATIONS — AND HOW TO PLAY THEM

1. Playing drawing hands in position
Few things are more exciting than when you flop a flush draw or a two-way straight draw in no-limit hold ‘em. No-limit hold ‘em is a game where you can take every last chip away from your opponent. One of the most recurring ways you can accomplish this is to make a big hand, like a straight or a flush, and break someone holding a set or an over-pair to the board.

The age-old question pertains to how you should play your draw. Should you fast-play the hand by raising the flop with a willingness to play for all of your chips? Or should you play your draw slowly by checking or simply calling a bet from your opponent?

In Position with a draw to the nuts:
Assuming you are up against only one opponent, there are a variety of ways to play a hand like a flopped two-way straight or flush draw.

One rule of thumb I follow is to always play a nut-flush draw fast on the flop. Let’s assume we’re in a 5/10NL table where both you and your opponent have 100 big blind stacks. You call a $40 pre-flop raise in position with Ad5d, the blinds fold and the pot size is $95.
The flop comes down Kd2dTh and your opponent leads out for $70. I virtually always raise my opponent on these types of flops. I will likely make it triple his bet size or $210.

There are several good things that can happen by doing this, including your opponent folding to your flop raise and you take down the pot right there. Your opponent may also call the flop re-raise and you will have to play some poker on the later streets. But from my experience, this is the least likely outcome. Most opponents will make a decision on the flop to either re-raise back and go all in with their hand, or simply fold and live to fight another day.

If your opponent does re-raise back and go all in, you are almost never in bad shape. In fact, one of the main reasons I advocate always raising the flop with a draw to the nuts is because of the chance to get all of the money in against a worse drawing hand. Hands like QJ or a worse flush draw are very likely to come back over the top to your flop raise, and that presents the opportunity to get all of your chips in the middle with 79% equity versus a flush draw like 7d8d. Against a hand such as QhJc, you have 70% equity.

If they do flat call the flop raise and the turn brings a card insignificant to you or your opponent’s range (such as 6 of clubs), I advocate showing further aggression by betting around two-thirds of the pot on the turn in an attempt to pick up the pot. There will be $515 in the pot, and a two-thirds pot bet would be risking approximately $345 to win the $515, so your turn bet only needs to succeed 40.1 percent of the time — [$345/($345+$515) = 40.1%] — if you had no equity in the pot. At that point, you are committed to the hand and have to call.
The worst-case scenario is you get all of your money in against a hand such as KcKh, in which case you still have 26 percent equity. Not a good situation, but not a huge blunder either.

**In position with a draw to a flush or straight:**
When you are in position with a two-way straight draw or a flush, there are a variety of ways I advocate playing your hand.

Let’s assume we’re playing a 5/10NL table where both you and your opponent have 100 big blinds stacks. You call a $40 raise in position from one opponent with a hand such as 7d8d. The blinds fold and the pot size is $95. The flop comes down Jd3d6h. Your opponent leads out for $70 so the pot is $165 at this point.

I advocate playing your draw in one of several ways in these situations. When your flush draw is not a draw to the nuts, I’m inclined to play the hand a little slower, but with the intent to look for spots to take the pot away on a later street. But I like to throw in a mixture plays, including making raises with a willingness to get all of the money in against opponents I face regularly. You are going to take the worst of it when they do play back at you, but it’s important to not become too predictable to opponents you face on a routine basis.

Let’s say you decide to call the $70 bet and the pot is now $235. The turn is a 2c and your opponent checks. This puts you in a pretty difficult spot because if you check you are passing up a good opportunity to take away a medium-sized pot with a bet on the turn.
If you bet, you risk getting check raised and priced out of a draw that likely would’ve won a large pot off of your opponent. I prefer betting here. Though you risk getting check raised, the frequency with which your opponent will price you out of your hand and force you to fold, pales in comparison to the number of times you can pick up the pot with a turn bet.

Another possibility is that your opponent bets the turn. If your opponent bets, it will typically be in the two-thirds pot range. Using the above example, two thirds of the pot would be $155, which sends the total pot amount to $390.

You are getting about 2.5-to-1, and your draw will come in approximately 1 out of 5 times on the river, assuming all flush card outs will give you the best hand. So while this may not seem like a profitable call, remember that should you complete your draw on the river, there is a very good chance you will be able to get another large river bet out of your opponent or possibly even his entire stack.

There is also a chance your opponent is bluffing, and even if you miss your draw on the river, you can still pick up the pot with a river bet. Some of the time you will make a pair of sevens or eights on the river, which may also end up being the winning hand.

Another reason to call the turn, even though you are only getting 2.5-to-1 on a draw that only comes in 1 time out of 5, is for balancing your range against opponents who you face frequently. If you are only calling on the turn when you have a marginal hand relative to the board such as pocket 8s or ace six, your opponents
will be able to much better judge your range of hands and make more accurate assumptions because your game will be somewhat transparent.

2. Playing drawing hands out of position
Here are my thoughts on the best ways to play a drawing hand when you’re out of position.

Out of position with a draw to the nuts:
Much like playing nut draws in position, I also advocate playing nut draws out of position fast. There are a few different ways to play nut draws out of position that I advocate.

Let’s say you’re at a 5/10NL table and both you and your opponent have 100 big blind stacks. You are in the big blind and call a $40 raise from the cut-off position raiser with AhTh. The pot is $85 and the flop comes down Jh5h6c.

I have the nut flush draw and I’m looking to play my hand fast. I’m not married to one particular play here. Fifty percent of the time I like leading into the pre-flop raiser with a bet of around $60 with the intent of being comfortable getting raised on the flop. This will allow me to come back over the top with an all-in re-raise. The other 50 percent of the time I will check to my opponent with the intent of putting in a check raise.

Ideally the mission is to play my opponent off of his hand and win the money from him that he bets post flop. By leading out, three things can happen, two of which are good and one that is not necessarily bad.
• If you lead out for $60 and your opponent raises your flop lead to $180, you can come back over the top, and if he folds, you win a nice medium sized pot. If you shove and he folds, you win $325. If you shove and he calls and you win, you get $1,105. If you shove and he calls and you lose, you’re out $900. If he calls you your equity would be 40.78 percent versus the range of hands I have assigned him. In this case, your opponent would have to fold approximately 20 percent of the time to break even.

• If you check, your opponent will likely bet around $60. You can then check raise to $180, which will often force him to fold and you will take down a medium sized pot.

• If he simply calls your flop lead or flop-check raise, you typically can continue to profitably show aggression in hopes that he will lay down his hand at some point against most opponents.

The great thing about having a draw to the nuts is that it frees you up to make confident semi-bluffs providing your outs stay clean. Using the above example, let’s assume our flop-check raise gets called and the turn brings an irrelevant card like a 2 of spades. It’s very unlikely this card improved his hand, and while it didn’t improve yours either, a bet of two-thirds the pot on the turn may take your opponent off a marginal hand he is now getting the sense he may have to play for his entire stack.

In this scenario, there is $445 in the pot and you and your opponent will have $780 behind. There are three ways to play this situation, all of which have merit.

• You can bet very small on the turn, somewhere in the quarter-pot range. What you are essentially doing is setting
the price for your draw if your opponent calls as well as
giving yourself a cheap bluff. Say you bet $110 into the $445
pot. He only needs to fold approximately 20 percent of the
time — [($110)/($445+$110) = ~ 20%]. Experience tells me
your opponent will fold at least that often. Combine that
with the chance that you can hit a heart, may have the best
hand against a worse draw of his and an ace or a ten may
also improve your hand to the best hand, makes this a very
profitable play. That being said, this may also inspire him
to make a large re-raise and price you out of the hand, but
I believe it is worth the risk that he will do that.

- A second option is to bet close to pot, which will commit
you to the hand in the event your opponent comes over
the top with an all-in re-raise. Say you bet $400 into the
$445 pot, and your opponent shoves for $780. There’s
$1,625 in the pot after his shove, and you would have to
call $380. You would be getting 4.3-to-1 and would need to
win approximately 19 percent of the time. On this Jh5h6c2s
board against the range I have assigned him, your AhTh has
24.3% equity and should call. This play has some validity to
it, as well, because it puts your opponent to a decision for all
of his chips. At this point, your opponent has not shown that
he is strong enough that he will want to play for his entire
stack. It’s no fun when you get shoved on and are forced to
call with just a flush draw, but you will be getting the right
price to do so and you gave yourself an opportunity to take
down a $445 pot with just a draw.

- A third and much trickier option is to check the turn
and check raise all in if your opponent bets. This is a play
you may not want to use as often as the other two plays I
mentioned previously, but it has merit when used sparingly.
First off, if it is used sparingly, then it will get a lot more
credit and will work a much greater portion of the time.
Secondly, you may be value check raising some portion of
the time given hands like 78 and worse flush draws are very likely to bet the turn as a semi bluff. This is quite a coup because he will be priced in to call your check raise assuming he bets in the neighborhood of 2/3 pot with his semi bluff. When this happens you will be a 4 to 1 favorite to win the pot heading into the river against his straight and flush draws. For example, against KhQh you have 86 percent equity and against 87 off suit you have 77 percent equity.

**Out of position with a draw to a flush or a straight:**

When you are out of position with a flush or a two-way straight draw against just one other opponent, there are a few different ways to play a flush or straight draw.

Let’s assume that you are playing a 5/10NL table where both you and your opponent have 100 big blind stacks. The button raises to $40 and you call in the small blind with Th9h. Everyone else folds, you’re heads up with the button and the pot is $90. The flop comes down JdQc5s.

Many of the same concepts as playing a nut-drawing hand out of position apply, expect you will never get all of the money in against a weaker draw. There are a few ways to tackle this situation.

- One way would be to simply lead right out. If your opponent raises you, shoving all in as a semi-bluff is certainly a worthy option. This will force your opponent to have a very strong hand if he is going to commit his entire stack. When he does have a hand he can call an all-in shove with, your equity is going to be in the range of 25 to 33 percent. This is not a great spot to get your money in the middle, but given that there is a reasonable likelihood that your opponent will fold to an all in shove, he only needs to fold to an all-in around
half the time. For example, say you lead for $60 and your opponent raises to $180. If he calls your shove with the range of hands I suspect he will call with, then you have 28.5 percent equity with Th9h. If you shove and he folds, you win $330. If you shove and he calls and you win, you win $1,110. If you shove and he calls and you lose, you lose $900. Given that you have 28.5 percent equity vs. his calling range, we can find the break-even folding frequency by solving for X in the following equation: $(X)(330)+(1-X)[(.285)(1110)+(.715)(-900)] = 0$. Now we know that he needs to fold 49.8 percent of the time. From my experience, your opponent will fold at least that often and this play will yield a profit. Even if I am wrong and he doesn’t fold that often, there is long term value in letting your opponent know that you will play back at him very lightly. Sending this message may keep him from making other profitable plays against you out of fear that you will play back at him with a wide range of hands.

- For those looking to take a small-ball approach — which I think is perfectly reasonable — I would recommend simply playing your draw passively, while intending to look for spots to take away the pot if your opponent shows weakness. One approach would be to check the flop to your opponent and call his flop bet. From there, lead any turn that does not complete your hand. (You can also lead the turn when your hand is completed.) At that point in the hand, the pot will likely be $210 assuming your opponent bets two-thirds the pot on the flop and you call him. Leading the turn for two-thirds of the pot (or appr. $140) would only need to work 40 percent of the time — [140/(140+210) = 40%]. Even if you had no equity in the pot, it is very likely your bet will work at least that often. But given you will likely have at least 15 percent equity in the pot with one card to come, that means 15 percent of the time you may still win not only a turn bet, but potentially your opponent’s entire stack when you consider the pending river action.
• If your opponent calls the turn and you again miss your draw, more often than not you’re probably wise to simply surrender the pot. If you are playing against someone who you have a lot of history with and you think he thinks you’re not going to bet the river without a very strong hand, you may consider bluffing the river. If you sense your opponent likely has a weak hand himself, then it is probably best to bluff the river. There are cases to be made for bluffing the river, but I would typically recommend surrendering the pot on the river in this scenario.

• Your last sensible option is to check-raise the flop an amount three times greater than your opponent’s flop bet. If you do get re-raised at that point, you have no choice but to fold. This is because you’ll be priced out of your draw with virtually no chance your opponent will fold to an all-in shove with so few chips behind. However, it is perfectly reasonable to check-raise the flop and, if called, bet the turn using the same concepts explained in the section.

3. Playing small pairs in and out of position
Playing small pairs profitably is one of the most difficult things to do in poker. It’s exciting to get dealt a pair, and we know that unless our opponent has a bigger pair, we are a favorite against his hand before the flop.

The thought of flopping a set and cracking your opponents’ overpair is one of the bigger thrills you can have in poker. That’s the good news.

The bad news is that you only flop a set about one time in eight, and typically when you don’t flop a set, you are reduced to an underpair to the board and your opponent will come out betting.
Of all the questions people have asked me over the years, the dilemma over playing a small pair seems to arouse the greatest emotion. It can be frustrating — especially against aggressive opponents — and no one likes getting outplayed.

If you surrender the pot every time you don’t flop a set, you feel like you’re getting outplayed far too often (and you’re right).

If you call down your opponents too often with your small pair, it feels like you’re hemorrhaging money. Trust me, we have all been there.

While I am not going to pretend there are a lot of great options, there are some reasonable ones that will at least allow you to show a profit with these hands.

Whether you are in position or out of position — providing stacks are 100 big blinds or more (the deeper the stacks the more inclined you should be to play a pocket pair) — I recommend playing small pocket pairs from any position as long as there is at least one very weak player at the table. Once you have decided to play them, one thing to remember is to not be disappointed if you do not flop a set. Flopping sets is nice, but is not essential to picking up the pot. What is essential is that you look for ways to pick up the pot even when you do not flop a set.

If you call a raise pre-flop in position, I like to raise most flops with my small pocket pair. I like to use small pairs as a way to remind myself to balance my ranges. If the only time you are raising the flop is with strong hands and strong draws, the
opponents you play with regularly will have a much better idea how to combat your play.

But if you decide to raise your opponent on the flop when you have a small pair that does not flop a set, that will help you balance your range by adding in some hands that are not strong hands or strong draws.

The same concept applies when you are out of position. I recommend using small pairs that do not flop a set as a reminder to balance your range by check raising your opponent on the flop. It’s very easy to find yourself not making very many bluffs against your opponents, especially if you are playing a lot of tables. That’s why I recommend using small pairs as a way to throw in a few bluffs here and there that will help balance your range a little better.

Sometimes you will make a check raise on the flop and your opponent calls, but the turn brings an excellent bluffing card like an ace or some other card that you feel is likely to look scary to your opponent. In these cases you may want to consider betting the turn in an attempt to pick up the pot.

If you are the pre-flop aggressor, I recommend making a continuation bet with your small pair and then proceeding throughout the hand the same way you would with any other situation. I don’t think you need to try and do anything you wouldn’t normally do in those cases.

The reason I like using small pairs to balance your range is that it is a really simple way to remind yourself to toss in what basically
amounts to a bluff. If the flop brings 3 Broadway cards and you have pocket 4s, you are essentially bluffing if you are check raising the flop against the pre flop aggressor.

The other reason I like to use small pairs as my bluff reminders is that every so often you will spike a set on the turn or river (if you get a free card) and now you are going to be eyeing your opponent’s stack.

There are few things in poker sweeter than tossing in a check raise with small pair on a hopeless flop only to hit your set and bust your opponent. It isn’t a great back-up plan for the times your check raise or flop raise fails to work, but it does bail you out every so often. Occasionally, the hand may get checked down after a flop raise or check raise and your opponent shows down a busted draw and you will still win the pot which is also a nice little surprise.

Against thinking opponents, playing small pairs with the intent of giving up on the pot when you do not flop a set is a losing proposition. I used to be horrible at playing small pairs until I adopted this strategy. Today, I’m profitable with all my small pairs and I owe it all to simply using them as a means to balance my range and keep my opponents on their toes.

4. Handling aggressive pre-flop 3 bettors
There is a ton of advice on how to handle aggressive pre-flop 3 bettors. But most of the literature fails to keep things simple. Much of it contains elaborate charts that detail 3-betting frequencies, shoving ranges and calling ranges. While I am well
aware of the value of these complex equations and charts, most of that stuff just confuses me — I just want some quick and easy tips on how to handle more aggressive players.

I like to keep my approach to this situation simple. If someone frequently 3-bets me pre-flop, I will begin 4-betting him repeatedly. Sometimes I will wait to get 3-bet several times before I begin 4-betting him, and other times I will do it the very first time an opponent 3-bets me. You don’t always have to fight back instantly, nor do you have to wait until you have been 3-bet over and over again. Finding a balance is a good idea.

It’s important you make your 4 bets just enough to get respect, but not so much that you’re risking more than you need to take down the pot pre-flop.

For example, let’s say we’re playing a 5/10NL table and you raise first on the button to $30. The aggressive small blind re-raises to $95. If you decide to 4-bet your opponent, a mistake many people make is to make their bet size too large. They’ll make raises to $350, and now they’ve committed way too much money to the pot in an attempt to re-steal from their opponent. A 4 bet to $215 should suffice. It’s large enough to induce a fold from your opponent if he doesn’t have a big hand, but not so small that you’re unlikely to get any credit. Always remember to make your 4 bets the same size, whether you have AA or 27 off-suit. You certainly don’t want to create a tell that your opponents may pick up on.

Another way to handle aggressive 3 bettors is to call their 3 bet and play some poker with them post-flop. Sometimes your opponent will shut down post-flop once you’ve called his 3 bet,
and a bet on the flop will easily pick up the pot. More often than not, they’ll bet the flop. What you can do when you don’t flop a hand is to min-raise your opponent on the flop. This forces your opponent to have a hand that he’s willing to go all-in with or your flop raise will take down the pot. As we’ve touched on plenty of times before, forcing your opponent to have the very strong hand he is representing is more often than not a good thing to impose upon him.

For some of the very aggressive players you may face, it’s often a good idea to just call an active 3 bettor when you have a hand like AA or KK. Many aggressive players will bet nearly every flop after their opponents call their 3 bet. Oftentimes, they’ll do the same on the turn, as well. I don’t recommend making it your default play to just call with hands like AA and KK, but trapping with those hands and letting your opponent hang himself is definitely a move worth adding to your arsenal.

You should also be able to just leave the table. Many pros have too much ego to admit this, but unless the game has a mega-fish or two at the table, why even be at the table?

I’m not ashamed to admit that I’ve walked away from countless games where the weaker player at the table wasn’t bad enough to make it worthwhile to deal with the aggressive 3 bettor. Some may say that doing such a thing makes you a lesser player.

But this is just not true. Think of it in terms of owning a small business. You have a minor client who frustrates you immensely despite his representing a very small piece of your revenue pie. Is he worth the aggravation? Probably not.
It’s no different at the poker table when you have an aggressive 3-bettor who is annoying you. If you count the extra energy you have to put into that table which can distract you from making better decisions at your other tables, it can even be a highly unprofitable situation. It’s best to simply set your ego aside and move on to a more enjoyable and profitable table.

The most important thing to realize is aggressive 3-bettors are representing strength when statistically they can’t be that strong. People’s first reaction is to become timid and even scared when they are facing an opponent who is very aggressive. Or the opposite happens and they take it personally and wind up quickly on tilt.

In either of these scenarios, you should say to yourself, "Here this guy goes again trying to represent something we all know he can’t have. This is too funny. I’ll just start making him pay for this by putting the onus on him to have a hand."

5. **Keeping the pot small pre-flop**

Keeping the pot small can be beneficial in many ways. For instance, it can keep you from getting gray hair, a rapid heart beat, a sweaty brow, nausea and a condition known as "busted computer equipment."

Keeping the pot small is something I like to do against better opponents for two reasons:

- First, there aren’t too many occasions where you really want the pot to become overly large.
• Second, when you are in a pot against another strong opponent, you are ultimately just passing money back and forth (and paying rake for the privilege), so why introduce larger swings into your game?

Keeping the pot small starts before the flop. If you make a raise pre-flop to 4 or 5 times the size of the big blind, the pot will swell rather quickly after the flop. Raising to 3 or 3.5 times the size of the big blind before the flop is pretty common.

But I like to make raises of only 2 times the big blind, on occasion. I typically do this when I am raising the players in the blinds who also happen to be good players. If I’m against a poor player, I’ll typically make a much larger pre flop raise because I want to play bigger pots against opponents over whom I have a substantial edge.

One reason why I like to make my raises only 2 times the big blind is it’s a cheap attempt to take down the pot pre-flop. If you’re only risking 2 blinds to win the 1.5 blinds already in the pot (the small and big blinds combined), your steal attempt only needs to work about 57 percent of the time to show an immediate profit.

While I don’t have hard evidence that proves or disproves how often a steal attempt works, from experience I can confidently say your steal will work at least this often, given that some percentage of the time you’ll have a very strong hand that will take down the pot pre-flop by making an additional re-raise after your opponent re-raised you.
Another reason I like to keep the pot smaller against tough opponents is it takes away from their interest in the pot and they are less likely to play you as tough as they might otherwise. It’s human nature to expend more mental energy on situations that are important to people. When the pot is small, most opponents seem much less inclined to take the pot seriously post-flop. As a result, you have the advantage of playing someone who isn’t focusing as well as they could. Meanwhile, you’re giving it 110 percent, so there’s a built-in advantage to keeping the pot small.

Keeping the pots small cuts down on variance, which is always something you should strive for when treating your poker like a business. But I don’t recommend passing up edges for the sake of reducing your variance. If you’re following my recommendation of playing on a conservative bankroll, there’s no need to concern yourself with taking less profitable steps to reduce variance. But if you can cut down on your variance in a way that also doesn’t hurt your win rate, you should.

I definitely recommend looking for spots where you can keep the pot small, but never at the expense of your win rate or your strategy as a whole. Keeping the pot small is a nice tool to have against tougher opponents, but don’t let this concept seep into your overall game.

6. Utilizing position post-flop
At this point everyone knows that being in position is critical to being successful at the poker tables. There’s a ton of information on the subject — perhaps too much.
It’s easy to get bogged down with too much information on the subject, so my intent is to simplify things. Let’s just reduce things down to a few powerful tips that can help make you a much tougher player.

Here are my top 5 ways to utilize position:

**A. Don’t give up easily on the flop.** Too often, lower stakes players have a tendency to lose hope when they don’t flop a strong hand or strong draw on the flop. They’ll call a pre-flop raise in position with a hand like AhTh, and if they miss the flop, they’ll fold to a continuation bet from the pre-flop raiser. This is far too weak and is not utilizing position very well.

One thing to remember is that if you have a hand like AhTh and the flop comes down as all under cards, there are still a lot of good things that can happen by simply calling the flop if your opponent bets.

First, your opponent may decide to check the turn to you, in which case you can usually pick up the pot with a two-thirds-pot turn bet. Second, you may hit an ace or a 10 on the turn and improve to the best hand. Sometimes you’ll hit an ace or a 10 and will still not have the best hand. In these cases you may wind up paying off hands that have you beat. But the risk of this is not so high that I would advocate folding to a flop bet when you miss.

You may also decide to raise the flop when your opponent continuation bets into your hand. This play is very effective when in position because your opponent now has to risk most of his stack by making a re-raise on the flop if he does not have a strong hand himself and wants to contest the pot. If he simply calls your flop raise, he will be doing so with the fear that you may bet the turn and river. This
will make even some of his stronger hands appear to shrink up. When your opponent is out of position and facing a flop raise, it is not a fun position for him to be in unless he has a strong hand or a strong draw. And let’s not forget that it’s much easier for him to have a weak hand than a strong hand from a mathematical standpoint. In poker, people are unlikely to have the hand they are representing (especially on the flop) so it’s almost never a bad idea to put your opponents to a tough decision by raising them on the flop when in position.

B. Force your opponents to tighten up pre-flop. The best way to keep your opponents from becoming the table captain is to re-raise them frequently pre-flop. If you have position on a loose and aggressive player, making re-raises pre-flop will discourage him from trying to run over the table.

I recommend re-raising your opponents with most of the playable hands you’re dealt. Here is the range I would most likely re raise with: 22+, all suited connectors (no gaps) and any two cards 10 or higher.

Additionally, if for meta-game reasons you determine that it would be a good time to re-raise your opponent, you can broaden this range to any two cards. I wouldn’t recommend broadening your range that wide on more than an occasional basis, however.

You want to be careful not to get carried away with this or your opponent will likely begin to suspect you are getting out of line and make adjustments. It’s a balancing act. You rarely want to be obviously loose or tight. One of the best compliments you can get is when some of your peers say you are tight, while others say you are loose. That’s when you really know you are a mystery to your opponents.
C. Run more multi-street bluffs. When you’re the pre-flop raiser and you have position in the hand against your opponent, you may want to consider betting all three streets if your opponent appears weak. Too often people will not put your average tight/aggressive player to the real test. They will bet the flop, and if called, shut down from there unless they have a big hand or a big draw.

When out of position, most tight-aggressive players will simply check and then call your flop bet. They are unlikely to call all three streets unless they improve their hand. Against these types of opponents, it’s important to frequently bet all three streets as a bluff.

Far more often than not, when someone who is out of position checks and then calls your bet on the flop, he does not intend to call a bet from you on all three streets. They typically are calling a flop bet and sometimes a turn bet in an attempt to “keep you honest.” But they are very unlikely to check and then call all three streets. Take advantage of this leak in their games and make them pay for their lack of a better strategy.

D. Value bet thinner on the river. One huge advantage of being in position is that you get to make the last move in the hand. Getting to act after your opponent is a huge advantage because the size of the pot on the river makes it by far the most important street to play well.

Too often, people will timidly check the river even though they know down deep they probably have the best hand. For many, the fear is they will get check raised on the river and not know what to do. For others, they simply dread being put to a difficult decision. Because the pot is typically large by the time you reach the river, they’ll become afraid of making a mistake.
You have to turn the fact that many people become scared on the river into an advantage. After all, if you are scared, chances are so is everyone else in those situations. If you can come to grips with your fears and confidently play the river, you will by default have an advantage on the river.

When I have a good—but—not—great hand on the river (like a top pair, top kicker), I ask myself, "Does my opponent have a hand like two pair or better, and if he did, would he play it this way?"

Chances are that if you’re confident that, given the action in the hand, your opponent is unlikely to have a hand worse than yours, you should bet. Betting thinly also has the added advantage of balancing your range. Playing the river out of position is a ton of fun against opponents who only bet the nuts and bluffs on the river. Those who do this make decisions a heck of a lot easier.

Remember, the river is the street where the pot is the largest. If you’re going to utilize position in the hand to your maximum advantage, you need to learn to play the river well. Position is good to have pre- flop. It’s very good to have on the flop. It’s great to have on the turn. And it’s outstanding to have on the river.

There is no more important time to have position than on the river. Take some deep breaths, get focused, and if you have the best hand, don’t be afraid to release the hounds on your opponent.

E. Utilize turn raises to get to showdown: Oftentimes you flop a medium-strength hand and will choose not to make a continuation bet. This is a perfectly reasonable option, especially against aggressive opponents who like to check raise you on the flop. There’s nothing more frustrating than flopping a medium-strength hand only to get check raised
by an aggressive opponent and not having any great options
to look forward to.

After checking the flop back, your opponent will almost
always bet the turn. One way I utilize position is to make
a smallish raise on the turn. A raise of about 2–2.5x your
opponent’s bet is about right.

This play accomplishes a couple of things. First, it can
sometimes induce a fold from a better hand if your
opponent fears he is beat and will have to face an additional
bet on the river. It also typically freezes up your opponent
and he will be unlikely to put in further action without the
nuts or near nuts.

Had you simply called the turn, your opponent would’ve been
able to make a bet the size of his choosing on the river. Not
only will you be facing a larger bet than the size of your small
turn raise, but you lose the chance of folding out a better hand
or charging a draw. Additionally, you are now faced with a
situation where you have to make a less informed decision.

But since you raised the turn, he is unlikely to bet the river
without a very strong hand. Since you have no idea where
you are at in the hand by calling the turn, this is a good way
to get information on the cheap.

It also can serve as a means of extracting value when you have
the best hand. Sometimes your opponent will lead the turn
with a draw and call your turn raise hoping to improve. If
they don’t improve, you can show down your weak made
hand and feel glad you made a turn raise when he shows you
a busted draw.

If you’re going to be a successful poker player, you have
to know how to effectively utilize position. Playing pots in
position is statistically proven to be the main source of profit
in poker.
When I was first learning the game, I was watching poker on TV, trying to pick up some tips. The broadcaster asked Phil Ivey about the importance of position. Ivey said, “It’s everything. If I had to play every hand out of position, I couldn’t beat my grandmother.”

7. **Finding good board textures to steal the pot on the flop**

Against opponents who do not think on a world-class level, you can increase your win rate by stealing the pot on board textures that make it unlikely they will have a strong hand.

Stealing the pot when you have nothing is not only a lot of fun, but also an essential element to becoming a professional. All top players take away a lot of pots that most players do not. That is a big reason why they’re able to make so much money.

You want to look for boards where it’s unlikely your opponent has a hand that can withstand a lot of pressure. My favorite boards to steal the pot are:

- **Ace high flops**: You may not win them right away by bluffing the flop, but if you have the heart to bet all three streets, you are likely to induce a fold from your average TAG (tight aggressive) opponent.

- **Flops with one face card and two little cards**: A good example of this is a Q62 rainbow flop. When you’re out of position, a check raise will work often enough to be profitable. When in position, a flop or turn raise will usually be enough to take them off all their marginal holdings.
• **Draw heavy boards when in position**: The pre-flop raiser bets into you on a 7h8hTh board and you look to steal by raising the flop. This will often induce folds from hands as strong as an over-pair against TAG opponents.

• **Paired boards**: Any time there is a pair on the board, it becomes highly unlikely your opponent has a strong hand. Flops like 994 present a great opportunity to take away the pot with a flop raise or check raise.

Remember, you don’t want to try and steal every single time on these types of boards. These are the types of boards where I recommend tossing in a raise maybe every third or fourth time you come across them, unless your opponent is noticeably weak-tight. If you try and steal too often, you risk being too inclined to bluff and therefore becoming exploitable.

I never recommend doing anything in poker that makes your game obvious for people to identify the type of player you are. If your opponents are able to easily identify you as a tight player, then they’re easily going to make good decisions against you. Same goes for playing to loose. The trick is to find that perfect balance.

It can be very frustrating when you try and steal pots on these types of boards, yet your opponents keep having strong hands and won’t fold. But it is important to continue to apply the pressure to your opponents and not let a few failed attempts cause you to lose heart.

This is one of the biggest mental hurdles to overcome in poker. It’s easy to slip into a passive style when things are going poorly at the tables and you keep running into big hands. Always
remember that math will not let you down in the long run. Raising your opponents on these types of boards will show a profit in the long run. You are generally getting a pretty good price on your bluff and your opponents simply will not have a strong enough hand to withstand the pressure of a flop raise on these types of boards.

Say the pot is $90 on the flop and your opponent bets $60. If you raise to $180, you will be risking $180 to win $150 (the pot size plus your opponent’s bet). Assuming you have no outs, you only need him to fold 54.5 percent of the time. \( \frac{\$180}{\$180 + \$150} \) = 54.5%. When you consider your opponents are highly unlikely to have a hand on these types of boards, and you can sometimes get bailed out with a favorable turn or river card, it is easy to see why fighting for pots is such a good idea in these situations.

8. **When to C bet as a bluff and when to give up.**

One of the most important aspects of no-limit hold ’em is simply knowing when to continuation bet and when to surrender the pot.

One sure way to leak a lot of money on the flop is to make a continuation bet that has very little hope of working. There is more to this game than knowing when to hold ’em and when to fold ’em — you also need to know when it is best to simply punt.

**Here is an example of when it is best to punt:**

Let’s assume you are playing a 5/10 NL game, everyone has 100 big blind stacks and you raise from early position with Ah3h. The button calls, everyone else folds and you go to the flop heads up.
The flop comes 7s8s9c. You have ace high on a board that hits a large portion of your opponents’ range and you have a three out draw to top pair.

In this situation, I recommend punting to your opponent, no questions asked. Here’s why:

- First, you have ace high with no draw to any hand that you’re going to be excited about. Even an ace on the turn won’t leave you feeling overly confident.

- Second, the types of hands your opponent will float your pre-flop raise with are going to be excited to see a flop like this. His typical hand range is going to consist of pocket pairs and suited connectors. All of these hands are not going anywhere on a flop like this.

- Third, even if he doesn’t have a hand that likes this flop, there is a very good chance that if you did C bet, the button will call your flop bet and look for a scary turn card so he can represent a very big hand with a bet or a raise.

No matter how you slice it or dice it, your continuation bet is not likely to work on this type of board.

The same principles apply whether you are in position or out of position. But you should be more inclined to punt when out of position in the hand. When you are in position, you can expand slightly the number of boards on which you can profitably continuation bet; however, it’s likely best to err on the side of punting when the board is well-coordinated and highly likely to have hit your opponents’ range of hands.
The types of boards you definitely want make a continuation bet on are boards where you have at least one of three things going for you:

- The flop is dry and very unlikely to have hit your opponents’ range. A textbook example of this would be a K72 rainbow flop.
- You have at least a 6 out draw to a hand you can be relatively confident should you hit one of your 6 outs, that it will improve to the best hand.
- The flop is ace high.

I don’t recommend these criteria as absolutes. There are certain types of opponents where it may make sense to deviate from these recommendations. There may also be game flow or meta-game reasons that argue for deviating, as well.

But this should serve as a basic starting point and you can expand the number of flops you continuation bet when it makes sense.

9. **My philosophy on bluffs**

When I’m trying to figure out if my opponent is bluffing, my philosophy is simple: the earlier in the hand, the more likely your opponent is bluffing; the later it is in the hand, the more likely he is to have the hand he is representing.

Most successful players will play about 25 percent of the hands they are dealt. When they play those 25 percent, they will typically be raising or re-raising before the flop. Once upon a time, a
raise of any kind — even pre-flop — meant you probably had a strong hand. In fact, in some home games I have played in over the years, it was viewed as unseemly to raise with a less-than-premium hand. I was actually told I would be asked to leave if I continued to raise with hands that weren’t large pairs. They said it was "proper" to just call pre-flop if I wanted to enter the pot with anything less than a premium pocket pair. But a raise nowadays can mean anything.

On the flop, a bet from the pre-flop raiser can still mean just about anything, but it certainly carries more weight than a pre-flop raise. Even a flop raise carries some weight, but it would certainly be pretty weak if you assumed that every flop raise meant that your opponent has a strong hand.

On the turn, the likelihood your opponent is bluffing goes down sharply. There are many players (especially at the higher stakes) who will bet the turn seemingly automatically, but a turn bet should certainly be given respect from most opponents. Typically opponents are betting the turn with their strong hands, their strong draws and cards that offer good bluffing opportunities like an ace. A turn raise generally means great strength, or at the very least, the raiser picked up a very strong draw.

Once the river comes, no winning player will bluff as a standard practice. Bluffs become much less frequent and strong hands become the norm. There is plenty of room in poker to make well-conceived and creative river bluffs, but they occur infrequently at this stage in the hand.

People like to make bluffs when they are cheap, but are less inclined to want to risk a significant portion of their stack with
a late street bluff. No matter what else changes in poker, I feel it will always hold true that bluffs are less and less likely as the hand progresses.

10. Playing from early position

Playing hands from early position is something that is really difficult to do profitably. I’m not sure anyone will ever truly be able to quantify exactly how much better it is to have position in a hand, but trust me when I tell you it is incredibly important. Having position is so vital, in fact, that there are very few early position hands that can be played profitably by anyone but the world’s best players.

Here’s my breakdown of the most important things to keep in mind when deciding what to do from early position:

A. You will be out of position to any opponent who calls you pre-flop except the blinds. It’s very important to remember that when you raise from early position, unless you steal the blinds, you will almost always be out of position in the hand. The small and big blinds typically will just fold. There is just no reason for them to take a flop against someone with a strong range while out of position unless they have a strong hand themselves.

B. Play tight from early position unless the table is soft. It’s typically best to play tight from early position unless there’s at least one — and preferably two or more — very weak opponents at the tables. An even better scenario would be if the weak players are positioned in either the small or big blind when you are deciding on whether or not to play a hand from early position.
If the table is pretty tough, and you’ll be out of position against the only other weak opponent at the table if your early position raise is called, you’re going to want to stick to a tight range of pairs 77+ and suited connectors where both cards are a ten or higher.

If you have a very weak (or several weak) opponents at the table, you can consider playing a similar range of hands that you would play from late position. While being out of position is no fun, if you have an opportunity to get involved with a playable hand against a very weak opponent, I recommend taking that opportunity.

C. **Respect your opponent’s re-raises.** Most players tend to get too involved in pots where they open raise from early position and get re-raised by a tight-aggressive opponent. They either overvalue their hand and are too willing to play for stacks, or they tend to call too much and are forced to play a marginal hand out of position which is almost surely going to be a losing proposition for them.

You’ll come across savvy opponents who realize that early position raisers have to have a very strong hand to play back at them, and will re-raise them lightly. But those opponents are few and far between, so I’m going to omit them from this discussion.

With that in mind, you can put yourself in your opponent’s shoes when you’re being re-raised after an early position raise. Ask yourself, would I re-raise someone with a less-than premium hand a significant percentage of the time? For most people the answer is no.

Apply that same logic to when you’re getting re-raised from early position, and think about how many hands it really makes sense to continue playing the pot with. For me, the answer is not very many. Most people are re-raising a very
strong range of AQ+ and QQ+. After you factor in the positional disadvantage, it typically doesn’t make sense to continue with any hands other than QQ-AA.

I know tossing a hand like AK or JJ to a mere re-raise may sound incredibly weak, but my database of several million hands of high-stakes poker has shown I can’t make money with those hands after being re-raised from early position.

If you try and get all the money in pre-flop in these situations, too often you run into aces and kings. If you just call the re-raise, you are out of position and cannot make a confident decision post-flop unless you flop a monster hand.

Keep in mind, this advice is being given under the assumption you are being re-raised by a tight-aggressive opponent. If the opponent is a very weak and/or loose player, then you can play a hand like JJ or AK profitably. But against a very tough and/or tight opponent, I recommend just folding your hand and living to fight another day.

D. Don’t fall in love with small pairs. Unless the table has a particularly weak opponent or several weak opponents, just fold all pairs 22-66 from early position.

E. Bluffing gets more credit. If you are ever going to run multi-street bluffs, early position is the time to do it. If you sense your opponent is unlikely to have a strong hand, I recommend firing all three streets. Any time you bet all three streets, you’re going to make your opponents nervous. This is especially so when your opponent factors in that you raised from early position. The credibility of your bluff jumps through the roof in these cases and I highly recommend taking advantage.

You must be cognizant of the significance of playing hands from early position, which will not put food on your table,
but can take food off it. People lose a lot of money trying to play too many pots and make too much happen from early position.

Approach early position hands in the same way a football team would approach playing defense. You’re rarely going to win the game with defense, but you can sure lose it if you aren’t careful.
Chapter 2
FIVE EFFECTIVE PLAYS
THAT ARE UNDERUTILIZED

1. Checking with a chip
One of my favorite plays is one I call, “checking with a chip.” This play doesn’t come up very often. But when it does, it can be a great way to get to a showdown or gain a wealth of information on the cheap.

Let’s say we’re playing a 5/10 NL table and you are dealt AcJd in the big blind. Your opponent raises from the button to $40. Everyone else folds and you call in the big blind.

The pot is $85 and you go to the flop heads up, each with 100 big blind stacks. The flop comes down 6dJsQd. You decide to lead out for $60 and your opponent calls. With the pot at $205 the turn brings a 2h and you again decide to bet the turn. You bet $150 on the turn and your opponent calls.

The river brings a 3h and now you are in a very tricky spot on the river. Your opponent can have any number of hands, and all of your standard options don’t sound very good. If you make a standard two-thirds pot bet on the river, you may very well just be value betting yourself, as it’s a distinct possibility your opponent has a better hand than you.
If you check the river and your opponent bets, you have no idea whether he has a busted draw like KT, T9, or a flush draw. He might also be value betting a top-pair type of hand that narrowly beats your second-pair top kicker. You may end up making the right decision by either calling or folding, but it certainly won’t be made with any great deal of confidence.

But what if you simply bet one chip ($10) on the river? If you are called by a hand like KQ, then you only lost one big blind. If he calls with a worse-made hand, he likely would’ve checked the river if checked to, or folded to a two-thirds pot bet on the river. You end up $10 richer in those cases.

Given the action in the hand so far, it is very unlikely that your opponent is slow-playing a very strong hand. Very rarely do players slow play in spots when the board is so draw heavy. So the top end of his range of hands that he can have is almost certainly a hand like KQ or QT. These two hands are very unlikely to raise the river for value, so you can be nearly certain that if you bet one chip on the river and get raised, it is because he has one of his busted draws. In that case you should beat him into the pot and call his river raise no matter what size he makes it — even if it’s an all-in wager.

The following counter-argument could be made: Some very good players at the higher-stakes games will look to value raise a hand like KQ against your one-chip river bet. But it is very likely that, had you checked the river, he would’ve bet a hand like KQ for value anyway. Given the large number of busted draws he could be bluffing the river with, it would be very difficult to find a fold anyway. Furthermore, I still am not convinced there
are too many people who will value raise a hand like KQ in this spot. If you do come across players who are capable of that, then you can always start leading with sets and two-pair type of hands and wait for them to value raise lightly.

Using a single chip as a means of extracting value and/or gaining information is one of my favorite plays. Because it’s a river play, it’s so much more valuable than many of the other plays where the pot is smaller. The pot is medium-to-large sized by the time the action is complete. There just aren’t any downsides to speak of with this play, unless you are facing some of the better players in the world.

You will virtually never pay off a big river bet with the worst hand. You also have the chance to win a very large pot, because most opponents will simply never be able to help themselves when they see you bet one measly chip on the river. It will look like red meat to a lion, and they will raise (sometimes all in) with most of their range, with the exception of the hands you beat. That is the real beauty of this play: the pot only grows large when you want it to.

2. **Weak leading to induce a raise**

Oftentimes you may have a hand that you’ve determined is best, but feel your opponent doesn’t have a strong enough hand to call so much as a half-pot bet. Too often in these situations, people will either check and hope their opponent bluff[s], or they will make a two-thirds (or greater) bet that has virtually no hope of ever being called.
A good example of this play is the following:
You are in the big blind with AcJs at a 5/10 NL table where everyone has 100 big blind stacks. The cut off raiser bets $40, everyone else folds and you re-raise to $125. The cut-off raiser calls and you go to the flop heads up with the pot totaling $255. The flop comes down Jc2s7d.

Unless your opponent flopped a set or is slow playing a big pair, you have the best hand. You decide to bet out $175 and your opponent calls. While it is certainly possible your opponent could be continuing to slow play, this really shouldn’t be at the forefront of your mind. On a flop like this, you are simply not going to be able to get away from your hand unless you have an incredible read on your opponent or he has a reputation for being extraordinarily tight. Since there are no draws on this board, the overwhelming majority of the time your opponent will have a marginal made hand like 88-TT or JT-KJ.

With the pot at $605, with both you and your opponent having $700 remaining in your stack, an ace of hearts comes on the turn. While this may seem like a great card, it is an action killer. Prior to the ace coming on the turn, his range consisted of hands that either have only two or three outs and a board that still looked appealing to his hand.

Now that an ace arrived on the turn, your opponent will usually have between zero and two outs and not a lot of confidence in his holding. The trick now will be extracting value from his range. I have found the best way to do this is to simply make a very weak bet on the turn that induces action. A bet of $125 into the $605 pot should do the trick.
This turn bet accomplishes a lot. First, it gives poor odds for your opponent to draw to his hand. Second, the bet will instinctively make an aggressive player want to raise your bet and try to blow you off of your hand. Finally, it’s confusing and will make your opponent very frustrated and not know what to do. He may not be able to fold any type of hand given that he is getting such a good price on his call.

This is another one of those plays that has no real downside. You were never going to be able to extract value from his range with a bet. He was also very unlikely to start turning his made hand into a bluff, as he fears you are going to check raise all in on the turn if he bets.

Another huge benefit of this play is you can mix in some bluffs with your range. Let’s say we use the exact same scenario, but instead of A$cJ$s, you have 5s6s. You can bet $125 on the turn and will be risking only $125 to win the $605 in the pot with a 6 high bluff. He only needs to fold about 17.1 percent of the time for your bet to be profitable. This can be a great way to balance your range in these spots.

3. The Killer Blow
Hands down, my favorite is one I call “The Killer Blow.” This is a two-part play that involves both a turn and river bet, and I feel it’s one of the most effective plays I’ve ever devised.

Let’s assume you are playing a 5/$10NL table where everyone has at least 100 big-blind stacks. You get dealt 7c8c in the small blind. The cut-off position raiser makes it $40, and everyone
folds to you. You decide to call and the big-blind folds. The pot is $90 and the flop comes down Kc9s4h. You check and your opponent checks. From my experience, your opponent will have either a weak made hand or a hand that completely missed the board once he checks the flop.

Once in a great while your opponent will have a big hand like a set. But the overwhelming majority of the time this will not be the case, because if he had a set he would want to make the pot large, which is something you cannot do by checking.

At this point, I’m thinking, “How can I take the line that would make him the most likely to fold his hand?” In a perfect world, I’ll also choose the line that extracts the most value from a hand he will ultimately fold. This may sound a little greedy, but this is a rare occasion where greed is a good thing, based on my experience.

The turn comes a 2d and I again check to my opponent. I do this because I’m assuming he has what I believe he has at this point, and he should bet the turn. If he has a weak made hand, he is going to want to protect it. If he has nothing, two checks from me will make him feel confident that a bluff will work.

Your opponent bets $60 on the turn. At this point I have my opponent right where I want him and check raise the turn to $240, leaving $720 behind. I typically make my raises three times my opponent’s bets. But I want to tell him I am looking to play for stacks and put the maximum pressure on him, so I make this raise four times his bet.
At this point in the hand, you will often induce a fold from your opponent. Occasionally, your opponent will sense that your check raise seems a little fishy and call after much deliberation. I am glad when he does. I am rooting for a call on the turn because I know that he is never going to call the river.

Let’s assume your opponent decides to call your turn check raise. With the pot size at $570 the river is a Jd. This is the point in the hand where you deliver the killer blow and shove all in for your last $720. What you have essentially done is put your opponent to a decision for all of his chips in a spot where we know he almost never has a strong hand based on the action. This is also where you need to have a strong heart, because while this play works an astronomically high percentage of the time, my opponent usually folds after a minute or more of deliberation. That minute can feel like an hour, but take my word for it, he will nearly always fold.

A few important things to remember: First, you need the board to be somewhat dry. It doesn’t have to be completely void of draws. But if you make a turn check raise when a card comes that presents a variety of different draws on the turn, your opponent will call much more frequently on the turn because he is drawing to a big hand (that is completed on the river) or he will put you on a draw. If the river does not complete any of the draws, he may find the heart to call your river all in with a bluff-catching type of hand. So definitely be cognizant of the draws on the board.

This is a scenario where it’s especially helpful to have information on your opponent. There are those opponents who absolutely
love to make heroic calls so be careful not to pull this trick on them too often.

As is the case with any play I advocate, it’s important to not use this every time or you will become massively exploitable. It is important to keep this one in your arsenal, but don’t make a habit of using it at every opportunity.

4. The delayed C bet
A play that isn’t talked about or utilized enough is one I like to call the “delayed C bet.” It’s best used against players who are on the aggressive side, especially those who show a lot of aggression on the flop. We’ve all experienced those who’ll call your raise out of position and check raise you on seemingly every flop.

This is tough to combat because it’s hard to flop hands that can withstand a flop-check raise. If your hand is good enough to withstand a check raise on the flop, it is even less likely to be able to withstand a turn bet from your opponent, as your entire stack may be in jeopardy at that point in the hand.

Let’s assume you are playing a 5/10 NL table where everyone has 100 big blind stacks. You raise to $40 from early position and your opponent calls out of the big blind, bringing the total pot to $90.

The cards are irrelevant. Your opponent checks. Rather than continuation betting, check back the flop. You know he was very likely to check raise you and the onus would then be on you to make a tough decision. You will likely have to commit
a significant portion of your stack to re steal the pot with no guarantees your efforts won’t be in vain.

Instead, put the onus on him. When he inevitably bets $60 on the turn, raise him to $180. This will put him to the test and force him to have a hand. If you bet the flop and get check raised, the onus is on you. This play is an excellent way to turn the tables on him and make him have to make a play for a significant portion of his stack if he is going to win the pot.

Remember, like any play you make in no-limit hold ‘em, be careful about overdoing it. If you do it too often, you become exploitable. In this particular scenario, I recommend a sensible balance between C betting the flop, using the delayed C bet, and even giving up on coordinated types of flops that are very likely to have hit your opponent’s range of calling hands from the small blind.

5. **Shoving when they can’t have it**

This play is a great one. Proper execution of this play will make you feel like Phil Ivey — at least for a second.

When determining whether or not to utilize this play, it’s critical the flop be completely dry. There can’t be any draws whatsoever, or this play is not good at all. Here is the best example: Let’s assume you are playing a 5/10 NL table and everyone at the table has 100 big blind stacks. You’re in the small blind and the button raises to $40, you call and the big blind folds. You go to the flop heads up and the pot is $90. (The cards you or your opponent has are irrelevant. The flop comes Kh7c2s. You check and your
opponent bets $60. You decide to check raise to $180, because this is the type of board that doesn’t hit very many hands and you are hoping to take down the pot with a bluff. Your opponent re-raises you to $425, leaving himself $575 behind.

From my experience, if your opponent has a big hand, he never re-raises the flop in this situation. The reason why he never re-raises a big hand here is that it really does not make very much sense for him to do so. If he has a big hand like a set or AK, he will simply call your flop check raise because he will feel that either: A) You are bluffing and he does not want to discourage you from continuing your bluff; or B) He has a monster hand and knows that if you have the big hand you are representing, all of the money will go in eventually.

So if your opponent re-raises you on the flop, it is probable he did so because he has nothing. But he knows that unless you have the unlikely set that you are representing, you don’t have a hand that can withstand a re-raise, and he’s looking to re-steal the pot.

This is your golden opportunity to make a great play and shove the rest of your stack in the middle. After you scoop the pot you can tell your friends you “read your opponent’s soul.”

Trust me, there are few plays you can make that are more fun than this one.
IN CONCLUSION ...

I know this book will be unpopular with those who like their poker books to be math-dense, and those who like their poker big and bold. For whatever reason, a humble, methodical approach does not jibe with accepted norms in the poker world.

But as I said in the beginning, you can have all the poker skill in the world, but if you don’t know how to monetize that ability, you’re sunk. Much more skilled players than I am have gone broke. There is a vast difference between poker skill and actually making money. I truly believe that a total commitment to a slow-and-steady plan is the way to long-term riches, and my record supports that I’m right.

There’s a saying that goes, "Let there be change, and let it begin with me.” Ironically, I feel like I’ve become a much better player for having written this book. It’s crystallized so many loose thoughts that I’ve had over the years. Soon after putting all of these thoughts down on paper, I sensed that I was playing at a level I’d not achieved before. Truly, I felt as though there were very few people who could match my performance hand-to-hand. So, in a way, I have to thank my readers for inspiring me through this process. It’s made me a richer man, figuratively and literally!

Before I exit, I’d like to draw your attention to some key points from the book. Had I known these things, I’d have been a more profitable player from the get-go.
• **Take advantage of rakeback.** As I said earlier, this can sustain you through lean months, and turn good months into great ones. If you learn nothing else from this book, please know that you should take advantage of this opportunity that, for some reason or other, is far less popular than it should be in poker circles. Rakeback is found money.

• **Manage your bankroll conservatively.** You don’t want to be the restaurant that runs out of food just as a big group comes through the door. Invest — then reinvest — in your small business.

• **Make peace with variance.** You will invariably go through hard-luck patches. Recognizing those times when you have good luck makes the bad times tolerable. Understanding variance is an essential building block to managing tilt.

• **Set process-oriented goals.** Being process oriented is a trait possessed by every successful poker player, businessperson or athlete I’ve ever met. Bottom line: if you put in quality time, money will follow.

I’d like to leave you with some quotes that I keep near me at all times. These act as a compass for me and get me focused.

“To give anything less than your best is to sacrifice the gift.”
— Steve Prefontaine

I’m a volunteer assistant coach for the University of Oregon’s men’s golf team, and the only poster on the wall of our offices has this quote on it. Prefontaine was a legendary track athlete at Oregon whose career and life were cut short in 1975 when he died in a car accident at the age of 24. He was a rock-star athlete who won 120 of the 153 races he ran — an astonishing 78 percent.
"Pre," as he was called, believed talent is a myth; that there was a higher standard than victory. What I admire about him is the integrity of the effort he put forth every single day.

"It ain’t about how hard you hit. It’s about how hard you can get hit, and keep moving forward. That’s how winning is done." — Rocky Balboa, Rocky Balboa (2006)

Like this fictional character, I’ve been knocked down. I’ve been as low as most people could get in life. I was on the verge of realizing my dream of making the PGA Tour when it all ended suddenly at the age of 23 due to a massive heart attack. I’ve been broke, in horrible health (due to a mysterious cause), and had no one to whom I could turn. That’s when my poker career began. There is opportunity in even the greatest tragedy, to know ourselves better, if nothing else. The bad times make the good times sweeter. Don’t listen to people who’d rather be second worst than try to elevate their own circumstances. Whatever bad situation you’re in is only temporary. Just put your head down, outwork everyone else. I dare you to tell me someday that you regret having done so.

"The greatest thing about tomorrow is that I will be better than I am today. I have no understanding of why people hit the snooze button. I don’t know how you could think any other way." — Tiger Woods

You have just one life. One. Don’t waste it. Do you want your tombstone to read, "Here lies John. He could have been great, but he felt like sleeping in"? There is greatness in the struggle; in the trying to be great. Every day is an opportunity to put more distance between you and everyone else.
“To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment.” — Ralph Waldo Emerson

I, too, confront pressures all the time to be the person others want me to be. I grew up in Orange County, Calif., where superficiality reigns supreme, then entered the ego-driven world of professional poker. Ever since I committed myself to being myself, it is amazing how much easier my life has become. I’ve probably never had more people dislike me, and at the same time I’ve never had so many amazing friends. Emerson also said, “People only see what they are prepared to see.” Outside-the-box thinking is a trait of nearly every successful person, so by default such a mindset will put you at odds with others. This is the reality of thinking for yourself and doing things the way you know is best.

“Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we’ve been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.” — President Barack Obama

Put your politics aside for a moment as I explain the relevance of this quote. I cannot tell you the number of times I’ve been at a social gathering where I’ve met someone who is absolutely fascinated by what I do for a living — not because they, too, dreamt of being a poker player, but because they’re amazed at the nature in which I achieved it. I took a risk. I put my world on the line — I risked having to crawl back to a family and a job I loathed — to change my circumstance. I went “all in” in a quest to chase my dreams of financial independence, and independence overall. Most people tell me they thought about taking risks, too, the same way I did. But they didn’t, usually because they were
scared of disappointing others around them. I understand this completely. Going out on my own caused many people to simply give up on me. I can only imagine what they said about me when I wasn’t around. But I knew I couldn’t risk being manacled to the expectations of others, because I’d drown under their weight.

I gave in to grand possibilities. I was the change I sought. You are the change you seek.
AFTERWORD
By Nick Grudzien

Just as there are 400-pound offensive linemen who don’t have to hit the weight room, there will be poker players with 200 IQs who can get away without working hard. For the rest of us, there’s Dusty Schmidt. His approach applies to the everyman, which is most of us.

I may be in a unique position to attest to the soundness of Dusty’s business sense. Before becoming a full-time poker pro in 2005, I worked for nine years for a respected boutique investment firm on Wall Street called Allen & Co., trading equities for institutional clients and high net-worth individuals. I traded a number of high-flying IPOs during the NASDAQ technology bubble, and had good practice using split-second judgment to weigh risk vs. reward. We had a seven-man desk with a solid team. I was especially proficient with new technology, which made my position particularly secure.

Prior to 2003, the sum total of my gambling experience away from the stock market was getting in on a $1,000 prop bet that a guy on our desk couldn’t eat a baseball-sized piece of wasabi. (The bet never ended up happening, by the way.)

Late that year, I was at my in-laws’ house with nothing to do, and was playing hearts on my computer when a poker site came up. I put $50 in the cashier and was immediately hooked. Before long,
poker was producing better dividends than the stocks were. One year later, I was playing 300/600 and winning at a decent clip, and by 2005 I was averaging $5 a hand. The skills I’d developed on Wall Street served me well, in particular money management and discipline, as well as emotional control.

I decided to leave Wall Street that December. The decision was borne out of our desire to be back in California where I grew up so our children could grow up near their grandparents and extended family. I played poker full time as I went through the process of selling our house and looking for a job in San Francisco’s financial district. Things continued to go so well that by the time we were ready to head west in Oct. 2006, I’d decided to forego a desk job in favor of life as a poker pro/stay-at-home dad while living in gorgeous wine country an hour north of the Bay Area.

A few months prior to our move, I was waiting for a flight and killing time when I pulled out my laptop to see if there were any good games happening online. Eight hands and 15 minutes later, I’d won $35,000. News of this spread across the poker community. It wasn’t long after that I heard from Dusty and his friend Matt Amen, looking for private instruction. I said I’d be willing to provide it, but at my hourly rate and only if it could be done online. Dusty and Matt said they wanted to meet in person, and they were insistent. I asked them to tell me about themselves, and they sent me a synopsis that included their huge background in golf.

“I LOVE golf,” I wrote back.
In truth, I did love the game but was terrible at it. I sensed a trade was in the offing. If they could get to New York, we’d golf during the day and play poker at night. They were on the next flight out.

It was a great match. They were beautiful people and we’ve been close friends ever since.

My initial impression of Dusty was that he was quiet and reserved (not to mention a phenomenal golfer). Still, his work ethic and the clarity of his focus were incredibly obvious. I monitored his progress in the weeks that followed, and his tenacity was mind-boggling. He was playing eight tables at a time for 100 hours a week — four tables on his desktop and four on his laptop with a touchpad, which was exactly as miserable as it sounds.

Dusty clearly has strong business instincts, but initially he solved problems through brute force. He needed to pay the rent, so he played 400 hours of poker in a month. He did it nonstop, which is how he got the name “Leatherass.”

At the end of the day, it’s true that Dusty is simply willing to outwork everyone else, plain and simple. But sometimes his legendary work ethic does him a disservice. People fail to see the science that he’s come to apply to his poker and his life.

In the months and years that followed our meeting, I saw him become the best out there at approaching poker like a business. Now he’s way out on the leading edge as a poker player and a businessman, with no stone left unturned. Our relationship has evolved from student-teacher to one where we’re peers. In fact, I’m proud to have him as a partner in Stoxpoker.com, which I founded in 2006.
Dusty has a tremendous ability to emotionally detach from his decisions about money and work. He looks at things from an expectation standpoint.

I can also speak to the quality of life his process and mine have lead to for the two of us and our families. Working at home allows me to take my two kids to camps and school, eat lunch with them and do other fun things. I get in about 200 rounds of golf a year, and our life is very fulfilling. Likewise, Dusty’s been able to spread his wings into a variety of business interests, including starting 10thGreen.com, the first social network for golfers. He also is able to participate actively in the life of his wife and child.

This book is concrete evidence of Dusty being ahead of the curve, because it for the first time teaches poker players how to monetize the abilities they hone on sites like Stoxpoker.com. Much of his advice runs counter to the bluster that accounts for a lot of poker discourse these days, and Dusty wouldn’t have it any other way. There is a great life waiting for those who truly commit to the process.

*Nick Grudzien is the founder of Stoxpoker.com. His book, Winning In Tough Hold’em Games, can be purchased at Pokertrainingstore.com.*
Dusty Schmidt

A consummate "grinder," Dusty Schmidt has played nearly 7 million hands of online poker over more than 10,000 hours during his five-year career. He’s won over $3 million during that period, and has never experienced a losing month. In 2007, he achieved Poker Stars’ SuperNova Elite status in just eight months while playing high-stakes cash games exclusively. Schmidt posted the world’s highest win rate in both 5/10 NL and 10/20 NL in both 2007 and 2008. In a four-month period between Nov. 2007 and Feb. 2008, Schmidt won in excess of $600,000 in high-stakes cash games. He is now a highly respected instructor at Stoxpoker.com, and plays as high as 25/50 NL.

As a young man, Schmidt was a top-ranked golfer. He broke two of Tiger Woods’ junior records, and was the leading money winner on the Golden States Tour when, at age 23, he suffered a career-ending heart attack. Schmidt returned to golf in 2009, winning medalist honors in qualifying for the Oregon Amateur Championship. Later that year, Schmidt famously represented himself in federal court in his suit against the United States Golf Association, which controversially stripped him of his amateur status, in part due to his poker profession. Schmidt is now a volunteer assistant coach for the University of Oregon’s men’s golf team, working under his good friend, head coach Casey Martin.
Schmidt is also a successful entrepreneur. He is part-owner of Stoxpoker.com and Imagine Media, and the creator of 10thGreen.com, the first social network for golfers. His story has been featured in Sports Illustrated, Card Player, Poker News, Golf Magazine, Fairways and Greens, Golf Week, Golf World and the Portland Oregonian, as well as on ESPN, cnn.com, wallstreetjournal.com, forbes.com, fortune.com, espn.com, golfdigest.com and golf.com, among many others. He recently founded the House of Cards Project, a philanthropic effort to provide food and shelter to disadvantaged families. His life story will be told in the book "Raise: The Impossibly True Tale of Dusty Schmidt," to be released later in 2010. He lives in Portland, Ore., with his wife, Nicole, and daughter, Lennon.

**Scott Brown**

Scott Brown, co-author of "Treat Your Poker Like A Business," has won national awards as a writer and editor. He attended Santa Clara University, and is a past media fellow at Duke University. Brown’s work has appeared in numerous magazines and newspapers. He is the editor or co-author of several books, including top-sellers "The Major" and "Birdbaths and Paper Cranes." Brown lives in Carmel Valley, Calif., with his wife, Sara, and daughters Emma and Abby.
Imagine Media published and distributed "Treat Your Poker Like A Business" with the invaluable assistance of our friends at FastPencil.

FastPencil is a publishing platform that allows authors to write, share, publish and sell their books. FastPencil strips out the complexity of the publishing process and allows individuals and groups like Imagine to achieve their publishing aspirations.

With FastPencil, authors now have a single service to create and write a book, easily share their work with trusted friends, and publish instantly as traditionally bound or paperless e-books. Through a process called Guided Collaboration, FastPenciler authors can connect with like-minded people, pool resources, chat, gather feedback from reviewers and collaborate with other authors.

For more information, we strongly encourage you to visit www.FastPencil.com.
Sometimes inspiration comes from an unlikely place. Such is the case with Dusty Schmidt’s new memoir, “Raise,” a “Rocky” for the 21st century; a “Cinderella Man” for the Digital Age.

Schmidt’s father sold toys. Never has a profession so ill fit a man, as George Schmidt presided over his children with a thundering tongue and blistering fists. “From an early age,” Schmidt writes, “one thought reverberated through my mind: I must get free of that man. Just the sound of his key in our front lock struck the notion in me like a tuning fork.”

Despite a deficit of anything resembling discernable talent, Schmidt determined at the age of 8 that golf would free him from the tyranny of his upbringing. “I decided golf was my best bet because I could work alone,” he writes. “Nobody was going to hold me back, and nobody was going to outwork me.”

He took to the driving range with a swing unhinged as though he was falling from a tree. Still he blasted 10 buckets a day without exception, cursing when darkness overtook the wilting Southern California sun. His hands bled, his eyes teared and his mind ached. When other kids frolicked, he was grinding. By the time
he was a teenager, Schmidt had assumed Tiger Woods’ mantle as the region’s ”Next Big Thing,” breaking two of Woods’ records in the process.

Schmidt was verging on PGA Tour stardom when, at the age of 23, disaster struck in the form of a heart attack. Just as suddenly, a dream built on the foundation of 10,000 thankless hours was dashed. Medical bills mounted, and his bank account dwindled. Unable to do so much as a pushup, a future shrouded by his family’s willful neglect seemed all but certain.

Faced with the prospect of crawling from his sickbed to a soul-devouring job at his father’s business, an angel showed up at Schmidt’s doorstep on Christmas night. Fittingly, his name was Amen — Matt Amen, a close friend from their junior golf days. ”I will give you this shirt,” Matt said, proffering a gift given by his grandmother an hour before, ”if you give me $50. You can return it tomorrow for twice that.”

Within minutes, Amen was bent over Schmidt’s laptop, and the $50 was out there in the ether, wagered on online poker. Schmidt looked on as more cash was won or lost on a single hand than he could make in a month working under his dad.

”And that,” Schmidt writes, ”was my introduction to the game. I literally had no idea how to play. We had the tables open on one screen, and The Rules of Poker open on the other.”

In just three years, Schmidt would go on to earn a seven-figure annual income and redraw poker’s natural boundaries.
But to get to that point, he’d have to reapply the entrepreneurial drive that carried him to golfing glory. Handicapped once again by a lack of native talent, he studied poker manuals and memorized math tables, while grinding on hand after hand after bloody hand. He built up to playing 20 hands at once, 1,200 high-stakes hands an hour, 7,000-plus hands a day, and nearly 2 million hands a year. He played over 6 million hands in three years — maybe more poker than anyone has ever played.

His workmanlike approach to the game earned Schmidt the call sign for which he is now famous: Leatherass. But his success earned him something far more precious — his freedom.

Along the way, Schmidt literally and figuratively healed his broken heart. And as he’d done with golf and poker, he built a family where before there’d been nothing but air. He’d also revive his golf career — a pursuit that ended up in federal court with Schmidt defending himself against golf’s Goliath, the USGA, which took offense to his day job.

From a poker world famous for its bravado emerges the soft-spoken Schmidt, who — despite the nickname — proves to be as unhardened as they come. Today he’s focused his sights on philanthropy, with the goal of making "a global impact." He recently started the House of Cards Project, in which he and other poker players devote a week’s earnings to buying homes for needy families in Detroit and New Orleans.

In "Raise," Schmidt has written a deeply felt, emotionally gripping and darkly funny memoir. It is as sad, true and funny a book as one will find this season.
"Raise" is a roller-coaster ride through the devastating lows and unparalleled highs of Schmidt's incomparable life. The book transcends the golf and poker genres, and stands to win meaning with individuals and businesses worldwide. It should be on the reading list of anyone who cares about the human condition.

The highly anticipated "Raise," which is co-authored by Schmidt and Scott Brown, with a foreword by golfer Casey Martin, will be released in Spring 2010. Advanced copies can be pre-ordered at www.dustyschmidt.net
“The story of Dusty Schmidt is interesting, scary, tragic, life affirming and reassuringly unique. The manner in which the cash-game specialist known as ‘Leatherass’ found his way onto the virtual felt itself is pretty jaw-dropping.” — POKER NEWS

“Dusty Schmidt, a.k.a. Leatherass, (is) an online poker pro with a seven-figure income and a reputation for mental gymnastics. He went from amateur to Top 10 in a very short time, and the money went from a hundred grand a year to a million.” — SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

“No live games. No Vegas. No ESPN. Just a lot of poker — more than 7 million hands in five years. Maybe more than any person has ever played. That repetition and a solid business strategy to reduce risk and recognize ‘edge’ has made him one of the most profitable players in the online game’s short but growing history.” — FAIRWAYS AND GREENS

PLUS

SOME OF THE MOST IMPORTANT POKER INSTRUCTION IN PRINT

Dusty “Leatherass” Schmidt is known as the definitive “grinder,” with a legendary ability to focus during marathon online sessions. But this isn’t the ability to which he attributes his success. Instead, Schmidt says his multi-million dollar achievements are due to his ability to apply old-fashioned business concepts to the game of poker.

Five years into his career, Schmidt’s resumé is legendary: Nearly 7 million hands and 10,000 hours played. Mind-blowing win rates spanning massive sample sizes. $3 million won in cash games exclusively. Never had a losing month. Unbeknownst to Schmidt, combining poker and business was revolutionary (and somewhat controversial) in a poker world fueled largely by bravado. With Treat Your Poker Like A Business, Schmidt teaches other online players to monetize their abilities as he did. “All of the poker books and training sites have made poker players’ games better,” Schmidt writes. “But they haven’t necessarily taught them to make money.” Schmidt teaches readers how to manage bankroll, rationalize variance, play more tables, move up in stakes, avoid tilt, create new sources of revenue, and — most importantly — become more profitable.

Just as Moneyball did for baseball, Treat Your Poker Like A Business is poised to have a seismic impact on how poker is played, viewed and analyzed.

$39.95


Imagine Media
Portland * San Francisco
www.dustyschmidt.net

Cover image: iStockphoto°