

WSOP
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FREEROLL

POKER STRATEGY YOU CAN USE

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WILL YOU SHOW IF I FOLD?

Excerpt from Zachary Elwood's new book Verbal Poker Tells, available now online and in some bookstores now.

The question "Will you show if I fold?" is a commonly heard one. Most players have heard this question many times and will have a stock response to this phrase, like "maybe" or "I don't answer that," or they will just keep quiet. For this reason, most responses to this question won't contain much information. Sometimes, though, answers may reveal how relaxed a player is, which will often be connected to hand strength. Let's look more closely at the affirmative and negative responses to this question.

"I'll show you."

Affirmative responses, like "Yeah, sure" or "Sure, I'll show you," can have a wide range of meanings. Many players are capable of answering affirmatively with a wide range of hands.

For this reason, there aren't many good generalizations that can be made about a willingness to show cards. Information gathered from this response will mostly have to depend on player history and situation. For example, some players may tend to say "yes" to this question more when weak; others may tend to do this more when strong.

Sometimes affirmative responses will be accompanied by extraneous phrases that might clue you in to a player's comfort level. Extraneous phrases will be more meaningful than the affirmative response. For example, a player is asked, "Will you show if I fold?" and he replies, "Yeah, sure. Why not? But you'll owe me one." His willingness to speak more than is necessary may be an indicator of relaxation.

NEGATIVE OR IRRITATED RESPONSES

Negative responses to this question are more meaningful than affirmative responses. Negative responses are more likely to be indicators that a player has a strong hand. This is because some negative responses can be interpreted as unfriendly or goading, and bluffers usually don't want to risk making an opponent upset. Most bluffers want to stay friendly and conciliatory. Usually, if a bluffer is asked this question, he'll either stay quiet or answer "Maybe" or "I don't know" in a neutral way.

This pattern is especially reliable when negative re-

sponses are accompanied with irritated or angry ways of speaking. A bettor who's willing to display irritation when asked this question is unlikely to be bluffing. (See the chapter Irritation With An Opponent.)

UNCERTAINTY AND LOOSENESS

As with uncertainty and verbal looseness in general, responses to this question that seem hesitant or uncertain will likely be signs of relaxation and strength. Players who are bluffing generally want to convey certainty, while players who want a call have a motivation for seeming uncertain.

PEOPLE WHO ASK THIS ARE USUALLY FOLDING

Looking at things from the other player's point of view, a person who asks this question is usually planning on folding. The person asking it is just looking for some last minute piece of information that might change his mind. (Most pieces of information that can be gained from a response to this question are indicators that a player is relaxed, so it's not surprising that nothing ends up changing most players' minds.) Also, players who ask this are often already certain they're folding but just want to increase the chances they get to see their opponent's cards.

Knowing that an opponent who asks this question is probably folding might sometimes impact your behavior. For example, if you know an opponent is probably folding but you want a call, you may try to get a call in some way (however you think that might be accomplished).

EXAMPLES

Heartland Poker Tour NLHE tournament, Golden Gates Casino, 2012, E1, ~20:00

On a turn board of $\heartsuit 9$ $\clubsuit 9$ $\spadesuit 8$ $\diamondsuit 4$, Steen Ronlov leads out for 1.8M into a pot of 1.7M.

His opponent asks, "Gonna show me this one?"

Ronlov smiles, laughs, coughs, and says, "That's 'cause I showed all yesterday. Showed everything. [indistinct] expect me to show. [indistinct, but he seems to agree to show] I'm a good guy."

Results: His opponent folds $\heartsuit A$ $\heartsuit Q$. Ronlov has $\heartsuit J$ $\heartsuit T$, for the flopped straight. He shows it.

Ronlov agreeing to show here is probably not meaningful in itself. This is especially the case if he's been agreeing to show a lot in the past. But his loose and

(continued on page 8)

POKER IS A SKILL: POSITION

Are you happy with your poker results? If your answer is “yes,” that’s awesome. Go you! Check out some of the more advanced articles by my fellow writers in the Freeroll. But if your answer is “no,” then don’t despair. You’re in the right place. I’ll show you how to correct simple mistakes and get on your way toward better poker results.

Start From A Position Of Power

The first decision you make in a hand of poker will often be the most important one. To wit: “You’ve gotta know when to hold ‘em, know when to fold ‘em.” Getting involved with a strong hand might be elementary, but knowing what to do with a weak hand can be a mystery. Folding a weak hand in a bad position may prevent a cascade of bad decisions on future streets, while playing some weaker hands at the right times may allow you to squeeze extra profit out of good situations.

If you want to make money at poker, you must require at least one of two things in order to get involved in a pot:

- A good hand
- A good situation

A Good Hand

As stated, a strong hand almost plays itself. You don’t need me to tell you that you should always play pocket aces in holdem (with the exception of some bizarre tournament situations – let’s not talk about that). Other hands, like pocket kings, queens, and ace-king should almost always be played as well.

“Good hands” include pocket pairs, big aces (like ace-king, ace-queen and ace-jack), suited broadways (any two suited cards higher than a nine), and suited connectors (like ten-nine down through seven-six). For the right price, you should play most of these hands most of the time.

But what do you do with pocket queens or ace-king when a tight player raises, another tight player re-raises, and the tightest player on the planet moves all-in? You fold. This takes us back to “Stop Losing Part 2: Understand Relative Strength.” Your pocket queens turn into pocket crap when your opponent definitely has aces or kings. The strength of your hand is relative to the strength of your opponent’s range. The strength of your hand depends on the situation.

A Good Situation

Some good situations require skill, judgment, and perception to identify. Let’s focus on an easy one.

You’re on the button, the blinds are two of the tightest players you’ve ever seen, and everyone else at the table has folded. In this situation, you needn’t bother to even look at your cards. You’re in a great situation. How do I love this situation? Let me count the ways:

By raising, you will win the blinds a huge percentage of the time. That’s like free money.

If one or both of the blinds see the flop, you will be in position. That’s good. More on this in a moment.

When your very tight opponents see the flop, it will be easy to read them since their ranges are so tight and predictable. Their strong ranges will make it harder for you to win with a weak hand, but it will be easier for you to fold or continue with confidence. You’ll have less uncertainty about your opponents’ ranges.

Position

There were three things that made the last situation great, but position was by far the most important. In fact, it’s one of the most important concepts in poker.

When we say that you “have position” or that you are “in position,” we’re saying that you are last to act. While the blinds get to act last before the flop, they have to act first on every other street. When you’re on the button, you always get to see what your opponents do before deciding what action you want to take. That’s power. That’s position.

On the button, you can play many hands before the flop. You know that you’ll have a big advantage after the flop, so your cards don’t need to be as strong. Unless the blinds are super aggressive, you can play any pair, any ace, any two suited cards, any two cards higher than a nine, and any connected cards seven-six and higher. Strong players in the blinds should encourage you to tighten up (i.e. play fewer hands) and weak or tight players in the blinds allow you to loosen up (i.e. play some even weaker hands).

If you’re in the cutoff (i.e. the seat to the right of the button), you’ve got the second best position. The button has position on you, but if this player folds before the flop, it’s like you’ve stolen the

button. You can’t play as many hands in the cutoff as you can on the button, but you can still play a lot. Exactly how many you should play depends on the tendencies of the button and the blinds. Weak players let you play more, and strong players make you play fewer.

As you get further and further away from the button, you need to tighten up more and more. There are two reasons for this. The first is that you become less likely to have position after the flop. So you’re more likely to be acting with less information than your opponent will have after you bet or check. The second reason is that there are more players to act behind you before the flop. This increases the chances of someone picking up a big hand and re-raising you.

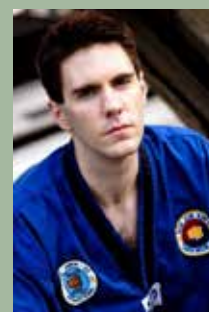
Specific Guidelines

This article has contained only general guidelines so far. If you’d like more specific guidelines, check out my ebooklet, White Chip Poker, available on Leanpub.com. It has starting hand guidelines that will keep you out of trouble while allowing you to maximize your opportunities.

The Importance Of Discipline

We talked about understanding variance in the last article. Bad variance can often lead to tilt and tilt can lead to losing lots of money fast. One of the easiest ways to tilt off your stack is to get involved in too many hands. If you can make your preflop play automatic and conservative as you build up your game, you can save yourself a lot of money and heartache. Consistently folding those hopeless hands will keep you out of a lot of trouble. Starting from a position of power makes all of your decisions easier and more profitable.

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I believe almost anyone can win \$5k playing live poker if they work hard enough and on the right things. And I'm not talking about luckboxing a tournament for a \$5k score. I'm talking about grinding it up a few hundred at a time playing \$1-\$2 and \$2-\$5 level live games.

The beauty of doing it this way, of course, is that it's repeatable. If you have the skill to win your first \$5k at these levels, you likely can do it again. Once you have this level of proficiency, no-limit hold'em becomes a very satisfying endeavor.

To get to that level, however, I believe that you need ten distinct skills. Here they are, rapid-fire style.

1. See the big picture.

Most people choose a game to play without thinking too much about it. They go to their normal room, put their name on the list for the stakes they usually play, and then they go play the game they get called to.

Beyond that, most people just kind of play hands as they come. They sit and make decisions on one hand and then the next with little thought to the bigger picture.

To succeed, you need to understand the big picture. How are you going to make money doing what you're doing? Where is the money going to come from? And what tweaks should you make to your normal routine to maximize that money source? Strong players think this way every time.

2. Play tight preflop.

In live no-limit games, nearly everyone plays too loosely preflop. Since it's a near universal disorder, on one level you put yourself at no disadvantage by also playing too loose. But on the flipside, you can gain an immediate, inherent advantage if you play tighter than everyone else.

Some players are so confident with the rest of their game that they feel they can play loose and take advantage of it. But the vast majority of \$1-\$2 and \$2-\$5 players would improve immediately if they played tighter.

3. Bet your hands.

This skill is one that many players at the level have begun to master, but it warrants mention. When you make a hand, by-and-large, you need to bet it.

Also, you frequently need to be decisive. You need to decide which hands are strong enough that they need to be bet and which ones fall short of that and don't need to be bet. Many players try to split the difference with the hands in the middle (e.g., top pair of aces with no kicker) by making small-sized probing bets. This strategy has its place against the weakest players, but if you try it against better players you will be immediately pummeled.

The bottom line? You need to learn which hands demand bets and bet them.

4. Lay hands down to big turn or river bets.

When your opponents bet big on the turn or river, they're betting a polarized range. That is, they either have a very strong hand, or they're bluffing. Most players at the \$1-\$2 and \$2-\$5 levels do not

make big bluffs often enough, compared to what is theoretically correct. Thus, it is generally correct to lay down all of your bluff-catching hands to these bets. And, in this case, any hand that is worse than what your opponent would require to make such a large bet is a bluff-catcher.

This rule can demand you fold hands like top pair, two pair, and sometimes even trips or small flushes.

5. Bet the turn.

Since most people play too many hands preflop, they end up with too many weak hands after the flop. If you're caught with too many weak hands, you can do only one of two things with them: call them down to showdown, or fold. In today's game, many players choose to fold most of these hands. The turn is a key point in the hand—many of these players will "take one off" on the flop with a fairly wide range, but when the hands remain weak on the turn, they fold.

Thus, you should bet the turn. If it's checked to me, in most \$1-\$2 and \$2-\$5 games I need a compelling reason not to fire the turn.

6. Bet after your opponents give up.

Whenever your opponent has been driving the betting, the hand can play out one of two ways. He can bet all the way to the river. Or he can give up short of that, checking in a spot he could have bet. When your opponents give up on their betting initiative with a check, you should bet. Unless your opponent is far trickier than most, this pattern of giving up indicates that a bluff will succeed often enough to be automatically profitable.

7. Look for bet-sizing tells.

Players at the \$1-\$2 and \$2-\$5 level often size their bets based on how they feel about their hand or on what they're trying to accomplish. If you pay attention to the sizes they choose, you can frequently reverse-engineer the bet to narrow down ranges or to detect weakness or strength. For example, players at this level are not making small bets on the turn on a draw-heavy board with a set. Bet-sizing tells carry information that can give you a large edge.

8. Draw hands out.

The typical \$1-\$2 and \$2-\$5 player is uncomfortable playing substantial pots on the turn and river. Resist the urge to end hands early, for instance by shoving the flop. Most of the advantage you can generate at these levels depends on your opponents betraying too much information about their hands. Unless you have a compelling reason to do otherwise, it's usually best to keep throwing the action back to your opponents. Your opponent can't give you bet-sizing tells if you just shovel your chips in the middle at the first opportunity.

9. Be consistent.

Consistency is paramount. Think about restaurants. All successful chain restaurants go to great lengths to make sure that when you order a menu item, it is virtually exactly the same no matter whether you're in Miami or Montana. It's not spicier or sweeter. It's not more or less cooked. It's iden-

tical every time. Without this consistently, people wouldn't trust the restaurant and it would fail.

You have to be just as consistent every time you play poker. You should play exactly as tight preflop every time. You should always bet your hands. You should always lay down to big bets. And so on. Yes, I understand that game conditions change, but many players at the level use the excuse that they're "adjusting" to opponents to excuse lax, lazy, and ultimately losing play.

My game is remarkably consistent from table to table and from week to week. In my opinion, consistency in your play is absolutely vital.

10. Practice every day.

If you want to be successful at poker, you must practice on a near daily basis. You don't have to put in live sessions every day (though it helps). But you must work on your game every day. The best way to work when you aren't playing is to analyze a hand you've played. Reading and watching videos also helps. If you resolve to work every day to get a little bit better, you will give yourself the best chance to win your first \$5k.

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THE SHORT STOP: ALL-IN VULNERABILITY

You are a winning \$1/2 regular who has had his eye on that juicy \$5/10 game that has been running for the last 6 hours. You have never played that big before and perhaps you are out of your league a bit, but you don't want to be grinding it out on your leather ass for the rest of your life, either. You get on the waiting list and plan on giving this short stack business a shot. Professional platitudes aside, your plan is to just ride out your minimum buy in, stick around and "freeroll" if you double up.

The buy in is \$500, so you peel off some c-notes and post in on the BB. A middle-aged guy comes walking to the table and sits down in front of a previously unclaimed stack of about \$3,500. He is eager to get back into the game and puts up a Mississippi straddle of \$50 on the hijack, a rule that allows a player to blindly post an unlimited amount in any position except the blinds and then take last action preflop. It is an unwritten law here that straddlers must be punished for disrupting the civility of the game and somehow hands like K9o magically transform into AKs when a bit of dead money is dropped into the pot.

An equally deep player on the cutoff strikes first and makes it \$200. Spotting an opportunity to capitalize on the situation, the aggressive and talented pro sitting on \$5,000 makes it \$450, seemingly a positional 3-bet meant to cause some postflop discomfort. The SB folds and you look down and gleefully see two black aces. You obviously are riding this one to the felt, but if history is any indicator, you can't remember the last time you saw a straddler post for this much and then fold, even facing a cold 3-bet out of position. By the way he is leaning forward and watching the action intensely, it seems clear that he wants in on it, and your shove isn't going to deter him. This is either going to be a 5 star night or you are going to drive home crying. As you instinctively cup your hand behind your stack, you hesitate at the last second as a new idea forms in your brain. You cut 10 red chips off one of your stacks, put them back against the rail, and quietly push forward \$450 for the call.

The straddler happily comes along and a flop is T65, all hearts. You double check your aces in the vain hope that you misread their suits. Alas, they are still black and you cringe, but it's inconsequential at this point. Barring a miracle flop of top boat or quads, you were going to stick it in no matter what came down, so you put your last \$50 in the pot. The UTG guy won't be humiliated so easily and casually matches your bet. The second guy hesitates for only a second before following. Being so deep with so much money in the middle, it's not customary in this cardroom for guys to be so passive in this spot with anything except the nuts or really weak hands, so the pro, emboldened by their display of weakness, thinks for 30 seconds and takes a confident posture and ships it with for a chance to freeroll against you. The straddler turbo mucks, but the second guy curses and leaps from his chair and starts pacing around.

"You flop a flush with QJ? A set of sixes? Whatever...I fold."

The pro stoically flips over 6d5d for bottom two pair. You turn over your AA it raises a few eyebrows around the table. The dealer counterfeits the small two pair with a ten on the turn and the guy who just folded whines about mucking JT with the J of hearts. You fade a river 4 and gratefully scoop the pot.

Would the pro have taken such a bold line with a relatively weak hand if the first two players hadn't revealed a hint of weakness? We will never know for sure, but I think we can ascertain that if the action checked to him and he had bet anything less than 75% of the pot, or worse, had checked it through out of caution, the initial raiser would be taking down this pot.

While an outcome like this might be as rare as a garden gnome in Antarctica, you don't need to have a black swan swoop down from the sky to crap in someone's pond to score some extra cash from this play. It's just simple math. Let's look at this from two different angles on a random board while discounting the extra \$5 from the SB fold. For simplicity's sake, let's assign the raiser and the pro a random hand while giving A9o to the straddler, which has the worst possible equity vs. AA.

Player	Contribution	Total Pot	Hand	Win %	Equity
You	\$500	\$2,000	AA	68	\$1,360
Straddler	\$500		A9o	5.2	\$104
Raiser	\$500		random	13.4	\$268
Pro	\$500		random	13.4	\$268

Even with the very worst match up against your hand preflop, the straddler still has \$104 equity in a \$2,000 pot on a random flop if it were to check down...but you made a long-term profit of \$860, so who cares! Here's a second scenario, where we push out his miniscule 5.2% winning chance, thereby losing out on his \$50 while the remaining 2 players call and check it down.

Player	Contribution	Total Pot	Hand	Win %	Equity
You	\$500	\$1,950	AA	73.5	\$1,433
Straddler	\$450		??	0	\$0
Raiser	\$500		random	13.25	\$258.50
Pro	\$500		random	13.25	\$258.50

You haven't gotten any better as a player, yet you just made an extra \$73 and reduced the chance of going home in tears! Feel free to think of any alternate scenarios you wish, but if you think your last \$50 has no effect on the action, you should petition your state gaming commission to move limit hold'em tables to the pit and rename them Two Card Poker Showdown. All-in vulnerability is what occurs when your chips are inevitably going in the pot, yet you find yourself powerless to induce any opponent mistakes. In other words, it hurts you, rather than helps you. If you put everything in now, you might as well declare to the table that you are checking dark the whole way because there is no difference. No matter how small the bet might be, saving a bit for the flop does give you an ounce of aggressive weight, and as we all know, the heart of winning poker is aggression.

The best part is that you don't need to have AA to pull this off. In fact, the concept becomes far more powerful as your hand becomes weaker, as increasing 5% equity to just 10% is a 100% relative improvement, as opposed to the 8.1% relative improvement in the AA example. Now that you have been primed with a new perspective, drop by The Short Stop again next month for some mind-bending variations on this play!

Lorin Yelle



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BOOK EXCERPT: POKER PLAYS YOU CAN USE

Delay continuation bet against Nits.



(Villain's flaw)



(Difficulty rating)
Related Missions: 5, 10



(Hero's exploit)

Continuation betting is important, but there are situations where you can delay the continuation bet and therefore get nearly perfect information about your opponent's hand.

\$2-\$5 Belagio	Image:	Action:	Hand:	Starting Stack:
...				
MP3	Nit	Limp/Call	<div>?</div> <div>?</div>	Covers
Button	Hero	\$30	<div>Q</div> <div>9</div>	\$630
...				

We are pretty happy to isolate the nit from the Button. He will often limp-call but fold before showdown. Sometimes we just win the blinds and a limper's call here. Both are good results.

<div>A</div> <div>2</div> <div>2</div>	Pot: \$67	Range:	Starting Stack:
Nit	Check	<div>?</div> <div>?</div>	Covers
Hero	Check	<div>Q</div> <div>9</div>	\$600

The nit is not going to put a lot of money into this pot without a hand, specifically, an Ace. If we continuation bet, we will not fold out better hands, but we will be called by better and have very little equity. However, if we let the turn come out, the Nit will let us know he has an Ace and we can safely fold. However, a second check gives us the green light to take the pot.

Again we see the main theme: Villain poorly hides information about his hand. We understand the flaw, then we exploit it. He would not check an Ace here since he always has a good kicker with that Ace. He would not call without an Ace. We can bet with near impunity.

<div>A</div> <div>2</div> <div>2</div> <div>7</div>	Pot: \$67	Range:	Starting Stack:
Nit	Check/Fold	<div></div> <div></div>	Covers
Hero	\$35	<div>Q</div> <div>9</div>	\$600



It does not always go our way with this delayed continuation bet, but saving money is just as good as making it.

\$1-\$2	Image:	Action:	Hand:	Starting Stack:
Cutoff	Nit	Call/Call	<div>?</div> <div>?</div>	\$400
...				
Button	Hero	\$12	<div>K</div> <div>Q</div>	Covers

<div>3</div> <div>6</div> <div>A</div>	Pot: \$27	Range:	Stack:
Nit (Cutoff)	Check	<div>?</div> <div>?</div>	...
Hero (Button)	Check	<div>K</div> <div>Q</div>	...

We could continuation bet here, but if we are getting a fold now, we will just as often get it on the turn. A nit would usually check-call with an Ace here, and we just should not be in the business of trying to take a nit off top pair on a dry board. Let us see what the turn brings.

<div>3</div> <div>6</div> <div>A</div> <div>9</div>	Pot: \$27	Range:	Stack:
Nit (Cutoff)	\$20	<div>?</div> <div>?</div>	...
Hero (Button)	Fold	<div>K</div> <div>Q</div>	...

We cannot win them all. The nit is going to show up with either a decent Ace or at least a suited Ace here almost every time. They just do not have that much adventure in them out of position against a raise on an Ace high board. To have any hope of getting him off this hand, we would need to raise now and barrel the river. That does not seem profitable. Fold, knowing we saved our continuation bet on this hand.

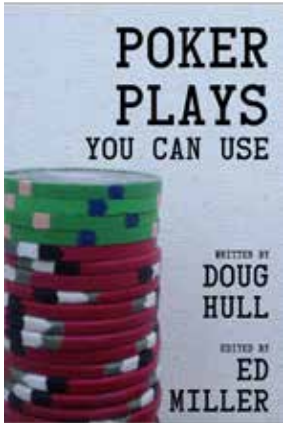
A guide to reading these hands

This book is laid out differently than other poker books. A tabular format is used so that all the relevant stack sizes, positions, holdings and table images are easily seen during every street.

\$2-\$5 Foxwoods	Image:	Action:	Hand:	Starting Stack:
UTG	LAG	Call/Call	<div>?</div> <div>?</div>	\$450
...				
Cutoff	Bad regular	Call/Fold	<div></div> <div></div>	...
...				
Button	Hero	\$30	<div>K</div> <div>Q</div>	Covers

In this format, the action of each player is in the action column. If a player makes multiple actions per street, they are separated by slashes. This hand would be written out as follows:

"A Loose Aggressive player limps Under the Gun. It is folded to a bad regular in the cutoff who also limps. Hero raises on the Button and only the LAG calls."



Doug Hull



@3BarrelBluff • www.ThreeBarrelBluff.com

BOOK EXCERPT: LIVE NO-LIMIT CASH GAMES

Playing from the Small Blind

The small blind differs from all other positions in that you will be out of position throughout the hand. In this section we will discuss every situation besides heads-up spots against the big blind, which we will examine later.

Facing a standard pre-flop raise in the small blind, you will be getting a small discount to take a flop compared to all other positions besides the big blind. Most amateurs use this as justification to call with a wide range from the small blind, hoping to flop well. You should actually play a snug pre-flop strategy from the small blind, usually three-betting or folding when facing only one raiser. This is because if you call an initial raise, you will be giving the big blind excellent odds to call, and he will have relative position throughout the hand. Relative position stems from the fact that both you and the big blind will frequently check the flop, the initial raiser will usually continuation-bet, and you will have to make your decision before the big blind, so that he will see what everyone else does before making his decision. Since you will be on the losing end of this deal, you usually want the big blind out of the hand, especially if he plays reasonably well.

Suppose someone in middle position raises to 3 big blinds out of his 150-big blind stack. As long as the initial raiser is not overly tight and the big blind is a decent player, you should re-raise or fold almost every hand you plan on playing. If the initial raiser is tight, meaning he will have most of your three-betting range crushed and you will have very little pre-flop fold equity, or if you want the big blind in the hand because he is a terrible player, you should call with most hands. When you three-bet from out of position in either blind, you usually want to make a slightly larger than pot-sized re-raise to give yourself a bit more pre-flop fold equity and reduce your opponent's implied odds. Here you should make it between 10 and 11 big blinds.

If the big blind is an especially bad player with many easily exploitable post-flop leaks, you should call a raise in the small blind with hands that flop well and three-bet with those that flop poorly. For example, it's fine to call a raise with

A♣J♠, **9♣7♣** or **33** from the small blind if you expect the big blind to call with a wide range of hands against which you will fare well. However, you should usually three-bet with hands such as **A♠4♣** and **K♦5♦**, assuming you want to play them in the first place. There is nothing wrong with folding these hands when out of position.

I actually play much tighter in the small blind than most players because I realize how detrimental it is to be out of position. If you play a LAG strategy from every other position, your opponents will usually not notice your tightness from the small blind. This will allow you to get full value from your strong hands when out of position without giving too much action in return.

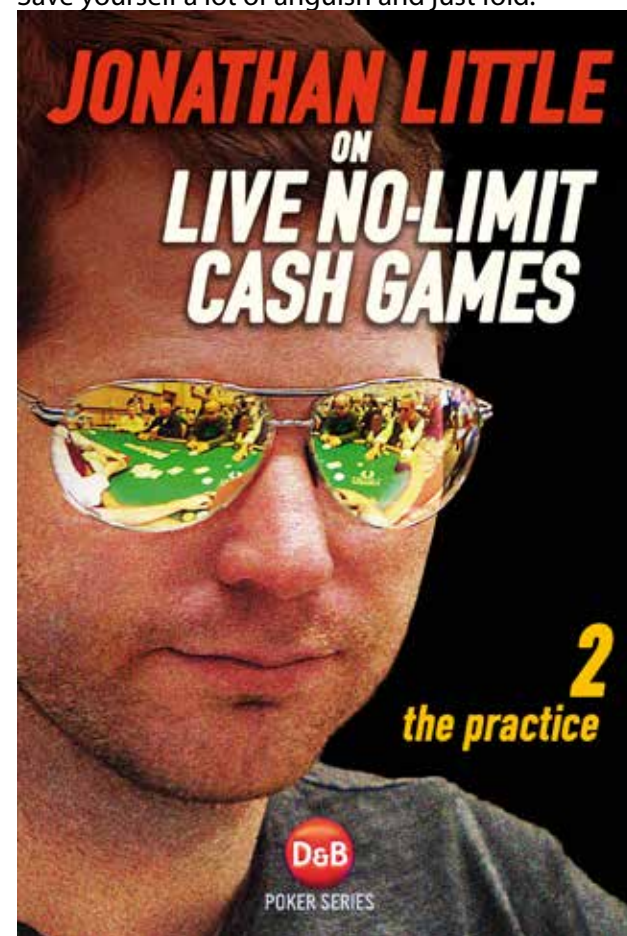
Facing one or more limpers, tend to call the extra half of a big blind with a range of hands that will do well against your opponents' limping ranges. This typically means folding hands that are dominated or have little potential, such as **Ax**, **Kx**, **8♣5♥** and **4♠2♠**. Call with hands that can flop reasonably well, such as **AT**, **33**, **J♣7♣**, **Q♠9♥** and **8♣5♣**.

If the big blind happens to raise, you should only call with hands that do well against a reasonably tight range because most players in the big blinds will only raise with a strong holding. Even if the big blind raises and multiple players call, you should fold hands such as **AT**, **98** and **Q♠8♠**, despite the good odds. When out of position against a strong range, you should simply get out of the way unless your hand has a lot of potential. If there is a raise from the big blind and multiple callers, feel free to call if you have a hand with high implied odds, such as **A♠4♠**, **9♣8♣** and **33**.

The strategy outlined earlier for playing against three-, four- and five-bettors generally applies to small blind play as well. The main difference is that if called, you will be out of position in a large pot, which is not desirable at all unless your opponent will frequently fold to your continuation bets after the flop. This should again lead you to play tightly from the small blind.

You will find a few more opportunities to re-raise as a bluff from the small blind because, quite often, someone will raise from early or middle position and a player will call in late position, hoping to see a cheap flop. You can then make a pot-sized re-raise and frequently pick up the pot. If one player calls, you can continuation-bet fairly often, expecting your opponents to play straightforwardly. Most of your profit from this play will come from your pre-flop fold equity, so you need to know your opponents will fold often before getting too far out of line.

Let me make it perfectly clear that you should play tightly from the small blind. It is by far the worst seat at the table. Calling raises in the hope of seeing cheap flops will usually lead to significant trouble later in the hand. Re-raising will often result in your playing a bloated pot from out of position. Save yourself a lot of anguish and just fold.

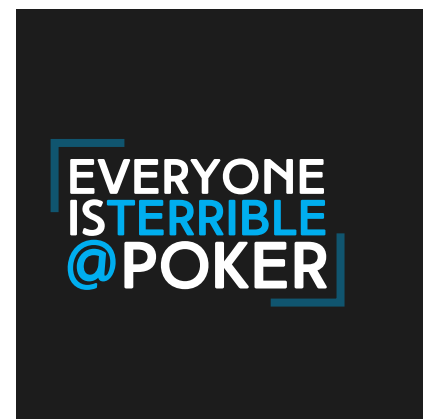
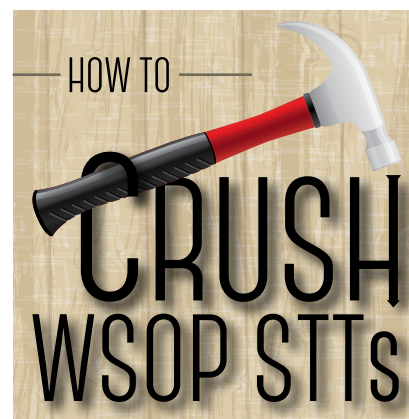


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OVERCONFIDENCE: SILENT KILLER

You'll often hear it said that confidence is needed for success. But is that really true? As with many things in the mental game, the truth emerges once you better understand the nature of confidence. Confidence is a funny thing because people can be confident while having very little skill. Of course, the poker players who think like this are the ones you line up to sit with, but understanding how this can happen is important to avoiding overconfidence. This phenomenon has actually been studied

and it's called the Dunning-Kruger Effect. The Dunning-Kruger Effect is a cognitive bias in which the unskilled suffer from illusory superiority, mistakenly rating their ability much higher than average. This bias is attributed to an inability of the unskilled to recognize their mistakes. In other words, being blind to your own weaknesses, or worse, blind to the reality that you have weaknesses makes you overconfident.

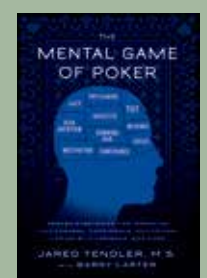
Ignorance of your own ignorance creates overconfidence. This kind of overconfidence has consumed some of great poker players over the years because they were blind to what created their success. Blindness to your own weaknesses is why overconfidence is a silent killer.

Another major thing that Dunning & Kruger found is that people with actual skill often have low confidence. "Actual competence may weaken self-confidence as competent individuals may falsely assume that others have an equivalent understanding." Actual skill weakens confidence! Incredible when you think about it. I've also found that confidence can decrease when you learn more. Finding out how much more there is to learn can make you feel like you actually don't know that much. But this is just another part of the same illusion. While it may seem to them as though they don't know much, in reality they already know more than their most of their competitors.

Another reason confidence is a tricky concept is that having too much confidence can destroy prior success. Part of the problem with the idea that confidence is needed for success is that people don't often look beyond the finish line — to what happens after they win their first big tournament or move up to \$5/\$10. Having too much confidence will make you believe that your success means you'll have more of it in the future, no matter what you do. Of course, the opposite is true and poker is littered with stories of players going bust after winning big tournaments or players who got complacent after the internet boom. I interviewed Gavin Griffin (the first player to ever win an EPT, WPT, and WSOP title) on my podcast in 2012 and he talked at length about how this exact problem caused him to end up back playing low stakes.

What's the lesson? Becoming successful – whatever that means to you – isn't enough. You have to think beyond your initial target and look towards the long-term. If your goal is to move up to \$2/\$4, add the goal of consistently beating the regulars at \$2/\$4. It's not enough just to get there, you have to stay there and that means constantly improving, celebrating your small successes along the way, and realizing you always have weaknesses to work on. Overconfidence causes complacency, and the combination can be lethal to your long-term success in poker. A simple way of avoiding overconfidence is to remember that you always have weaknesses, and things to improve, in order to stay on top of your game and continue to be successful.

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WILL YOU SHOW IF I FOLD? CONTINUED

Show If I Fold: continued from page 1

extraneous statements are probable indicators that he's relaxed with the situation.

\$1-2 NLHE cash game, witnessed by author
The river board is 8♠ 6♦ 4♠ Q♥ 2♥.
The player who had bet the turn now bets \$120 into a pot of \$150.

I say, "I've got a big pair. Will you show if I fold?"

The player says quickly, with a lot of emphasis, "Sure!"

Results: I fold my A♠ Q♠. The player shows Q♦ 8♦, for top two pair.

While this player's agreeing to show wasn't likely to be meaningful in itself, his immediate and loose response made me feel confident that he was relaxed.

\$2-5 NLHE cash game, witnessed by author
In a 3-way pot, on a river board of 6♦ 4♥ 3♦ K♠ 5♣, a player bets \$130 into the \$160 pot. Her opponent asks, "Will you show if I fold?"

She laughs in an irritated way and shakes her head emphatically.

Her opponent asks, "No?"

She says, "No" quite sternly.

Results: The player calls. The bettor has 8♦ 7♦, for the nut straight.

A recreational player willing to show irritation in response to this question will usually be strong.

High Stakes Poker, high stakes NLHE cash game, S2 E4, ~10:00

On a river board of 7♣ 4♦ 2♠ J♦ K♥, Sam Farha bets \$20,000 into a pot of \$22,400. Fred Chamanara considers.

Chamanara and Farha talk a long time as Chamanara thinks. Farha is very talkative and very exuberant. One of their last interactions is this:

Chamanara: "Tell you what; you gonna show your hand to me?"

Farha (immediately, dismissively): "Never, to nobody. But I'll do some business deal, what do you want me to do? Take five back or..." They continue to talk.

Results: Chamanara folds his 9♠ 9♦. Farha has J♥ 4♥ for two pair.

"Farha's immediate and exuberant negative response to Chamanara's question makes a bluff unlikely."

Farha's immediate and exuberant negative response to Chamanara's question makes a bluff unlikely.

2008 WSOP NLHE Main Event tournament, E3, ~20:00

On a river board of A♠ K♥ J♠ T♣ T♦, Roberto Romanello bets 1,800 into a pot of 1,950.

Greg Geller raises to 6,000. The third player

folds.

Romanello considers.

Geller: "Just don't raise me."

Romanello: "You show if I pass?"

Geller: "Pardon me?"

Romanello: "You show if I pass?"

Geller: "No."

Romanello: "One time?"

Geller (shaking head, emphatically): "No."

After another 25 seconds, Geller says, "Okay, I'll show."

Results: Romanello has J♥ J♦ and folds his full house. Geller has K♠ K♣, for the better full house.

Geller's immediate negative responses to Romanello's questions could be interpreted as dismissive or rude. This makes it likely he has a strong hand. The strangeness of Geller suddenly stating that he's changed his mind about showing his cards is probably also a sign of relaxation.

\$1-2 NLHE cash game, witnessed by author
I have A♥ K♦ and I'm heads-up with the pre-flop raiser. The flop is 7♦ 5♠ 2♠. I check and he checks behind.

The turn is the T♠. I check and he bets \$50 into the \$30 pot. I call and am prepared to call many river bets.

The river is the 9♠, putting four spades on the board.

I check and he bets \$100 into the \$130 pot. I ask, "Will you show if I fold?"

He thinks a bit, looking very uncertain, and says, "Uhhh... yeah, if you fold." He puts a good amount of emphasis on the "if."

Results: I fold and he shows A♣ Q♠, for the queen-high flush.

The "uhhh" in this player's statement made it unlikely he was bluffing. Bluffers don't like to show uncertainty. Also, his emphasis on the "if" made it seem like he was emphasizing that he wanted a fold; that he'd show only if I folded. Considering how purposefully weak his phrasing seemed to be, I thought it was likely he was actually strong.

Overall, though, just the amount of looseness and modulation in his response are indicators of relaxation. Bluffers usually have an instinct to reply in normal and neutral ways, if they respond at all.

Zachary Elwood



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THE SECRETS OF MENTAL TOUGHNESS

If you played poker for any length of time, then you know how important mental toughness is to the game. Commentators and professional poker players often talk about mental toughness, but what exactly is mental toughness, and how can it help at the poker table?

I like to think of mental toughness as a combination of motivation and resilience. First off, you must be motivated to do whatever it takes to take your game to its highest level. Motivation is the inner drive to commit to doing the work. Resilience is your ability to bounce back. Poker is filled with challenges and bad beats, and you must be able to bounce back time after time if you want to make it. It's this combination of motivation and resilience that gives you the will to be focused and consistently driven.

By now you are probably wondering how you can increase your motivation and resilience. I'd like to offer a few strategies that have been empirically tested and shown to be effective by peak performance psychologists.

Mental Toughness Secret #1: Have a Daily Focus

You can start your work on this by setting clearly defined goals for your poker career. Whatever your main goal is, make it a challenging one. A challenging goal is far more motivating than an easy one. Take the time to break your big goal down into daily and weekly actions that you can take steps towards with focus and dedication. To figure out what you should be doing on a daily basis, make sure you have a clear understanding of what is it that you want to achieve. Create habits that take you towards your goals, and keep track of your progress with regular reviews.

Mental Toughness Secret #2: Have a Why

It's easy to stay motivated when you have a powerful why. Why do you want to achieve your poker goals? Is it to help your family out or so your kids can have a better life? Is it so you can quit your 9-5 job and turn pro? Knowing why you want something helps you keep your eye on the prize. You've got to be motivated to get through the long hours of study and training that it's going to take. Realize that most people won't do this because they lose focus. Always maintain focus on what your goals are and why you want to achieve them.

Mental Toughness Secret #3: Play to Win

The mentally tough do not aspire to merely get by. They want to win. Train yourself to be really committed to the outcomes you want. Survival is not your goal, winning is. In a tournament scenario, who do you think has a better chance at making a final table – the guy with a

survival mindset or the gal who takes chances? It's all about the mindset you keep. Be committed to doing your best at all times and focus on doing those things that have the best chance of leading you to success.

Mental Toughness Secret #4: Learn How to Laugh

Poker is an extremely tough game. It can get monotonous, and sometimes no matter what you do, things don't go your way. In those moments, it's important to keep a good attitude. Go to your happy place (a technique known as dissociation in psychology circles) and have a good chuckle at the absurdity of what's happening to you. Surround yourself with good friends and family who will help you keep perspective through the tough times.

Mental Toughness Secret #5: Plan Your Game and Game Your Plan

Before you sit down to play, remind yourself of your overall goal. Stay focused and have a plan ahead of time for how you want your session to go. Visualize how you would like things

to go, but always have contingency plans for when things don't go as planned. Knowing what you will do when things go wrong will increase your confidence at the table.

Poker success is a journey, not a destination. The most important advice I can share with you regarding mental toughness is to never give up. I'd say that 99% of people get to the point where they are good enough players to get by and the stop working on their game. Strive to be in the 1% who never stops learning and improving. If you commit yourself to being mentally tough, good things await you.

Patricia Cardner



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HOW TO HANDLE A BIG TOURNAMENT SCORE

Every poker player imagines what it would feel like to win a major tournament. Every summer, the World Series of Poker presents players with an opportunity to fulfill their dream. Each day crowns a new winner and with that honor usually comes a large sum of money. There is no better feeling than being handed a check for six figures after winning a tournament, and the last thing most players have on their mind is giving a portion of the money back to the government. However, taxes are an integral part of gambling and have an even larger impact when hundreds of thousands of dollars are won on a daily basis. In order to help players better understand tax implications, we have compiled our best tax tips to consider after a big score:

Keep Detailed Records of Gambling Sessions

Whether you are an amateur or a professional poker player, the best thing you can do (even if you do not have a big score) is keep accurate records of your gambling sessions. In order to keep detailed records by IRS standards you must include the following: date, location, game played, stakes, buy-in, amount won/lost and duration. Many players do not keep accurate records until they win big and then they try to recreate records from the year to account for any losses to offset winnings. It is very difficult to recount an entire year's gambling history and players are losing possible deductions against their winnings. It is especially challenging for professional poker players to recreate a year since they also are able to include poker-related expenses to write-down income for the year (amateur players are unable to do this). These expenses include hotel, transportation, meals, entertainment, seminars, home office and utilities. It is also helpful to keep as many receipts from buy-ins as possible so when you are going through your records from the year you can ensure each tournament is included in the total win or loss.

Collect the Gross Amount Won

When you go to the cage to collect your tournament winnings, you can choose to receive the gross amount of money won or request the net amount after taxes are withheld. Most players do not like the idea of having 30% withheld from their tournament winnings and applying for a refund at the end of the year. As long as you make sure to set money aside for your tax bill at the end of the year, this method is preferable. Since you are not having taxes withheld, it is best to send the IRS an estimated tax payment during the quarter in which the money was won.

If you choose to collect the net amount of the win, the amount withheld serves as an estimated tax payment and is added to the total amount of tax you have withheld (if any) throughout the year. Since the gross amount of the win is taxed at a high rate (30%), it is possible that this event will produce a partial refund at the end of the year. Unless you think you are going to spend the entire amount won in the tournament and do not plan to put some money for taxes at the end of the year, we recommend collecting the gross amount of the win.

International Players Should Have an ITIN

Any international player that wins a tournament in the U.S. will have taxes automatically withheld if they are treated as a nonresident alien for tax purposes. These players will not have a choice regarding withholdings and will have to file a U.S. tax return (Form 1040NR) in order to recoup all or part of the withheld tax. International players should be prepared for such scenarios and need to apply for an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN). This identification number allows people who are non-U.S. citizens to file a tax return for income generated in the U.S. In order to obtain an ITIN, players must present a certified copy of their passport along with their application. In the past, the IRS was lenient about the documentation needed to apply for an ITIN. How-

ever, players must now have a copy of their passport certified by the agency that issued the passport. It can be a lengthy process to get a passport certified in this fashion, so it is important that players know to take the proper steps well before the filing deadline. You are able to file for a refund up to three years after the return was due. Non-resident tax returns are due in June of the following year. This means, if you had money withheld in 2010, you have until June 15, 2014 (three years from the due date of June 15, 2011) to file Form 1040NR to obtain a refund.

Consult a Professional

Any time you receive a large sum of money it is best to consult someone who can help explain the best course of action for your situation. There are many nuances when it comes to gambling winnings and your goal should be to report everything correctly to the IRS so there are no future problems. However, you want to make sure you are taking advantage of the tax deductions and strategies that will provide you with the greatest benefit.

Kondler & Associates, CPAs is a full-service accounting and financial consulting firm with locations in Las Vegas, NV and Atlantic City, NJ. The firm, led by President and Owner Ray Kondler, CPA, specializes in individual and corporate tax preparation and has developed an expertise within the gaming industry over the past 10 years. This has translated into a practiced understanding of the industry and exposure to diverse gaming taxation scenarios. In an environment of constant change, Kondler & Associates has continually focused on its clients' needs while remaining knowledgeable in the ever-changing world of gambling taxation.

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