

TALES FROM THE PIT

CASINO TABLE GAMES MANAGERS IN THEIR OWN WORDS



EDITED AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
DAVID G. SCHWARTZ

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Excerpts from *Tales from the Pit*

They told me that if you were a dice dealer, you could have a job for the rest of your life, which still pretty much holds true today. We're always looking for good dice dealers.

Dave Torres

And I wore glasses, I looked like a little school teacher...and it took me a good year and a half before I totally felt comfortable, and if someone called me a name or became argumentative or took a shot or anything like that, I would keep my mouth shut and deal my game.

Chris Tonemah

I came back to Vegas, and four days later, I was working back at the Fremont Hotel. And I worked for Fremont from 1977 to 1979....Frank Rosenthal and Anthony Spilotro were all part of that scene...back in those days, that's the way it was.

Cliff Conedy

Well, obviously everything's different, just like it'll be different forty, forty-five years from now. You know, the casinos were all privately held with the exception of the Hughes properties.... And the people that broke me in at the Las Vegas Club, were all guys that had worked in the illegal joints around the country.

Jimmy Wike

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Dedicated to Bobby Parsons, who is missed by many.

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Naturally, my first thanks go to the men and women who took the time to sit down with me and share their lives and thoughts. I learned a great deal by listening to them, and I hope that this book conveys some of their wisdom. The original transcripts of their interviews are available in UNLV University Libraries Special Collections; this book is a collection of thematically-linked excerpts from those interviews. I am honored and humbled by the eagerness with which so many of them shared their stories, as well as their candor.

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1

Introduction

Dealing in a casino presents challenges and rewards not seen in many workplaces. With hundreds of thousands of dollars at stake every minute, casinos are high-stress workplaces. Managing a casino workforce brings stresses of its own.

In 2015, the Center for Gaming Research received a grant from the UNLV University Libraries Advisory Board that enabled it to undertake an oral history project intended to capture the stories of table games managers, including both those currently working in the field and those who have retired. There were several reasons for undertaking this project. First, the table games manager occupies an important vantage point in the casino. As someone with a long tenure in the business and employment at a number of properties and sometimes jurisdictions, he or she is privy to insights into the nature of the casino industry that might elude line employees or executives who have not spent significant time in operations.

Second, table games managers—floor people, boxmen, pit bosses, shift managers, and casino managers—have, thanks to their long tenure in the industry, seen many changes in the casino business. The city in which many of them started their careers in the 1970s (and, in one case, as early as the 1950s) has changed tremendously since then. Listening to table games managers describe their early careers in their own words provides a window into a Las Vegas that is now gone. There are, unfortunately, few documentary sources that describe the everyday operations of casinos and the work conditions in them as these interviewees do.

Finally, the nature of table games management is currently in transition. The traditional career path described by most interviewees—a low-paid break-in stint in a Downtown casino, followed by progressive moves

“upward” to dealing on the Las Vegas Strip, ultimately in the highest-end casinos like the Desert Inn, MGM Grand, and Caesars Palace—is no longer the norm. Dealers today break in even at casinos that, a generation ago, might have demanded a decade or more of dealing experience even to audition. Casinos have eliminated several management positions, from box to pit manager. Generally, interviewees felt that dealing, while still a viable career choice, has become less prestigious and less remunerative.

For all these reasons, the Center undertook the oral history project. This is a necessarily Las Vegas-centric look at table game management, given the Center’s location in Las Vegas, but interviewees described their work in Las Vegas, Reno, Atlantic City, numerous tribal and state jurisdictions, cruise ships, and as far away as Australia. The crisscrossing career trajectories that some interviewees describe provide a ground-level look at how the proliferation of casino gaming created opportunities for both dealers and managers.

It is hoped that the interviews captured via the project will provide a source for future historians to consider in their writing about gambling in Las Vegas in the late 20th and early 21st century, and will be of interest to those who, right now, are curious about what goes on in gaming pits, and how that action has changed over the past several decades. The complete transcripts of the interviews can be found in UNLV Special Collections; this book presents excerpts from the interviews grouped by topic. Before launching into the topics, a brief introduction to table games management—and some terminology—is in order.

MANAGING THE TABLES

Table game management, as it is practiced in casinos today, is a relatively young discipline. Modern American casinos emerged in Reno and Las Vegas in the middle of the 20th century. Around this time, a basic hierarchy of table games management emerged, determined by the nature of the games that made up the casino.

The chief games offered by casinos at this time were craps, blackjack, roulette, and “the wheel,” a game known alternately as Big Six and the Wheel of Fortune. Craps was, until the ascendancy of blackjack in the 1960s, the chief moneymaker for casinos, and, with its complex set of wagers and payouts, was considered the most difficult game to deal. Baccarat joined these other games more or less permanently in the 1960s in Las Vegas. Most of the managers interviewed began their careers as dice dealers.

As described by Bill Friedman in 1974’s *Casino Management*, the first book devoted to the study of gaming management, the DEALER was at the base of the management hierarchy. This employee was responsible for dealing the cards at blackjack, spinning the roulette wheel, selling chips, and sweeping in losing bets. Craps featured an additional role, the STICKMAN, who controlled the dice and announced the results of each roll.¹

“Dealing,” Friedman notes, “is a highly skilled profession...it takes several years of serious dedication for a person to become a proficient crap dealer.”² Further, dealers were required to not only run a quick, precise game, but to protect the house’s money by guarding for cheating by players.³ These essential responsibilities gave dealers in the era in which Friedman wrote two major perks: a schedule that allowed for twenty minutes off each hour, and a combined tip/salary income that surpassed that of most casino managers.⁴

This apparent pay inequity discouraged many proficient dealers from moving up in the management hierarchy. Several interviewees cited the Internal Revenue Service’s increasingly tight policing of tip income—including several years’ worth of audits—as factors in agreeing to the first step above dealing, the position of FLOORPERSON (originally FLOORMAN or simply FLOOR). The floor was in charge of between two (craps) to six (blackjack or roulette) tables, supervising the game play, monitoring the chip counts, and watching for cheating or other

malfeasance, and was the first line of appeal for customers upset by a dealer's call.⁵

Crap games had an intermediate level of supervision: the BOXPERSOON (BOXMAN, BOX), who sat in the center of table. From this perch, the box monitored the table's chip supply and issued rulings on gameplay. Box also had responsibility for the integrity of the table's dice and watched for cheating and theft by dealers and players alike. Friedman describes the Desert Inn as having inaugurated a policy of employing two boxmen on each game to deter theft. Most Las Vegas casinos, however, maintained one boxman. Northern Nevada casinos, with lesser, lower stakes action, sometimes eliminated the box and even the stick positions, giving the two remaining dealers on the game additional responsibilities. This economy, Friedman noted, reduced expenses but also slowed down the game.⁶

Above the floor, the PIT BOSS supervised a grouping of roughly between six and a dozen games in a pit. Within the pit, the pit boss oversaw operations, settled disputes about play, interacted with patrons (including the power to award them complimentaries, or comps). Removed from the immediate supervision of the tables, the pit boss held a position of considerable authority; he or she was responsible for the human resources function of keeping the games staffed by happy (or at least responsive) dealers, ensuring the players felt they were getting a fair deal, and watching for theft, cheating, and collusion by employees, subordinate managers, and players.

The pit boss reported to the SHIFT MANAGER, who was responsible for all table game operations during one of three shifts, day, swing, or grave. Theoretically, the shift manager was in charge of the entire casino, but, as Friedman notes, he only became involved with keno or slot operations in extreme cases. In some casinos, shift managers doubled as assistants to the casino manager.⁷ Over the time period described by the interviewees, many casinos began reclassifying their shift managers as casino managers, giving them more perceived authority to act as final arbiter on play disputes and other patron-facing incidents.

The CASINO MANAGER was responsible for setting all aspects of casino operational policy and for hiring, promoting, and firing dealers and managers. Friedman, writing at a time of transition, explains that “traditionally, most of the Strip hotels...made the casino manager the most powerful executive in the establishment.”⁸ While this was an “effective” management structure when casinos were relatively small, the growing size of resorts, and the growing prominence of non-gaming elements (even in the early 1970s) was dictating a shift towards a more balanced power structure, in which a property president presided over all gaming and non-gaming department heads so as to “coordinate and integrate the policies of all the departments and produce a unified and efficient business venture.”⁹

This was the management structure which most of the interviewees in this book came into the casino industry under from the 1970s to the 1990s. It had a distinction rare in American industry; those seeking promotions actually accepted pay cuts to rise in the ranks. Judging from the interviews, most future managers did not enter the industry with a plan for advancing; for the most part, they were attracted to dealing by the potential for high incomes, and later chose to pursue careers in management for a variety of reasons.

In the time that many interviewees have worked in the industry, table games management has changed. Writing in 2003, Taucer and Easley state that, in earlier years, “casino managers were generally placed in their positions of authority because of nepotism, seniority, or even their gold handicap. In the sixties and seventies, a formal education was not a job requirement for a casino manager.”¹⁰ In the ensuing generation, however, there had been much change: “Today,” they write, “it is rare to find a table games manager who does not hold at least one college degree.”¹¹

In addition, the responsibilities of the casino manager both expanded and contracted. At the time that Friedman wrote, the manager was the ultimate authority over all casino employees, and the primary decider for a host of operational and player decisions. Since then, the advent of other departments, from human resources to casino credit, has lessened the

burden on managers somewhat, although they now have the additional responsibility of coordinating between the larger management structure, other departments, and their dealers.

Another expansion came with the rise of “secondary” objectives for managers (their primary objective, of course, being to maintain and increase profits). Taucer and Easley describe casino managers as being additionally charged with “social responsibilities” such as preventing underage gambling, assisting compulsive gamblers, working with organizations like the United Way, and guaranteeing employee satisfaction.¹²

Many of the interviewees not only describe the shift in table games management, but explain how these changes have impacted both the daily operations of casinos and the morale of both employees and managers. As dealers under the old system and managers under the new one, they are in a unique position to comment on this historic shift.

DEALING AS A JOB AND CAREER

The interviews were conducted with no set goal in mind or thesis to support. Interviewees were given an open microphone and a series of open-ended questions, with minimal prompting from the interviewer. As a result, the interviews provide a cross section of how the job of dealing—and managing dealers—has changed in the past 40 years.

Dealing casino games is not an easy job. In addition to the difficulties associated with mastering the physical and mental demands of dealing cards/dice and calculating and delivering the correct payoffs, dealers are charged with both protecting the game from player cheating and ensuring those same players remain happy. There is a more fundamental tension here: if the players are winning, they are satisfied and likely to tip more generously. But if the players constantly win, management, which safeguards the bottom line, will be displeased. So, on a daily basis, the

average dealer can expect to make someone unhappy. The trick to dealing seems to be managing that unhappiness.

Despite that seemingly no-win situation, the managers interviewed for this project for the most part seemed happy about their decision to become dealers. Some of this may be self-selecting—those who regret the decision do not stay in the field for years (or decades) and rise up the ranks. But in their recollections of their days as dealers, one thing that emerges from many of the interviews is a sense of fun. The job may have been stressful, but it was rarely boring. In addition, the shared antagonists (management on the one hand, and players on the other) assisted in building a sense of camaraderie with fellow dealers.

Table games management in Las Vegas—and even internationally—was and still is a relatively small community. One of the most interesting things about conducting the interviews was what a small world the table games management field is. As can be expected, those with decades of experience in an occupation where frequent moves are the norm and not the exception run across many of the same people in their careers. Unlike other careers, where employees typically pick an employer with the expectation that they will remain for several years, dealing in Las Vegas involved a great deal more job-hopping. Most interviewees who were well established boasted at least a half-dozen different casino employers. Perhaps the most well-traveled worked for 17 different casinos in nine different markets. The peripatetic nature of both dealing and management assisted in dealers developing stronger attachments to their craft—the profession of dealing itself—and particular managers and colleagues as opposed to casinos.

Another thing that is clear from the interviews is that successful dealers—both new and established—were motivated by a pride in their professional execution of their duties. This included both the technical and mechanical aspects of dealing and the maintenance of a stoic façade no matter what players, fellow dealers, and managers threw at them.

Particularly in the time before the IRS began ratcheting up its pressure to collect taxes on previously unreported tip income (the late 1980s) and

when human resources departments began to assume many of the personnel responsibilities (hiring, discipline, and firing) previously held by the casino manager, interviewees spoke of their pride in achieving their positions as dealers. At the time, most dealers “broke in,” or started working as dealers, in Downtown Las Vegas. Some were recent graduates of independent dealers’ schools; some attended schools run by the casinos themselves; some were already employees in other departments.

Before the hiring responsibility shifted to human resources departments, most casino managers hired dealers under a strict protocol: they had to work their way up to more prestigious—and better paying—dealing opportunities. To get a start in the profession, dealers had to start at break-in houses, usually Downtown Las Vegas casinos whose low table limits attracted low-betting patrons—and generated relatively low tip income. From break-in houses, ambitious dealers would, after at least one year, progress to more prestigious Downtown casinos, whose higher levels of play allowed for more tips. With more time—anywhere between one and five years—dealers could then make the jump to lower-tier Strip casinos. After more time—typically several years—at those houses, particularly dedicated dealers could then progress to the elite Strip casinos—for many years, the Desert Inn, Bally’s, Las Vegas Hilton, and Caesars Palace.

Another change captured in the interviews is the shift from tips being divided between craps crews on individual tables to those tips being divvied up among all dealers on a shift or across three shifts. This had both positive and negative effects on dealing. On one hand, it eliminated the direct incentive for dealers to encourage more action on their games: why work harder when you’re not going to be paid much more than a crew standing over a dead table? On the other, it did much to eliminate tip hustling, which was a frowned-upon but seemingly omnipresent reality in that era of dealing.

The cumulative effect of these three changes—closer IRS scrutiny, the end of the slow progression from break-in to elite houses, and the end of tables keeping their own tips—did much to create a sense that dealing has gone

from being a “special” occupation to just another job. That is likely not a phenomenon unique to dealing, or even to casino work, in the early 21st century.

STRUCTURE

The book is broken down into 15 chapters that explore several themes common to the interviews. Following this introduction is, appropriately, a chapter focusing on the experience of breaking in as a new dealer. Chapter 3 is devoted to the game of craps, about which interviewees spoke enough for it to warrant its own consideration—with some comments on Pai Gow tiles as well.

Chapter 4 discusses cheating and advantage play—a topic about which interviewees also spoke a great deal, which is not surprising, since game protection is an important element of both dealing and managing games. Following that is a chapter on the experience of moving up—either to the Strip from Downtown, or to management from dealing.

Next are three chapters dealing with personalities. Chapter 6 includes interviewees discussing some of the more memorable players they dealt to and with. Chapter 7 discusses dealers worthy of mention. Chapter 8 talks about specific owners and managers—some good, some not so good.

Following that triad is a pair of chapters that feature answers to two questions: “What makes a good manager?” and “What makes a bad manager?”

Next is a discussion of particular casinos in Las Vegas, followed by a chapter focused on other markets, including Laughlin, Atlantic City, tribal, and Asian casinos. While most of the interviewees spent the bulk of their careers in Las Vegas, many had substantial experience outside of Las Vegas, and their observations make for interesting comparisons.

Chapter 13 focuses on a subject that most interviewees felt strongly about: changes in casinos, dealing, and management that interviewees observed over their careers. While there is an expectation that most long-time

managers will view the past through rose-colored glasses, as do many Vegas and casino aficionados, the interviewees were surprisingly candid about how not all changes have been for the worse.

The shortest chapter has answers to a simple question: “Do you gamble?” There was no consensus here; although none of the interviewees was morally opposed to gambling, many felt that playing recreationally was something of a busman’s holiday, and few interviewees discussed gambling as a major passion or pastime.

Chapter 15 features interviewees’ thoughts on the art and science of table games management: what works and what doesn’t, what should and should not be, and other miscellaneous topics. The book then closes with responses to the question, “What advice would you give a young person starting out in the field?” Again, the responses were varied, with some recommending against anyone pursuing a career in dealing or games management, and others offering specific advice about how to progress.

Representing excerpts from the original interviews, this book provides an overview of how the interviewees felt about these topics. It is hoped that, in addition to satisfying readers’ curiosity about the career of a table games manager, the book spurs researchers to take a closer look at the original interviews, which are valuable primary sources for the professions of casino dealing and management.

ENDNOTES

1 Bill Friedman. *Casino Management*. Secaucus: Lyle Stuart, Inc, 1974. 30.

2 Friedman, 30.

3 Friedman, 30.

4 Friedman, 30.

5 Friedman, 29.

6 Friedman, 29-30.

7 Friedman, 28.

8 Friedman, 27.

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10 Vic Taucer and Steve Easley. *Table Games Management*. Las Vegas: Casino Creations, 2003. 2.

11 Taucer and Easley, 2.

12 Taucer and Easley, 3.

2

Breaking In

Everything has to start somewhere, and for years Las Vegas casinos adhered to an unwritten but nonetheless nearly-ironclad hierarchy. Dealers were expected to pay their dues by breaking in at a lower-end Downtown casino before moving to a larger Downtown or off-Strip casino after a year or two. Only with several years of live dealing experience would a Las Vegas Strip casino even audition a dealer.

Following a move to the Strip, it might take several years, if ever, before a dealer could move into a job at one of the houses with the potential for the highest tokes, like Caesars Palace.

Breaking in was a trial by fire for Las Vegas dealers; those who survived their months or years of low pay and frustrating customer interactions gained a set of experiences that would guide them for the rest of their careers. Those who weren't as committed to dealing left the business.

Outside of Las Vegas, dealers broke in at small casinos or on cruise ships. Naturally, the breaking-in experience figures heavily in the stories of those who not only stayed in the business, but rose to leadership positions in it.

ED WALTERS

Well, I was born and raised in New York City. I was in an orphanage, 'cause I didn't have any parents, all the way 'til age 11. By 16, I was in pool rooms, and I became an almost famous pool player in New York. Because of that, some special people in New York asked me to come to Las Vegas to look at something.

Okay.

[In August 1959] a certain family back there wanted—the old man wanted sort of another vote on it before they took any action. So, one of the

lieutenants who knew me hustling pool and hustling cards and stuff, wanted me to go to Las Vegas to look at this dealer because their information was that he was stealing for himself—what we call working with an “A” in it. So, the next day I had to go downtown to meet a certain guy—he was actually the major crime boss of New York...

So Mr. G. actually didn't even talk to me—he just looked at me and nodded. So, the next day, the lieutenant asked if I wanted to go to Las Vegas, fly me here. I thought that was great, ‘cause I heard of Las Vegas. I had never been on a plane, so I took a plane to Las Vegas. At that time, Vegas was very small. You had desert—I mean real desert, ‘cause I remember getting off at the Flamingo by mistake, and I walked through the desert to the Sands.

Anyway, I took a look at the dealer, and he was stealing. Next day, I called the number I was told to call. He said, “Fine, we'll take care of that.” He said, “What can I do for you?” I said, “Well, I need a job.” He said, “Call me back, same number, same time.” I called the next day; he said, “Where are you?” I was at a payphone booth—which at those times was just outside the Sands.

Mm—hmm.

I said, “I'm out at the Sands,” he says, “Go in and see a man called Carl Cohen, tell him who you are, all the rest will be taken care of.” So I walked into the Sands right after that, it was 3:15 in the afternoon. And Carl says, “Yes, do you know the games?” I said, “Well, I know the games in New York.” He says, “Well, we have the table games out here—alright, so you'll start here right away; I may send you down to Bobby Ayoub at the Fremont.” So, during the day I would work with Bobby down at the Fremont, who worked directly under Lansky, and they were all approving this—at night I'd go to the Sands....

Anyway, so I watched the little Rat Pack get started, and those were interesting times. Now as far as being a pit boss—so I was, Carl Cohen originally put me in the twenty-one pit as what the mob and the casino

then called the floorman, meaning you controlled an area of the floor where you took care of customers, you got them what they needed—credit, whatever—and as you probably heard, it's legendary. In those days, there was no names kept, it was all in your head. It was gracious, it was, "Mr. G., what could I do for you, what do you need, sir?" But remember, we're only dealing, like in my head, I may have thirty or forty players in my head—today, you handle thousands, so they can't do what we did.

BILL ZENDER

At the Royal Inn, oh, it was a nightmare. I worked the eight o'clock to four o'clock in the morning shift, and they were very superstitious. Frank Toti, Michael Gaughan believed in lucky, unlucky dealers, you know, the flow of the cards—if you changed the flow of the cards, you changed the luck of the game, and the rest of it. That was their big thing, so you'd be standing at the table dealing, and let's say that you busted out a couple of hands, you'd have a floorman come up to you and say, "I want you to deal all the way to the bottom card." All we had in those days were single deck and double deck games. So you'd deal all the way to the bottom, and then you'd burn the last card and shuffle. Then you'd have another floorman come up to you and say, "Alright, I want you to deal one round and shuffle." Now this would be okay if they told you to do this at different times. When you first went to work there, they actually picked on the new dealers, and I had two floormen—one scream in my ear, "I told you to deal one round and shuffle," the other one says, "I told you deal all the way out." They just liked to mess with you.

So what did that do for hands per hour?

Oh, nothing, absolutely nothing. Regarding game protection, you're dealing all the way to the last card. Matter of fact, Frank Toti was a nice man, but Frank always thought he was this super guru in gaming, and he really wasn't. One of the things that Frank wanted to do was have the dealers, "Deal all the way out", when the dealer was running unlucky. He

told the floorman to tell us to do that. When he was managing at the Barbary Coast on the Las Vegas Strip, he found out this wasn't such a great idea. Arnold Snyder printed in his blackjack forum, "Burned Joints" and "Dave's Best Bets". "Best Bets" were the casinos that Snyder thought were easy to beat. Frank Toti got a hold of a copy and read that one of the best places on the Strip to play was the Barbary Coast because from time to time they dealt all the way to the last card. Because of this article, Frank went berserk. He used to have these weekly meetings with his floor staff and he'd just yell and scream at them. It didn't help when his floor staff commented, "Well, Frank, that's, that was your idea."

Really?

Yeah. I remember when I was dealing at the Royal Inn, the other thing the floormen would do is come up and kick you in the back of the foot if they wanted you to shuffle the deck. If a player made a big bet, they'd kick you, to shuffle up. This one guy sat down, and he makes a big bet. The most we could take was a two hundred-dollar bet, per spot, he so puts a stack of checks in his betting circle and the floorman came over and kicked me in the foot just as I went to pitch the first card. As it happens, it startled me and I pitched the first card out of my hand. So I just keep pitching all the way around to all the players. Well, they pull me off the table immediately, and the floorman said, "Do you know who that was, that was Kenny Uston that you were dealing to." However, the guy didn't have a beard, and he didn't look anything like Kenny Uston, but you had to believe what the floorman told you. They were really paranoid about card counters, but nobody was even worried about any of the cheating or any form of advantage play.

Interesting. So how long were you at the Royal Inn dealing?

Too long. I broke in dealing at the age of 21, I learned blackjack at the Vegas School of Dealing. Then I learned roulette and baccarat while I was working at the Royal Inn. I started, let's see, I started in October, and I left there in March, so it was like nine months dealing at the Royal Inn. Next, I

went back to dealing school while I was still dealing blackjack, and learned craps. I then went to work for Jackie Gaughan at the El Cortez in the dice pit the spring of 1977.

CHRIS BIANCHI

I did my internship at the Barbary [Coast] through UNLV. I had a cousin who was a pit manager there at the time. He introduced me to the general manager and casino manager and I told them that I would like to learn about the casino side of the property. So they brought me in, sent me to dealing school, and I started my “live training” as a dealer learning all the procedures. So for three months I was wearing my black-and-whites learning everything about the different games from other dealers that would shadow me on live games, floor supervisors, and pit managers. At the end of three months the casino manager offered me a full-time dealing job and I was to start after my spring break.

So there I am on a busy Friday night, April 5th 2002, Barbary Coast, swing shift, seven o’clock at night, as green as a dealer can be.

Okay.

I was nervous, intimidated, and excited all at the same time.

So what were you dealing, blackjack?

Yeah, blackjack at first, then I learned roulette, baccarat, Let it Ride, Three-Card Poker, and Pai Gow Poker.

So tell me what it was like breaking in as a dealer there at the Barbary Coast?

They were very strict on procedure. They wanted to make sure that everyone was very, very knowledgeable about dealing a game. So I was always stressed out. Being a young novice dealer, I knew they were going to come down hard on me. The Barbary Coast wasn’t a break-in place.

Mm-hmm.

Normally you would have to go Downtown to start dealing and every dealer at work was always kind of glaring at me because I just got right in and I’m a cousin of a pit manager. So, I took it upon myself to work twice as hard so people wouldn’t point the finger and think like I’m just a juice job

getting in here. I wanted to show them that I earned it. And those managers expected a lot of you, so the fact that I worked hard at it and that they were willing to help me, really made the transition at the beginning easier for me.

Coming in at seven, and the first couple weeks were really intimidating. I knew I was going to make mistakes and I would get really hard on myself for making them. I remember I paid a Blackjack wrong one night and I was so upset with myself I didn't sleep the entire night.

Wow.

I would take a notebook and write down every mistake I made as a dealer, so I wouldn't make the same mistake again. And then as I gained more experience, it became fun. Then I really started to relax because I knew I had the confidence to deal the way I was supposed to.

DAVE TORRES

Interesting. So what attracted you to the casino industry?

It was actually the money. I had friends who were dealers, and they were saying how much money they were making on a daily basis. And this was before there was the tip compliance in where you can go for your own and keep, so they were making an extraordinary amount of money. And I was right at the tail end of, of the old, into the transition into the new.

Okay.

So it was the money, and they told me that if you were a dice dealer, you could have a job for the rest of your life, which still pretty much holds true today. We're always looking for good dice dealers. My other options—my family's pretty poor. We moved out here—my dad came into some money but I didn't have money to go to college, and I didn't have a whole lot of options, so this was the way for me to provide my children options, and that's what I did.

So, where and when did you start?

I broke in at the El Cortez, and this was in the late eighties, early nineties, yeah, so '89, '90, I was at the El Cortez. Twenty-five cent dice—what they called the bird game—so I dealt quarters. Just on a whim, I had advice from a friend—there was a pit boss there, his name was Tony Estrada. He was from San Pedro, so we had a family connection that I didn't even know about. He was telling me at that time, "Learn other games, learn other games," so he actually allowed me the opportunity. So, I actually dealt twenty-five cent dice, ten cent Roulette, and fifty-cent pitch Blackjack, silver, so you're hands hurt but you got good fast.

And from there, I moved on to the Barbary Coast.

So let's go ahead and talk about this. Tell me a little bit about breaking in at the El Cortez. A lot of people broke in there, so tell me what that was like.

Wow, okay. So the El Cortez is, there's a badge of honor to it. When I broke in, our average tokes were six to nine dollars a day—that's what we made in tips. So basically, everybody was broke and starving, but we had a lot of fun. You had what they would typically call fleas.

Yeah.

Okay, so the fleas would play the quarter game, and you'd see some interesting things—people fighting over a quarter. I saw a guy get stabbed in the hand with a pencil over a quarter dispute on the Big Six, on the corner six and eight.

Wow.

Over a quarter. Someone's willing to stab another guy over that. And it was, it was just insane. But I made a lot of friends there who are my friends to this day. Some of the bosses that helped me—I took the El Cortez as, those guys saw themselves as defenders of the gates—the bosses.

Okay.

They were gonna run you out. They were gonna haze you so much, they were gonna run you out of the business, but if they couldn't run you out, then they were gonna take you under their wing and groom you.

What shift were you on?

Swing shift. So I did three regular swing shifts and two, what they call, the late crew. So the late crew was definitely the twenty-five cent game, and you were gonna come in at, a little later—an hour to two later than everybody else.

HOWARD DREITZER

And then a lot of my parents' friends were telling me about how I should get in the gaming industry, and how they all had friends who were going to get me jobs etc., so I went to gaming school on the GI Bill. When I got out all the people that said they were going to get me jobs couldn't, so I had to just go pound the pavement downtown.

Tell me about the school that you went to, where was that?

It was right across the street from the Sahara, upstairs. I don't remember the name of the school, but it was there for quite a long time, and it was a pretty good school. They took me in, took my GI Bill, and did a fair job.

So what was your first job dealing in the casino?

I was dealing craps at the Nevada Club on Main Street—my first job.

So what was that like breaking in at the Nevada Club?

Well, anything bad about Las Vegas, you could experience there. It was a very low-end place—they didn't even have security. I remember one time I was dealing they tapped me out and told me to go throw somebody out. I said, "Well, get security to do it," and they said, "We don't have security." So I asked them how I was supposed to do it, and they gave me a few quick pointers, I went over and threw the guy out, and then came back to deal.

Interesting. So how long were you there for?

I was there I think for about eight months or so. At the time, Sam Boyd was still alive, and he used to come in periodically, and I used to go and work double shifts over at the California Club, so I would work eight hours

at the Nevada Club, and then I'd run over to the California Club and work eight more over there.

What was the clientele like at the California Club as opposed to the Nevada Club?

Well the Nevada Club was, you know all those guys you see hustling and begging on the street—they were the ones that came in there to play. And they were very difficult, and we had all kinds of characters, but at the California Club, it was mostly the Hawaiians, and they were hellacious gamblers, I mean, they just were fiendish about their gambling, so you'd always get involved in really big hectic games over there.

Management was very interesting over there. That was in the days when superstition still kind of had a big place, and they'd do some funny things like tell you to set the dice on seven when you gave them to the shooter, make you drink ice water, and all that kind of silly stuff.

What were some other ones, because I've heard a little bit about this, and it's fascinating, so what are some other superstitions that they had?

God, there's probably an endless amount, I'm sure I don't know half of them, but sometimes, I had—one time at the Flamingo, I had a pit boss who used to walk around the pit counter-clockwise, because he thought that did something. And I had another pit boss that used to dump salt on your shoes.

I've heard about the salt.

I had another pit boss that used to kick your ankles. I had another pit boss that, whenever you were a floorman, whenever you hit a certain criteria for losing that he had, he just moved you out and changed you or, they would change cards or change dice frequently. They'd start harassing players, sometimes, if they felt they couldn't interfere with their gambling streak, they would just start harassing them, sometimes to the point of having coffee dumped on them and actions like that.

So how long were you at both of those places for?

Not too long, I mean, I worked those places for about a year, and then I went to the Mint, and I worked at the Mint for a while. Then my wife to-be introduced me to someone who helped me to get an interview up at the Flamingo, and I guess after about six months at the Mint, I moved up to the Flamingo dealing up there, which in those days was pretty quick. Usually you had to deal Downtown for a couple of years before you could get there.

I should mention, because I always like this part of the story, when I couldn't get a job through my parents' friends—the process of getting a job Downtown was probably one of the worst ever in my life. I literally walked up and down Fremont Street, for three shifts a day, and just walked in and asked for an audition. That was the practice in those days. They would put me on a game, or they'd just abuse me, or they'd put me on a game and then they'd abuse me on the game. They would make fun of you and tell you how bad you were, use you to give breaks to people, and then tell you get lost.

You had to keep coming back and taking it, so I did that for about, I think it was over two weeks, and all three shifts—day, swing, and grave—and I took a ton of abuse, but it didn't really bother me in those days. The way the industry is now, dealers don't really understand what it used to be like to get a job and to get a better job. Now, the employers are so careful about how they treat you and what they say and what they do. They weren't careful at all in those days.

JOE FRIEDMAN

But Tahoe's a great place—seasonal, but a fantastic place. So, I needed a full time job, which was working race and sports as a ticket writer. Needed a better full time job, so I attended an in-house dealing school and started dealing. I dealt there from '92-ish to '95. During that time, I went out with Caesars Palace at sea, spent six months dealing in, on the Crystal Harmony in the Caribbean in South America.

Tell me what that was like.

Well, at the time, there was only three Caesars properties—Vegas, Tahoe, and Atlantic City. And every six months or so, they'd select people, dealers, from all the properties—and floormen—to go out there and deal on the Crystal—they had one boat at the time—Crystal Harmony. That was, got great travel. Some itineraries were better than others. We did Miami through the canal, and Acapulco up and back for about three months with a lot of stops in between. Then, from Miami down to Cape Horn, stopping in Brazil and Buenos Aires, then all the way back to New York, then across, and got off at London. It was fantastic, great experience, I loved it. I mean, it's, the nice thing about it, when the boat was in the port, you're off, so you got to go explore.

RUSSELL TERBEEK

And I'm thinking to myself, "Okay, I'm graduating in two months, what do I do now?" So my uncle called me up the phone—he was a bell captain at the time for Circus Circus. He said, "Hey they are starting a dealer's program here, would you be interested in that?" I'm thinking, "OK, we just went through a really cold winter in Erie, so I asked him "what's the weather like out there?"

And he said, "It's about eighty-five degrees, and gorgeous." I said, "I'll be right out." So I drove out a week after I graduated and went to dealers' school right at Circus. They trained you right on the floor on a dead game, and then put you on live games.

At Circus Circus?

At Circus Circus, and I learned how to deal in about two weeks and went on from there. So I eventually had fifteen years with Circus Circus properties between Las Vegas and Laughlin. I think it was, somewhere around '86—Circus bought the Edgewater, and I went down there right after that for their little change over, and continued my career there. I eventually worked my way up to a Table Games Shift Manager—and I

think I was one of the youngest shift managers that the company had. I think I was 30 years old when I started as a backup shift manager. And, you know, I was real fortunate to ask some questions, and had knowledgeable people that I just happened to run into that had real answers.

JIMMY WIKE

And then I did what so many others did that graduated from UNLV: went into the gaming business.

So what drew you to gaming?

I was fascinated. I read *Scarne on Dice* when I was probably thirteen years old. And one of my two best friends growing up, his father was a twenty-one dealer, and we were playing twenty-one at ten, eleven years old. We actually had little games at school, you know, for nickels and stuff like that where we would actually deal twenty-one. So, I've always been fascinated with gaming and, so it was just kind of a natural gravitation towards that.

Interesting. What was the, what was Vegas like then for gambling?

Well, obviously everything's different, just like it'll be different forty, forty-five years from now. You know, the casinos were all privately held with the exception of the Hughes properties. He had come in, in the mid-sixties, but it was still all the old wise guys that were running the places. And the people that broke me in, and I broke in at the Las Vegas Club were all guys that had worked in the illegal joints around the country. The Vegas Club, as we called it was the last sawdust joint in town, Downtown. As a matter of fact, they had just put the carpet in just prior to me starting work there.

And at that time, you had to sign a contract for a year, because they taught you and they didn't charge you for school. I really didn't go to school. My first game that I dealt was craps, and they just gave me and several others cheat sheets, you know, just saying this is the call, six easy six, coming out, etc. And then every day for an hour, we'd go on a table in a room upstairs from the casino and we would practice calls. And I was there

I think about five days, and the guy says, “You start tomorrow at eleven o’clock; be here at ten thirty and fill out the paperwork.” And, I was, “Sure,” so I went down there the next day. I had a white shirt and black pants, which everybody wore in those days—that was Vegas before most wore a uniform. And I signed up, and they just put me on the pole for three days. I just stayed on the stick and just made the calls—yoleven (eleven) or seven, seven out, etc, and I did that for three solid days.

I was working 11 am—7pm, and then the last twenty minutes of every shift, the swing shift boss Benny, who came in about six thirty, would put me on the base. I thought wow, this guy wants me to learn, but on the third day I overheard him saying he didn’t want any new guys on the stick because they were too lucky for the players and he didn’t want me blowing off the shift. So that was his motivation for getting me off the stick, I was going to call too many winners.

Almost all the people that worked at the Vegas Club were old guys that were busted. They had either drinking or gambling problems, and they’re working at a break-in joint with a bunch of young kids, most of whom are looking around, looking at the girls, not paying attention. They were a real cranky group and used to swear at us regularly. You couldn’t say anything back to them but we used to imitate them and laugh at them when we got off work and went to the bar.

Mm-hmm.

Anyway, the fourth day I went to work, I go in, I go to take my customary position on the stick, and the day shift pit boss tells me, “You go over there on the base.” And I said, “I think I’m supposed to be on the stick.” He says, “No, there’s a new kid starting today, he’s going on the stick, you’re going on the base.” And so I did. I’m not trying to self-promote, but I was a quick study, and I was very, very interested in it, and I did learn fast.

One of the funny things about that, though, was they kept telling me, “Watch out”—the clientele at the Vegas Club was the worst Downtown. They used to let all the slot cheats drink in there, eat in there, and play

tables games, provided they stay away from the slots. So you had that crew and you had the cab drivers, you had the bums, plus you had the dealers playing cause they had a quarter crap game there. So you had a lot of dealers from the Strip coming Downtown and stroking the break ins and just firing away, but it was a great, great learning experience, but it was quite a group.

Yeah, I can imagine it was.

Yeah.

Any names you remember from back then?

Oh sure, Kenny Woods. He taught out at community college in the nineties and I met with him then but he was kind of the boss of all of the dice then. He was the epitome of Vegas cool. He was much younger than the rest of the old bust-outs that worked there, was a sharp dresser, knowledgeable, and handled himself really well. Most of us were impressed, intimidated, or both by him.

John Johnson was the casino manager. Mel Exber's brother, I can't remember his first name, was the twenty-one boss. Joe McNeil was a boxman, Harley Lafevre was a boxman. Johnny Ward was the day shift boss. There was a floorman we called Bones because he was so skinny and I don't know if any of us break-ins knew his real name. There was a black boxman named Frisco, one of the few minorities in the business then.

Incidentally, in those days boxmen could take their own tips. What they would do is they would take it, put it in their pocket and cash out at the end of the shift. The box men knew more about the game than all of us, so consequently they would make more money than the dealers. They didn't get paid much, somewhere around \$45 per shift, but made up for it with those tips. I averaged between two and three dollars a day in tips. \$12.80 a shift, to start, and you would get a dollar raise every month, so I'd go to like \$13.80 a shift after one month, and \$14.80 after two.

Two to three dollars a day doesn't sound like much, but it was enough. The Golden Gate across the street had the Hoffbrau. You could get a roast

beef sandwich or corned beef sandwich for fifty cents and they were good. A lot of us on our last break would go over there and drink a couple of draft beers for a quarter a piece. So they told me to watch the game, these guys, these desperados that were playing, they'll take shots at you. And so about the first three or four weeks I'm dealing, I didn't have any problem with anybody, other than me trying to get up to speed on how to deal the game. After about three or four weeks though, all of a sudden, a couple of guys, I saw them, they were takings shots at me, they were past posting me, they were doing this, and they were doing that.

And what had happened is I had become proficient enough to realize how bad I'd been. I was just an open target because I was a new guy, as was everybody else. But I thought, oh my God, they've been doing this to me for weeks, and I've just finally noticed. But like I said, it was just a great learning experience, and I worked there exactly a year. Some guys got out of their contract, or would try to get out of it, but I always honored my commitments. So Harley Lafevre who had been a boxman there had gone down to the Fremont, and he told me, "When your contract's up, come down."

The day my contract was up, it was my last shift. I went down to the Fremont and Harley introduced me to the shift boss, a guy named Jeff Rapp, and he says, "Hey, you got the job, Harley speaks well of you, and you can start tomorrow." So, I said that's fine. He says, "Well, here, I want you to fill out this paperwork," and I says, "Well, no, I'm on my break, I gotta get back," and he says, "Well, it doesn't matter, it's your last day," and I said, "No, I gotta get back, I'll come in early, whatever you want me to do, I'll come in and do the paperwork." And in those days, it was no sin to quit with no notice. That's kinda what everybody did. And as a matter of fact, if you gave two weeks' notice, they would let you go at the end of the shift.

Really?

Absolutely. They thought if you were leaving you might steal on your way out. The Vegas Club, they would keep you there as long as they could,

because now you had a year's worth of experience and were reasonably proficient. The Vegas Club was a great training ground just because of the diverse clientele and so many of them were cheats and crooked guys, so that helps.

Tell me more about that, tell me more about breaking in. So, what year was this?

I started February, 1972. I had started to get into gaming in 1971, and I started, and then I stopped, ended up taking some graduate classes, plus I was working at the convention center on graveyard so it was easy to pick my school schedule. And so I didn't pursue it, but then finally in February of '72, I said, "No, this is, I want to do this." It was exciting; you know, I'm a young guy, Las Vegas was pretty exciting, and everything a young guy wants—nightlife, girls, everything. It was a fun time for everybody involved, except for maybe those old cranky bust outs at the Vegas Club.

RON SACCAVINO

So what the Las Vegas Club did, Downtown, they felt that they were going to have a tough time holding on to crap dealers. So what they did was they come up with—they would teach you for free, to deal, but you had to sign a contract to stay with them for a year. And me and Jimmy Wike did this.

Yeah, is that where you met Jimmy?

That's right.

Okay.

So we broke in together as crap dealers.

Wow.

And, yeah, and it was great. And we were young kids, and we go out partying, and the tokes there were \$3.50 a day, and they paid us—Jimmy reminded me of this, I, one time I called him up on the newsletter, I said, "Jimmy, what the hell did we get paid?" We got paid \$12.80 a shift. I don't know what translates into an hour, but that's what it was for a shift, and you would cut up \$3 a day, \$3.50 a day, but, you know, it's 1970.

Is that enough to live on?

Yeah, I mean, not great. I ate a lot of peanut butter and jelly, and milk—lots.

Did you get meals in the casino, at least?

Yes. One time, I remember—Jesus Christ—you know, Downtown, in 1970 was a different animal than it is today. I mean, the Golden Nugget had sawdust on the floors. We would deal, me and Jimmy would deal on a crap table, and you can bet twenty-five cents on the ‘Don’t,’ and then Mel Exber, he wanted to spice it up one time, I remember, and he said, fifty-cent minimum bets—the bums would do it, they each put in a quarter on the ‘Don’t,’ right? (Laughs)

GARY SANOFF

I came out November of 1979 to Las Vegas. I drove out from New York, and I went immediately into dealer school. It was called the Strip Dealer School, located off of Las Vegas Boulevard and Sahara. They told me back then, “Don’t be a twenty-one dealer because they’re a dime a dozen, be a crap dealer.” So I learned craps as my main game. It took six weeks to get out of dealer school, and I went to work. I broke in at a place called the Nevada Hotel on Main Street. We had six blackjack games, one crap game, and one roulette game. And the dealers’ room was the size of a closet. My first night, tokes, I made six dollars, and I spent, I’m going to say, two weeks there, and looked Downtown for further work. And back then in 1970s, late 70s, early 80s, there was no such thing as going to the Strip and getting a job—you had to break in. So I did two weeks at this Nevada Hotel and then got a job at the El Cortez, which was a very big break-in house. I had to work two weeks without tips.

Oh wow, okay.

Right, because we were told we weren’t qualified enough to work for tips. It was a very rough business back then, with no respect. There wasn’t an HR department at the time, so I worked my two weeks without tips, making six dollars an hour in salary, dealing craps. After two weeks, they put me on tips, and we averaged about twelve dollars a day in tips back then. But it was a good place to break in because of the action. We had cab drivers, so they would take what we call shots at you. If you call too many winners when you were on the stick, the bosses would sweat the money down there, so the pit bosses would come around and kick you a little bit.

And I went on looking for more work until I got to a better place. In 1980, I landed at the Union Plaza, which was at the top of Downtown, and a very good house. Toke went from \$12 a day to \$60 a day. So I thought I had made a score. And there I got a job dealing craps, and also got the opportunity to learn to deal other games such as baccarat and blackjack and roulette. So this was good all the way around. I didn’t get kicked quite as

much down there. The casino manager was a guy by the name of Rod Morris, a very, very old timer, he was probably eighty years old then, smoked a cigar, and taught you the way the business should be, “kid.” That’s what they always called you—kid—and at this point I was 24 years old.

So how did Rod think the business should be, what kind of stuff would he tell you?

Well, first of all, you never wore white shoes because that was unlucky. And you always got a lot of rolls and you always had to be “On your game, kid.” it was old-style Las Vegas, a good way to learn how to deal the game.

ELLIOTT SCHECTER

Okay. So what drew you to the casino industry?

That was quite accidental. I was working part-time parking cars while I was at Rutgers, and the guy I was working for basically told me I couldn’t make enough money doing this. I said, “I just need to make sure I’ve got money to spend, financial aid has got the rest.” He goes, “Ah, come on.” I said, “What do you have in mind?” He says, “Well, I play cards up in New York, a little private club—they need a dealer all the time.” I said, “But, I don’t know how to deal.” He said, “Oh, they’ll show you how; the money’s good, don’t worry about it.” Yeah, it was a little private club on the Lower East Side. They taught me how to deal, and actually taught me pretty well. I dealt there for a while and when I left Rutgers and went back home, I started dealing on the Discovery, which is one of the old coastal casino cruisers. In fact, it was probably the original one in Florida.

Tell me a little bit about the private club, what was that like?

It was mostly a lot of, it was fairly multi-ethnic, but mostly Mediterranean, there was a lot of Greek, a bunch of Lebanese. They had a few tables—three. And at least one of the guys had actually dealt poker in Las Vegas, and he was the one who showed me how to deal.

Okay.

It was fairly professional. It was fairly unusual for a New York club to have dealers, even then.

Really.

Most of them were self-dealt, running two decks. This one actually had dealers just to keep it going. This way, they could get more hands out and extract more rake out of the pot.

Yeah. Did you see any interesting things happen while you were there?

I'd like to say yes. I was only there for about six months, and looking back, it was fairly run-of-the-mill. Nobody blazed in with weapons or guns blazing, nothing like that. There wasn't knock three times, give us the password—nothing like that. I mean, there was the old camera, you had to show yourself to get in, but that was it. It was about as nondescript as it got.

What games were popular?

They were playing a lot of seven-card stud. Fixed-limit, a lot of ten-twenty. There was a small game once in a while, they'd play five-ten. Mostly it was ten-twenty, twenty-forty. So it wasn't a particularly small game considering this was the early nineties. The value of a dollar was pretty good, so that's actually pretty decent-sized poker.

CLIFF CONEDY

I came back to Vegas, and four days later, I was working back at the Fremont Hotel. And I worked for Fremont from 1977 to 1979. My roommate, another former UNLV player, found out Jackie Gaughan was offering free gaming school classes for former UNLV athletes, so we both went to the gaming school, but I didn't particularly like it. He did, and he went on and became a crap dealer. I went back to working hotel security....

Frank Rosenthal and Anthony Spilotro were all part of that scene. Every once in a while, we would grab somebody and throw them out the door. They don't do that anymore, but back in those days, that's the way it was. The Fremont was right across the street from the Horseshoe. The Horseshoe was notorious—if you got caught stealing in there, their security

was downstairs, and many have gone down head first. Guys have come out with broken arms. It was like a cowboy town....

And so after two and half years of working security, my roommate—we started at El Cortez Dealing School together. Now, they're working at the El Cortez working six days a week, making ten dollars a day in tips, and just been learning the grinding, dealing twenty-five cent crap games all day.

I started my first dealing job at Little Caesars when it started. And then I left after three months, and went back to the Fremont and worked at the Fremont for a year.

Tell me about Little Caesars.

(Laughs) I still have issues with cab drivers with that experience, because that's where most of the cab drivers hang out. They would all come in to Little Caesars. They would lose their bank and take it out on the dealers, especially 'cause we were break-ins, you know, we make a mistake and then, it's only twenty-five cents, what are you getting all bent out of shape for? They were—I realized as I learned more and went on that that was part of the game. They wanted to rattle your nerves, they wanted you to make a mistake, they wanted to be able to take a shot and claim, you know, and all that stuff. But I had made up my mind that I was gonna learn that game, and I wasn't gonna let none of the little bosses or any of the cab drivers or players, break me, because I knew once I learned how much the potential, as far as making money, was, because my roommate, they left and went to the Riviera. That was his first Strip job, and he goes from making ten dollars a day to making two, three hundred a day.

CHRIS TONEMAH

When I started, I was hired at the Four Queens, Downtown, and you were not hired as a dealer—you were hired as a dice shill. And you shilled the dice game until it was like five in the morning and it was dead, and then you went behind a table. You already knew how to pitch a double deck or a single deck, and cut checks, because that's what you learned in

school. And all your other experience was on a table. So I did that for, I don't know, maybe four months or so, minimum wage. What I earned as a shill on a dice game, I got to keep, which was nice.

Okay. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

Well what you did is you dressed in black and whites, and you just threw the dice while the dealers, the dice dealers, learned how to deal. They learned procedure on the game. Graveyard was great. There weren't a lot of women in the business, we weren't really accepted unless you were a keno runner or a cocktail waitress—that was the place for women. The Four Queens was very good at hiring women, break-in women, and you started there, you learned a little bit about the game. They gave you chips, had you stand at the table and throw the dice, just like it was a regular game, and that's all you did. And if customers came up, you handed in your chips and you went and sat down—took a break I guess. When the game went dead, you came back out. And your pay was minimum wage, and whatever you earned as a shill. You didn't get tips then, they didn't cut you into a share or anything until you were actually on a live game for eight hours, or the six hours you worked with the breaks in between. Tokes were cut shift per shift.

So you would alternate between doing that and dealing blackjack?

Yes.

So tell me a little bit about dealing blackjack at the time, what was it like?

It was quite an experience. Number one, the tables were all built for men, so they were higher. Myself, I'm maybe five-one, so I had to wear platform shoes or high heels, whatever I could do to get up there because otherwise, the table was hitting me right under my breast line, and it was uncomfortable, because you had to reach. But you learned how to get over the nerves.

At first, you were very nervous, so your pitch wasn't perfect—flying all over the place. I was lucky—I had control, and I learned from someone who taught me very well, and I practiced all the time because I'm a

perfectionist. I always want to be good at what I do. And after all, like I said, I guess it was about three, six months, you would go to work on the weekend. You worked five days a week, two days off. I worked graveyard shift, which then was three to eleven, three A.M. to eleven.

My shift manager, Jimmy Brown, he was a gentleman. A lot of my bosses were from Kentucky. They were old gentlemen, they'd been in the dice business back there when it was illegal, and those are the people I learned from, and they taught me very well. I became very comfortable dealing, and then it was on to learn roulette, so they let me learn roulette on my breaks.

They gave you every opportunity at the Four Queens to learn as much as you possibly could. I really enjoyed it there. I worked there for two-and-a-half years, and I didn't want to leave. I really didn't want to leave. And one night I went in and Mr. Brown said, "Listen, it's time for you to get a job, I want you to go to the MGM (now it's Bally's)." He said, "I want you to go there, and I want you to see Vic Wakeman, and if you come back tonight, I'm going to fire you." I said, "Oh, okay," because I felt very comfortable, very much at home.

The first time I went on a game and was confronted by somebody when I was at the Four Queens, I was very naïve, and I heard words that I hadn't heard before, and I was called names like, oh my God, people used to say this, you know, I couldn't believe it.

And I'm the type of person, when I get mad, I get emotional and I'll cry, tears will start, because I just want to go nuts. And I wore glasses, I looked like a little school teacher, because that's what I basically went to school for. And you don't want to embarrass yourself that way, crying, so you have to harden up, and that's what they kept telling me, "You have to harden up, you have to harden up, don't let it get to you, don't let it get to you." And it took me a good year and a half before I totally felt comfortable, and if someone called me a name or became argumentative or took a shot or anything like that, I would keep my mouth shut and deal my game.

3

Craps and Pai Gow Tiles

For many years, dealers and managers alike have considered craps the most prestigious game to deal. With a variety of payouts and fast action, it is more difficult to learn than most other games. Unlike a blackjack table, which is staffed by one dealer, craps tables are run by teams: typically two dealers, a stickperson, and a boxperson. In order to be proficient, a craps dealer had to not only master the mechanics of the game, but have the ability to work efficiently and pleasantly with others under high stress conditions.

In recent years, craps has diminished in importance in Nevada; since 2000, the number of craps tables in the state has fallen by 22 percent.¹ Baccarat dealers churn through more money, and blackjack is the focus of most table players. But craps retains something of its historic mystique, thanks in part to the high esteem in which dealers hold it.

Pai Gow tiles, while it doesn't have the same acclaim as craps, also has a reputation among dealers and managers as a difficult game, as well as one that is not widely understood outside of Asian games specialists. For that reason, I have included Bill Zender's comments on the game, which are quite informative.

RON SACCAVINO

Can you tell me a little bit about dealing on a craps game? So what are the different positions, what's your favorite one, what's the best one, what's the worst one?

Well, you know, I think it's still the same. You start on the stick—seven out, line away—you know what I mean, you gotta know all the calls. And there's an art to it. You gotta keep the pace at a certain level, just like a wheel dealer. There's an art to it. And in that book, I rate dealers, how they

rate. To me, a dice dealer is the top toughest, in the top. Next, you would get the roulette dealer. People don't think that, but a good wheel dealer, that's why Cubans used to be wheel dealers in the old days here, because that's all they had in fucking Cuba, and in Europe. They'll have thirty wheels, and two blackjacks, you know what I mean, so there's an art to it.

There's an art to the [craps] calls, there's an art to the pace. You can't overrun your dealers, because it gets all fucked up. You do twenty minutes on the stick, twenty minutes on that base, and then you go twenty minutes on this base, and consequently, that's why a crap dealer needs to have both hands proficient because one side, your outside hand has to be able to cut chips, and on the other side, it's this hand that has to be the outside hand that cuts chips and all that stuff. So there's a little finesse to it and an art to it, and you know what I mean.

And besides the numbers and that kind of stuff, there's a timing feature just like the roulette wheel. People think it's easy—it's very, very difficult to wheel deal—a top wheel dealer. I remember one time at the Landmark, I mean before I got to the Landmark—we were making \$3 a day, and one day, a guy come in, and he was a slot cheat, and he was a high roller for the Las Vegas Club. And it was the very first—and somebody called me, I was working swing shift, and somebody called me and they said, "Oh, we got such-and-such in here, and he's toking and toking, oh man,"—somehow, I got to work a double that day, because I knew the tokes were going to be good. The tokes went \$35 that day....

People don't understand the dice dealer. Sure, you go table for table, you go for yourself, yeah, but here's the ingredients it takes. A, you gotta have a game. Sometimes you sit there all fucking day like this, right. A, you gotta have a game to make any money. B, you can't point-seven, point-seven, and killing everybody. You're not going to make not money there. And C, so they got to be making money; and D, they gotta be Georging, making bets for you, and you gotta hit the bets.

I mean, my goodness, and here was a case where we're knee-fucking deep, dice were spitting, the joint was fucking losing money, the fucking floorman, the shift boss, everybody was behind me, motherfucking this and that, and I

mean we weren't making a dime. And I constantly look over there, and I'd watch the twenty-one pit, see, and they'd be coming out our end by the crap table, and they'd get their toke envelope, and they'd be ripping it up right there. I could see them, right, and they'd be ripping up their toke envelope and saying, "Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah," and I'd be working an hour sweating, and they'd be working forty minutes and cutting up their toke envelope, right? I said, I've had enough of this.

HOWARD DREITZER

I was really good at dealing craps, and I really enjoyed the challenge of getting tips. The dealers there [the Flamingo] were mostly on the older side, and they were a little caustic, and they really put a lot of pressure on you to make sure you were hustling and getting tips on the table, and quite often it skirted around the line of what you should and shouldn't do in terms of how you treat a customer, but I became very good at it. Then one day, I just got totally sick of it. I mean, I enjoyed people, and I enjoyed dealing with people, but I got tired of the constant hustle of trying to get out there, and every thought you had was how you were going to get a bet down for the dealers. And it just hit me one day, and I said, you know, I'm just, I'm tired of this, and I thought I'd go into management.

Can you tell me a little bit about some of the different approaches that crews would use to hustle? How would they get the player to put a bet down for them?

Well, there are different levels of what you do. I mean, in the nicest sense, it's created by service, and then you add into the service, interaction with the player. You start to understand who they are and what's driving them and what they like, what they don't like, that sort of thing, and try to play to that, and basically try to show them a good time. And then, of course, they have to be—well, they don't have to be, but they should be winning in order for you to approach them. And a lot of players know, on their own, to bet for you, and you just wait for that, and then when they do it, you encourage them and thank them and you're all over them. So that's sort of

the nice way. The next way is pretty much the same, but if they're not betting for you, then you sort of suggest to them that they should. You know, "You're doing pretty well, am I taking care of you alright, why don't you let me gamble with you?" or something like that, and sometimes you show them what it looks like, which is more than a subtle encouragement. That's when you're kind of heading into the land of not-too-appropriate. Some people went as far as, there were certain moves with chips and the way you manipulated chips to where, when you pay a bet, say on the line bet, you'd pay the bet and when the player looked down, there was already a bet placed there for you. So, it's not a difficult move, but there's a few like that. And then it progresses up to, sometimes some of the dealers, some of the tougher guys, in those days—I don't know about now—but they really get in the player's face and start demanding.

And what did management think of all this?

Well, you had management that was—some of them at the end of the shift were getting a tip from the crews. Usually, my experience with it was, it was never something that was mandated, and there was no fixed amount, but it was sort of a code that if you had a good night, you took care of your box men and your floormen, and subsequently they would not be as strict with you, usually, as they should be, within reason. I mean, it was a fine line, and it depended on the people involved, but it usually would allow you to be a little friendlier than you normally could and take your time when you needed to, and that sort of thing. It was an unspoken, uncharted area, but it existed. And then it could go as far as, many box men and floormen that made you do it, and demanded certain amounts—that's when it got kind of into the line of really being inappropriate.

DAVE TORRES

So tell me a little bit more about the dice crew that you're, you know, what that's like working, breaking in with the crew.

Well, when I broke in, you actually functioned as a crew. It was gonna be the same four guys. Every night, you had the same shift, the same—so, you weren't moving around. Like today, we may not work, we could work together as four guys, and then not work together again for six months, so there's no crew feeling, 'cause we're just on this table. But in terms of a crew, you really foster really good friendships. You're in it together, and there's always one guy who basically becomes like the crew captain. The boss is gonna talk to him to shape up the crew and stuff like that, and when you were going for your own, he was the one that would chop up the money, and lay off the pencil. Everybody chopped it up, but the crew feeling, it's definitely like a team feeling, and a championship team. You know when you're on a good crew.

I had such good crews that they called me—a guy that was on my original first go-for-your-own crew, his name's Brian Hall, he's at Hooters—they called me to see if I still wanted to go back to work. Like, "Hey, we're back in action, and this one's go-for-your-own." "Oh, hey," you know what I mean, "So, what are you taking down?" "We're taking down like four to five hundred a night." "Wow, still, it's very tempting." Each—you're talking a man, so these guys are locking up like two grand and chopping it up.

JIMMY WIKE

Are you familiar with craps odds?

Yeah.

You know, three, four, five times odds?

Yeah.

I put that in in Thanksgiving of 1997 at Bally's [Las Vegas], and it just went nationwide. Now, somebody had told me afterwards that the Stratosphere opened up with that, and then took it away, but I was unaware of that. I had thought of it as, you bet, on the four, you bet three, it's three, four, five, and all bets with full odds pay seven units. So if you bet five bucks with full odds, you're going to get thirty-five dollars. Whatever

you bet with full odds it always pays seven times the flat bet. And, on the lay side, whatever you lay, it's six times the flat. And I figured it out in kind of a metric like that, but at that time, there was pressure to increase odds, you know, everybody wanted to say, "Do ten times odds, or twenty times odds."

I said, "You give away too much." And plus, on the comp side, because the rating is so inaccurate even to this day in casinos, it's just horribly inaccurate, but, I says, "We're going to get killed on the odds, you're going to get killed on the comps," you know, with the odds. It's like, they had a hundred times odds at the Stratosphere for a while, when Stupak was there. So what that means is, if you go and bet ten dollars with a thousand dollars' worth of odds, you've got a fourteen cent theoretical on that, because the only advantage you have is on the pass line or don't pass portion of the bet. Over time you'll have winners and losers but theoretically you still only make fourteen cents on each bet. If somebody makes ten bets at that rate and loses a couple of thousand, your theoretical, and it will run true over time, is one dollar and forty cents, but how do you tell a gambler that just lost that amount that you can't afford to buy them dinner.

Yeah.

Gamblers don't understand that. Anyway, I didn't want to go to those high odds, so I come up with three, four, five, and that just got real popular all around. And part of it is, it's easy for the dealers once you figure it out, 'cause it's seven times the flat, and on the lay, it's six times. Now, when I went to fifty thousand on the line, but I went to max fifty thousand odds at Caesars, you could bet three, four, or five, up to a maximum of fifty thousand. So, if you bet ten thousand and the point was six, you could bet fifty thousand odds, but if you bet twenty-five thousand and the point was six, or you could still only bet fifty-thousand odds. But I let them place thirty thousand on the 6&8 and twenty-five thousand on the other numbers, and while it didn't happen that often, it was kind of fun.

BILL ZENDER

Pai Gow tiles is very confusing for most people, and I had known it, I learned it in 1979 when I was with the Gaming Control Board. The Gaming Control Board said, “Well, Zender, you know baccarat and blackjack and craps—go learn Pai Gow tiles.” I had nobody to really learn from. There was only one book written by Michael Musante at the time, it was very difficult to read. And I went into Caesars [Palace], who had the only tile game at that time in Las Vegas. I said, “Hi, I’m with the Gaming Control Board, I need to learn tiles.” And the guy reached over and grabbed one of these little two-piece paper handouts, said, “You read, you learn.” That was my first instruction in tiles.

I was very fortunate that another Gaming agent at the time, who didn’t say anything when they were looking for people for tiles—his name is Jim McKee—had learned tiles when he was in Vietnam. So, he said, “What’s wrong, Zender?” I says, “I need to learn this game, and there’s no one to teach me.” He reaches in his desk and pulls out a deck of cards with Pai Gow tiles printed on the faces. So, basically, he taught me right there in the office, and then I started to study and learn more about it. I practiced, I actually had a table in my house that we used to practice shuffling the tiles, stacking the tiles, turn the hands over, and calling them. And it’s not really that difficult a game, everybody puts more concern into it than necessary, because it’s something you could very easily learn.

Every time there’s another Asian Games manager running the tile games, they always put in certain hands that are stupid. You know, “This is the way we’re gonna set this hand, this is the way we’re gonna set this hand.” So I had to go in to the Desert Inn and clean up the hand strategies and dealing procedures.

Then, I found a whole drawer full of dice. Now, the dice are used to determine the outcome of the game. So, I said, “They’re not secure, we need to secure these dice.” “Well, they don’t really determine an outcome,

not like craps." I said, "Yeah, they are, they're telling you which set of tiles go to which play."

Curt Follmer was the casino manager, and I took all the dice and laid them on the table. I brought this huge magnet I had into work. I said, "Hey, Curt, I'm gonna pass the magnet over the dice, do you want to sit here and watch it?" He goes, "No, I'll be up in my office." He was afraid to watch the outcome, but I passed it over the dice and none of them jumped out onto the magnet. Because in Pai Gow tiles, juice dice, which roll certain numbers, are what some cheater would need to use to effectively bypass the dice roll.

I was also in charge of the Desert Inn's Pai Gow poker games. I had studied the Pai Gow poker hand strategies, and how the casino set the hands. Mike Caro and Bill Eadington from UNR had both written articles on Pai Gow poker. I took the two books, and I went through them, and I came up with a shortcut on Pai Gow poker.

The one thing about Pai Gow poker is there's a lot of pushes. About forty percent of the hands are pushes. So I found out that the house way they were using at Desert Inn was very conservative. What happens is there's a lot more pushes when using conservative strategies. Well you don't make money when there's a push, but you do when there's an outcome. When the house wins, they win money, and when the house loses, they pay out money, but retain five percent commission on all player winners.

So I said we need to be more aggressive. I took some information that Mike Caro compiled and actually designed a new house strategy for the Desert Inn. What's really funny is I walk into casinos now—now this was in '88—I walk into casinos now in 2015, and I'll pick up their house way, and it's identical to what I came up with back in '88. So it kind of makes me feel good that at least the strategy changes I made in both Pai Gow and Pai Gow Poker have stood the test of time.

ENDNOTES

1 "Nevada Gaming Revenue: Long-Term Trends."
http://gaming.unlv.edu/reports/longterm_nvgameing.pdf

4

Cheating & Advantage Play

Many interviewees had vivid memories of specific cheating scams—not surprising, since not uncovering cheating quickly enough was grounds for a manager's dismissal. The topic of casino cheating can (and does) take up several books.

This chapter has recollections about notable cheating incidents and the steps managers took to combat cheating.

RON SACCAVINO

I remember one time being on a crap table and seeing a guy come running through the casino, and a security guard was chasing him from across the street. He was a slot cheat, and they had certain slot cheats, and they were known, but they could gamble in the Horseshoe and the Las Vegas Club. They had an unwritten code—I'm sure Benny Binion put it to them, you know—he would take their change, let them gamble in their joint—but *don't you dare touch my machines*. So they had two joints that they could play in, but all the rest of the joints, they were pulling the strings and the wires and whatnot. And I mean, they would come running through chasing them, and that's the kind it was....

Now I worked for Joe Sliman, and I know I got fucked one time on the crap table. Guy came in with a rolled up newspaper, and in the newspaper was a set of dice. He would ‘in and out ‘em,’ you know what I mean, and I wasn’t privy to it till later. And at Joe Sliman’s joint, we had a guy who used to come, mostly, he was a street hustler. He would mostly go over to Stardust ‘cause it was close, and he would stand by the crap table, and he would find a pigeon, and pigeon wouldn’t know how to play, and he’d say, “I’ll show you how to play, come with me,” and he’d walk over to Joe

Sliman's joint with the customer—one customer, two customers—and he would show them how to play dice. And he was good, I mean he'd buy in for two, three hundred, and I mean you had to pay attention, and you could watch them fucking chips going down. They'd be in the rail, and before you know it, he'd be saying, "Give me this or that," and before you know it, there'd be—I mean, he was pretty good. And God forbid if he got lucky on a hot roll, then the customer would give him some reward money, not to mention what he stole from the customer, but he'd never come up short, even if the customer went busted, don't worry about it, he had his. So that was always fun to watch, but we couldn't say nothing, you know, nothing to be said.

JOE FRIEDMAN

And that sometimes gets lost, 'cause there's no percentage in sweating money. I think the more you see in the gaming business, the more comfortable you feel with that. Again, collusion—are people stealing? Absolutely. In one of the early days at Wynn, a floorman—I had the shift—floorman calls me out to their section, new floorman. Nice lady floorman called me up, "Joe, I got a problem out here, I'm missing twenty thousand in yellow and I can't figure out why." "Okay, I'll be right out there." "Look, Joe, I did the count here, I did the count here, I don't know what happened." "Okay, at least you did the count here, did the count here, and you figured it out. Let me call surveillance to see if they can shed any light." Called surveillance, "Okay, it's 7:04, there's twenty thousand," you know, "there's eighty thousand in yellow, 7:10, 7:15, there's sixty thousand." Well, you rewind, 7:10, 7:11—"Shit."

I go, "What do you mean, 'shit?'" He goes, "You just got robbed." So, what it was, and we could later see on the surveillance, it was this team you know part of the—they didn't have the garages, which they call 'em, the plexiglass over the high limit chips on the game, and they ran the yellow on the outside, towards an aisle. So, a team would notice this, and distract the

dealer—pull them down to one side of the table, down to the bottom side, while another guy, in stride, walks by that and just pinches one stack of yellow, twenty yellow. I mean, you watch the tape, it's magic. In stride, just took that yellow and walked right out the door, and that was that. But it's, there's always gonna be stealing. Like I always tell people, too, Siegfried and Roy showed you an empty cage—you were staring at that cage. They put a blanket over it, they pull it off, and there's a tiger. If someone's a magician like this guy, they're gonna steal. I mean, there's not much you can do about it.

If someone's gonna—you've heard of you dice sliding, whatever, that's people not paying attention. And crooks know your floor, know your staff better than you do. All this Zender stuff, and all those other guys that, hole carding, whatever, that's procedure, that's sloppy stuff. If you can't figure out that procedure stuff's happening, then shame on you. There's always people out there to exploit that advantage. As far as dealers stealing, look, you take money away from dealers, economy gets bad—you've got people with cash registers. There's always gonna be people stealing no matter what. So, it's part of the business, but you can't judge people on that win/loss. And that's, that's what happens too often. It's just easier to call it wins and losses. It's easier to write that email....

There were a couple scams that went down at the Hard Rock at the time. There was a baccarat scam, a collusion that was later down the line, but it was, a dealer was, colluded with a player, and I was, for better or for worse, oblivious to it, but we knew something. We all knew something was happening, we just couldn't quite put it all together. Collusion's always difficult. I mean, it's—overt cheating is one thing, but if there's someone else involved, it always is difficult.

I came in one day, and Mark and Jonathan Swain, who was the Swain Brain, he was GM at the time. We were standing, standing around, I'm walking around doing something. "Hey, come here, come here." I said, "Okay." We're standing at dead pit, and they go, "Look over there towards the Pai Gow game." I'm watching, there's some people playing, the dealer I

knew, dealing. All of a sudden, like they, so two guys come from inside of the pit, and hooked up, hooked up the dealer. People who were playing hooked up another guy on the outside of the game, and I just, my jaw on the floor. I was like, “What the F-,” and, uh, yeah. That was, they didn’t, they kept me purposely in the dark because, to make sure I wasn’t in on this scam. So, but it definitely opens your eyes, and, you know, there’s an old saying, which I’m sure you’ve heard: it’s never a matter of if someone’s stealing, it’s a matter of who. And that still goes on today. I mean, that’s always, always the case.

DAVE TORRES

Tell me about taking shots on break-ins.

So when taking a shot, what they’re trying to do is they’re trying to confuse you. One of the cheapest ones I saw was this guy dropped a hundred dollars in twenties, so he had five twenties, right? Or, six, sorry, it was six twenties—so a hundred and twenty in the field. Very casual as a dice guy, and he says one-twenty in the field, okay. Dice roll—bat one twenty in the field, this is when cash could play. Take it in, he said, “What are you doing, where’s my change?” What do you mean where’s your change? He said, “I had six twenties, I wanted one twenty in field.” I go, “Oh, no, no, no, no.” You didn’t say a hundred twenty dollars. Call Gaming, call, okay. But a lot of times what they were trying to do is confuse you with weird press moves, standards presses—six and eight get pressed together, five and nine get pressed together, four and ten get pressed together—what they’re doing is they’re doing odd presses. Press the four and six, press the five and four, so that you forget something, or you leave a losing bet up, and there was a lot of that. So, but it was at a low level. You’re talking about three dollars and twenty-five cents, as opposed to hundreds of dollars. And the bosses were quite good, ‘cause they knew they had to watch extra, and they’d bust your chops. And the interesting thing about that, too, is your crew would give you a hard time to get you better, so it

was like joining a fraternity. There's so many ways, different ways to take shots, I didn't even know at the time in terms of, working in terms of teams, they bring in a pretty girl, everybody's watching her, the scam is taking place on the other end, right?

Yeah.

And the bosses will tell you, you always have you watch your hand, watch your hand. You can't hold the deck properly, and you're exposing the card and you don't even know it, or the shuffle's improper, and they're slug tracking you. It was just a nice little scam place. I've seen so many different scams—that was the first time people tried to slide dice on me was at the El Cortez. And it was textbook—Tony actually let me see part of what they were talking about. He didn't let me see the tape, but he was sketching it out, and then they reenacted it. So on a dice slide, what is happening is the guy who's shooting is to the right of the stick, or to the left, but he's on one side of the stick, okay, and he's shooting across. So, they're gonna cross in front of the stick man. The guy who's gonna scam is on the other side. Okay, so, we've got the stick man boxed, okay?

Yeah.

Just as he goes to shoot the dice, he's gonna kill one die. The guy who's the blocker leans in front and throws cash to the box man, so that the dice pass under his body. So the stick man's here, he's shooting. He comes this way, the dice come under. And he has a stick man, I'm looking at his back, I can't see the dice. Call it. He calls the dice 'cause he didn't see that they did the tumble, and that's how they get it in. It's usually a field bet that they're doing on that. They're gonna kill a six, or they're gonna kill the whole thing, but typically they kill a six, and make a field bet.

Interesting.

And that was the first time that I saw that. It was incredible. And pass posting on the, on the Roulette wheel. The first time I saw the Savannah was there. And it's not when I was working there—I saw it later when I was visiting. Are you familiar with the Savannah?

No, tell me.

Okay, so the Savannah is, you take two ch-, man I wish we were at the school. So, I have like a five-dollar chip, and a five-hundred dollar chip, and I—there's columns at the end of a Roulette table, and they pay two to one. So I have this, one, two, three columns. The guy, he'll put it down. The guy who invented it was Richard—I'll think of it—anyway, he's just an old grifter. And he put it down so that the dealer, when he's looking this way, it looks like two red chips.

Okay.

Okay, and he spins the ball. If it hits, he goes and pays the ten bucks. He goes, “No, no, no, there's five hundred and five.” Oh, well, was it there, go to the tape, it was there the whole time. When it loses is when the scam is on, ‘cause you pick it up, like you're drunk, pick it up, “Oh, hey, hey, that lost,” “Oh here you go,” and you throw ‘em back the ten bucks.

Oh, okay.

You understand?

That's pretty smart.

Yeah, it's a, it's a very good scam, so that's the Savannah. So, that just, the way, he knew exactly how to set it, so looking from this way, it looks like two five-dollar chips, but it's not, and it's actually got a name for it. And his name, I think it's Richard Marks. He actually filmed some stuff at the school, but he's just an old grifter. And that was an interesting move.

CHRIS TONEMAH

Can you tell me a little bit about shot taking, what sorts of things would they do?

Well, some people would come in. A lot of Strip dealers back in the 70s would come in, and you can spot a break-in dealer in a heartbeat because of their nervousness, or they're watching everything, and they would come in and give you barber pole bets, blacks (\$100), greens (\$20), reds/nickels,

dollars, fifty-cent pieces—whatever they could stack up, and just watch you be nervous trying to figure out that combination or how you were going to pay it off if they got a snapper or blackjack, or tuck a breaking hand—that's a shot taker. We had a lot of those at the Four Queens, they'd come down from Caesars, the Sands, the DI, you know, just to bust your balls, and break you in, is what it was. But a lot of the shot takers would be older gamblers who were down on their luck, and it's pounding on the table, and trying to cap their bet, or bending the cards—things you have to stay on top of back then. It was a single deck and a double deck, and you had to watch your cards, protect your cards. That was your job, to protect the house money, and so you learned to deal with that, and people fighting, arguing about when it's time to—especially husbands and wives or girlfriends and boyfriends, and things like that, you had to learn to not get involved. Just deal your game and not worry about what's going on out there, just concentrate on the game—deal a clean, smooth game, and fast.

COUNTERING CHEATING

RUSSELL TERBEEK

His name was Jim Keller. He was a backup shift boss at Circus Circus in the seventies when I broke in. He was a big tall Indian guy. In fact, Jim's claim to fame was that he played against the Harlem Globetrotters, on the [Washington] Generals.

Anyway, I found out that Jim was a gaming “savant”.

Really?

He knew all the cheat moves; dice, twenty-one, roulette; he knew them all! For example, when I first heard about counting cards, I had been dealing a couple years. I asked almost all of our floor staff at Circus Circus and they gave me all crap answers.

What kind of stuff did they say?

They said, “Oh, you watch the fives, or you watch sevens...” So I asked Jim, “What’s this about card counting?” Nobody ever explained what a plus/minus count was; what the difference was between a true count and running count; Jim explained it all to me. Finally I found someone that knew what I was asking about. So I started practicing what he taught me when I dealt. It took a while but I wanted to know what these “recreational” players knew that I didn’t...

The Rio had a training facility in the basement. And it was filled with unbelievable, state-of-the-art stuff. You could bring the screen down, train from a computer program, adjust the lighting, adjust the sound in the room —all from this little podium that rolled around the room that controlled everything.

This is at the Rio?

Yes, in the basement of the Rio. So anyway, they gave me a budget to get all kinds of gaming materials and I ended up getting different books, videos and computer programs and that people could actually come down and check out stuff (like a regular library), to see and learn about the different games and gaming in general. Plus, I had a huge room where I had a full size dice table, Big Baccarat table, three Blackjack tables that I could change the layouts on them into whatever game I wanted to train on that day.

And Jim used to come visit me every few months while I worked there. He would say, “What videos do you have for me?” And Jim would just collect videos and brand new unopened decks of cards from everywhere; casinos from all over the world. He would have people send him surveillance videos and say, “Hey Jim, what do you see here? Or do you see anything going on?” And Jim would tell them, “Yeah, The guy’s mucking or the guy’s moving with the count, or he’s capping bets, or the dealer is in on it.” He was really good at that stuff. So I was real lucky to find guys like Jim and Steve [Forte] that would talk to me and teach me about the business. I probably went to three or four of their different game protection seminars and they even put out a four-tape VHS video tape series. Steve would

demonstrate a move then they would play it back in slow motion to see how the move was done. This was state of the art training at that time. And through the ages, I've just been lucky enough to meet people who helped me advance my career and would show me stuff about the business.

Mike Joseph is another incredible guy—super talented; another true card mechanic. And he does everything for the benefit of the business. He doesn't advertise to the players, "Hey, let me show you how to beat the game," or anything like that. He does everything for the industry to protect the industry—really top notch guy—very smart and talented.

You know what, it's funny because you see the old stuff come back from the past. We had some guy bending face cards the other day. We let him bend up the whole deck, then changed the cards on him. He got up and left. And, you see the same stuff, just basic card counters and it's funny, because I approach every card counter the same. I go out and say, "You know what, your play's a little bit too good." "Well, what are you talking about?" I said, "Well, you're real good." And then, if they're nice, they'll talk. If they aren't nice, they will be a little rude or verbally abusive. I had one guy tell me that he was with Stanford Wong's group, you know, he's out of San Diego?

Yeah, yeah.

Well the guy says, "I'm in town for that group and I'm meeting up with his other guys later." I said, "Look, you gotta do a couple things—number one, I saw you made one basic strategy mistake," and that almost drove him nuts, 'cause I wouldn't tell him what his mistake was, and "you have to learn to use camouflage a little better."

(Laughs)

I said, "You made a mistake, I'm not gonna tell you which one." He goes, "No, I didn't." I said, "Yeah, you did," I said, "Think about your play." And it was funny, and it was a marginal decision either way. He didn't double a soft eighteen versus a six up but that drove him nuts. He was telling me how he was going around to other places (casinos). I said, "Look, you're in

little Arizona Charlie's. You've got a bunch of old ladies betting five dollars; you come over, you're betting green, and all of a sudden it's five hundred a hand, two hands." I said, "Do you think that's gonna attract any attention in here?" I said, "Dude, if you're gonna go play, play at other places where they might not mind when you spread like that."

I mentioned a couple other places that have a lot less game protection than my place does, 'cause obviously I train my guys on how to spot a card counter or if they know basic strategy. They have to know what's going on, watch the money. If there's money going out of the rack, maybe something's going on, and you better know at least that. You better be aware of where your rack stands and if cheques (chips) are going out of that rack. Don't depend on the dealers telling you, 'cause a dealer may not know or care. Even if you can't figure out what's going on, you have to notify somebody; a shift manager, surveillance the pit manager, somebody. I see bends and warps, nail nicks, just little things like that.

Even when I was at Circus Circus breaking into the business, we had the RV park across the street. I used to watch people come in, buying a hundred dollar bill—these are like retired folks that live in their RVs, they come to Vegas for the winter—and they would count down every deck, and when it was right, they would increase their bets from five to fifteen dollars, and that was the amount of their bet spread. They'd win their hundred dollars, they're done for the day, and they'd go off and eat a buffet, play slots. Then they would be back the next day trying to grind out another \$100 bill. I saw that time and time again. Are you going to break the deck on somebody (shuffle) going from five dollars to fifteen dollars? No, you don't really give a crap, but people did that and some were pretty successful, but you see that all the time.

We just had a huge scam on our dice table. I'll tell you about it. Two guys would come in to play craps, one at each end of the table. One guy would throw up a "hop" bet, and he would say, (his verbiage could be interpreted two or three different ways), "Sixes hop same way me and the dealers," and he would throw in two green for him and two red for the dealers. What

does that mean? The problem is that it could mean two or three different bets! It could be a hard six, hopping hard six, easy six like five-one or two-four. So it could be interpreted different ways, so whatever would hit, he would say, "Yeah, that's what I called out!" And his friend on the other side of the table would say, "Yeah, that's what I heard him say!" So this happened to us a couple months ago, and we went ahead and paid him the first time because I've got less experienced dealers on the game who weren't sure what the bet was or could have been. I said, "Look, if you're not sure what the bet is, just say "no bet". If the player gets upset, let them know, "Sir, I just don't want to make a mistake with your money, I want to make sure that I book what you want to bet."

So anyway, this guy knows that I have some weak craps dealers. He's listed in the Griffin book of known cheats, but he keeps doing this stuff up and down the Strip and on Boulder Highway. So the guy caught a hand that put about two grand in his pocket, and then he proceeded to stay and play and caught two more forty minute hands!

Eighty-six hundred dollars later, this guy shouldn't have even been in here. Eighty-six hundred dollars is what he cashed out that day.

Then two days ago, I couldn't believe it! I look up at the monitor in my office and see that they've got the craps game stopped. Something was going on. I look again. It's the same guy and his buddy back in here! They tried to pull the same exact scam! This time we called security to 86 him, and as soon as he saw security, he ran and his buddy ran out the side door into a waiting car and sped on out of here. But those are the kind of scams where it's, nothing's really new, but you see a lot of recycling of some old stuff that people try. It's kinda crazy.

JIMMY WIKE

A couple of my favorite things in management was catching bad guys. But also, comp frauds, they're bad guys. And there's an awful lot of things that people can do, and that's the biggest threat to the bottom line of the casino.

It's not the occasional thieves that you catch, although, I always assumed somebody was stealing, at all times, I just assumed it. And, but for whatever they stole, it's minuscule compared to what goes out the door in comp fraud.

Is that because of internal stuff or external?

It's a systematic problem. If you have one floor supervisor watching six, eight games, how accurate are they going to be? And, I'll give you just a quick example. So, I'm a floorman, and I'm in a twenty-one pit—at Caesars, the Hilton, the Wynn, Mirage, anyplace, right—and you come up, and you take a marker for five thousand dollars, and you say, "Can I have a private game," and I ask the pit boss, "Okay," and you're betting a hundred dollars, right, you're betting a hundred dollars a hand. Well, you're probably getting a hundred and thirty, hundred and forty decisions an hour. So, say it's a hundred and forty. So, you're generating fourteen thousand in handle every hour. Over here on another game, I got a guy, he's playing with five people, takes a marker, he's betting a hundred dollars a hand. There's four people on that game besides that person. They're laughing, they're joking, "Should I take a hit, shouldn't I take a hit," you know, blah, blah, blah. They're playing thirty-five hands an hour, right?

Mm-hmm.

So the guy on the private game is four times more valuable as far as handle than this guy over here. But let's take it a step further. The guy on the private game is an average player, and playing a one percent game. So, you're worth 'X' amount. This guy over here, he's playing pretty tight, basic strategy, and he's playing somewhere around a third of a percent game, right?

Yeah.

So now the guy on the private game is betting 4 times the handle and at 3 times the house advantage, so now the real earning power for you with the guy on the private game is twelve times what the earning power for the other guy. But I'm the supervisor, I'm watching four, five games—I just see

two guys betting a hundred dollars, and you both play for four hours, and so you both got four hours play at a hundred dollar average bet, right?

Mm-hmm.

And meanwhile, the true theoretical is twelve times greater for the first player.

Interesting.

Yeah. So, if I'm, I don't have to be a counter—I can be a comp fraud. I can play on that slow game, I can—and floor supervisors almost always make the first bet the average bet. Because then they can put it down, and they don't worry about it till you're gone, right?

Yeah.

It doesn't mean anything, so if I sit down on a game, there's four or five people, "Hey, how you doing?" And I bet the first hand or two, two hundred dollars. He's gonna put me down for a two hundred dollar average bet, and then I go down to a hundred, and I play the hundred, and he's actually not even gonna hardly look at me until I leave. And I say, "Hey, thanks, see you later." Or I wouldn't say, "Thanks, see you later," because I don't want him to notice I'm gone for ten minutes, twenty minutes, 'cause I'll get an extra ten or twenty minutes on my rating. Because he looks up, I'm gone, and he puts the time down. So, a lot of it's contrived, some of it is accidental, but the ratings are the worst.

CLIFF CONEDY

I can tell you one example, and this guy wasn't a player, but this was a situation that happened. It was a Mike Tyson fight weekend at the MGM, and I was there for all six fights—boy, what a nightmare—but anyway, it was a long day, ten hour day, the end of the way, waiting to get off, and, I don't know, this one guy, he was a regular player, he was playing a thousand dollars a hand. And it was another guy, basketball player—Charles Oakley was on the game, Snoop Dogg, and a bunch of groupies standing behind. And there was this one guy, he looked like he was Middle

Eastern, but he looked like a sore thumb, just stuck out, you know, "What is this guy doing," so okay, he's watching the high limit play. So anyway, he's standing there, he has a glass cup in his hand, and he goes, "Oh, let me tap your chip for luck, brother." I go, "Excuse me, whered this come from?" And so now I'm looking, and he's still standing there, and all of a sudden, I look at the glass, and at the bottom of the glass, I see yellow. I'm going, "Whoa," so I reach over to grab him by the arm, and he had put glue on the bottom of the glass, and the chip just stuck.

But yeah, they said they suspected him of doing that in the baccarat pit with a five thousand dollar chip, but yeah, but anyway, I grabbed the guy and snatched him and pulled him in the pit. If I hadn't, those guys would've tore him apart, 'cause they wanted a part of him, they were like in disbelief, couldn't believe it. But, we had guys that would palm checks, palm checks and try to increase their bet, act like they were setting up their chips and dropping another one on top or whatever.

And a lot of those break-in dealers, they were just not used to that. "Now, wait a minute, he just had four chips and now he got five chips." But, it's over the years, you run into all kinds of shot takers. On the dice table, I had come back from break, I'm upstairs asleep actually, I'm working graveyard. I come back, I look, and they got two guys on each end, both of them had baseball caps on, and the guy next to the stick, and guy takes a thousand dollars in cash, throws it on the dome, the guy next to him rolls the dice.

And before the guy could throw the dice, I go, "No bet, no bet." I just called it off—first of all, it was cash, I didn't know how much was there, if it was over the limit or what. But, as soon as I called no bet, the stick man took the dice out of the stick and wiped out the dice. No numbers showed, so nobody, "Wait, holding was a seven, no, wait a minute, it was a craps, I'm on the dot," so he did a good job of covering my call.

But anyway, I pick up the phone to call surveillance, 'cause something's going on here, and all three of them peel off. One goes to the cage, cash out whatever he had, and the other two just head out the door. And they were

trying to scoot the dice, slide the dice and catch a ace or aces or crap from 'em, whatever, and come out roll. But, yeah, just shots like that, what happened periodically, but it was part of game protection, you know, things I've been taught, and people to watch out for.

I was taught to watch out for, I had somebody whod get it on one time or another, you know, sitting there, not paying attention, and look down and, "Where'd that fifty dollars on the dot come from?" You know, he's got a point of four ten, and now there's a bet on the dome, you know, so okay, I got your number, pal. But when you're dealing with money, it's always, I've seen it on both sides. I was working with Argent Corporation, and you see the guys with the briefcase going through, go in the cage and come out and head right to the airport, so yeah, it was going on all around us all the time.

5

Moving Up

How do managers get started on the management track? That's the question this chapter seeks to answer. As can be seen, different interviewees had different motivations and experiences in climbing the management ladder.

ED WALTERS

So what made you want to become a floorman instead of doing something else?

I didn't want to. I just did that favor for New York. I needed a job, he sent me into Carl Cohen, Carl Cohen put me on the floor. I didn't even pick it.

Really?

In fact, if he had said, "You would deal," I would've dealt. But because Mr. G. in New York is talking, he made me a boss....

First I was an assistant on graveyard, but then it got too late, we couldn't see when they changed the cans, meaning when they count the money, so then I went on swing shift. And I was in charge of the pit.

Okay, what was that like?

Well I changed it, I did it for two months. You find out you gotta take care of dealers, and you gotta schedule the thing, and you gotta get this guy in. I had to tell Eddie Torres, I spend all my time carrying these fucking dealers, they need a day off, they need—you find out the boss of the pit does all this kind of work.

Yeah.

So I said, "I ain't gonna do it." So then I became like an assistant, and they put the guy who was there back, and then I could see why they picked him—he liked doing all that. He made schedules and—

So it was all administrative stuff?

Yeah, you got it. That's exactly what it was called.

Did you not have time to deal with the players as much?

I—right! Plus, how could I watch Dean's money if I'm at the desk trying to get a dealer off Tuesday or some shit?

Is that the point of the whole thing?

What?

You're not watching Dean's money if you're at the table?

Of course. Yeah. So, Torres understood. He said, "Okay, Eddy." So then I was—and I also, most of the floormen had assigned areas—top of the pit, the middle—I'm the only one who had no assigned areas. Because of my connections, and I'm there to protect Dean, I'm allowed to walk anywhere, including the twenty-one pit, the Crap pit. I was the only guy in the joint like that who could walk anywhere.

RUSSELL TERBEEK

I went down to Laughlin where I worked part time on the floor. The casino manager, Mike Granninger, had me training people on how to deal, teaching public gaming classes and stuff like that. They came to me, actually I was still a dual-rate, and they promoted me to a backup shift boss. And at the time, they had the Reno property and all these other Circus properties, and it was Bill Paulos who was the GM. He was in charge over the Edgewater and eventually the Colorado Belle.

And he and Mike promoted only people who were working down at the Laughlin properties, which pissed a lot of people off who worked at the other properties. I guess that he promoted the people who he was comfortable with, and I didn't have any say in the matter. I just knew that I got the promotion. I found out later that a lot of other people were upset because I went from a dual-rate all the way to a backup shift boss, which is a big jump. But I knew and dealt all the games and was a trainer that

helped open the Colorado Belle later on and was all-in doing whatever they needed me to do. I was just trying to be a good soldier.

Dual-rate pit?

I was a dealer/supervisor; a dual-rate dealer/supervisor promoted from there, not even a full time floor supervisor at the time. But I also put in a lot of time and effort—I won employee of the month multiple times, and the Edgewater was already there, and they built the Colorado Belle, so before that opened up, we had to train and hire the table games staff for it. I mean, I had put in a lot of hours training, and in fact, Rick Gilmore, the assistant that I introduced you to, Rick and I helped train a lot of those people. So we were taking valet employees, and dishwashers, and EVS people, and waitresses, and teaching them how to deal and made sure they were ready to go when the “Belle” opened. So that was kind of our own little contribution to the vision for our new property. Plus, we were hiring fifty percent brand new employees (break-ins) who had never dealt before, and then tried to hire fifty percent who had some kind of experience; some that applied from other properties. So it was like a bee’s nest with so much activity. It was like, wow! We were proud to be part of the process for opening a brand new property. So, that might’ve gotten me the job, I don’t know, but I just figured whatever they needed me to do, if I could do it and help out, I was glad to.

So what did it feel like going up into manager from being on the floor?

It was kind of hard, because you work side by side with all these people, you work with the people who are dealers, and then they see you advance. When I dealt, my procedures weren’t perfect, I didn’t deal the cleanest game but now you’re supposed to enforce procedures, and you try not to tick anybody off. But there was a big difference from me and others who were promoted. It was in my approach. My mentors showed me the “why” we do what we do. I was one of those guys that trained a lot of people, so I got to show them “why” we followed the procedures and by doing that, we protected the games. Many people didn’t know why we did our policies and

procedures the way that we do. Upper management also knew that I could demonstrate correct procedures, and I didn't bust anybody's chops or anything like that. I would tell them if you're flashing your hold card while dealing out there, you have to make sure to be careful, keep it from being exposed and don't give anyone a chance to get a peek at it. There are people that make a living doing just that. So I knew about a lot of the scams that would be going on out there. People picking up hold cards, warping cards was a big one, with the single deck action that they had back then. Marking cards with nail nicks, lip stick, ashes, all that kind of stuff was fairly common. So, I was a trainer that wanted to help dealers and supervisors learn new stuff and not really busting anybody's chops, but it was a tough move at first, going from dealing into management.

BECOMING A TRAINER

It was really fun because I had done training ever since the Edgewater and the Colorado Belle days, so I'd been training for years and doing training through all the jobs that I've had up to this point. It wasn't like I said, "Hey, I'm gonna be a trainer." It just happened.

I would be asked to demonstrate a new policy or procedure for one shift and then someone would ask me, "Can you do this for this shift and that shift?"

I'm thinking to myself, "Okay - sure. Why not?"

So with the job at the Rio, I was the Division Table Games Training Manager and we had over five thousand employees working there. It was the coolest thing, 'cause I'd walk into the director's office (Jim Bonnell) and ask him, "I think that we need to do a training video to improve our dealers counting big buy-ins? I see a lot of mistakes on the floor." He said, "You know what, we do get a lot of big buy-ins here at the Rio, I need you to show dealers how to handle large buy-ins." So he said, "Oh, just go to the cage and get whatever you need." So I go over to the cage and I got twelve thousand in cash handed right to me. No problem! I just signed for it, went to a table in a dead pit, set up a camera with lights and did the video. They

bought state of the art video equipment, an editing system, the works. So I did training films, and that's another reason why Jim Keller would always be bugging me. "Hey, what do you have for me?" I can remember that big voice of his asking me as he walked in from the hall. And I'd give him a copy of the stuff that I made. It was the neatest thing because I could see where we needed help, set up a camera and do a training video just that quick.

BECOMING A MANAGER ON DUTY

You know what, you handle everything. Everything from table games issues, security problems, hotel and restaurant situations, you learn to wear a lot of hats fast. I remember when I was coming up, a guy pulled me aside and said to me, "Because you can get rattled, especially if you're new to the position—you gotta handle everything; restaurant complaints, hotel complaints, all that kind of stuff, (I think it was Moon Mullin, bless his heart), he said, "You know what, you need to turn lemons into lemonade and stop these guys from going to the general manager over something that you didn't fix. It's not that you couldn't fix their problems, it's that you didn't do it! So, give 'em the benefit of the doubt—unless they're throwing f-bombs your way, and take care of the guest." And I've carried that with me through my entire career. Take care of it however I can and I'm going to make it so that you want to come back. It's gonna be a win-win situation and go from there. So I try to remember that anytime I'm taking care of a problem.

So what kind of stuff comes up as MOD?

Just a ton of stuff comes up when you are MOD that you have to handle mostly complaints. You try to treat people like it was your mother that had the problem. You want to make sure that afterwards they say how great the problem was handled and they can't wait to come back to your place. But things have changed drastically from 20 years ago.

I think the biggest single thing that changed, well two things actually, are the focus on HR and the focus on customer service! Remember, there

wasn't any HR way back then. And in tribal casinos, they have their own gaming commission right there on property 24/7. You have HR (and/or Gaming) monitoring your every move.

HR requires you to do A, B, C, and D if you are going to suspend and possibly fire someone. They make sure that you dot the "I's" and cross the "T's". In the old days, if you caught somebody stealing on a game, you just tell them they're done and then they'd usually go down the street and get another job.

Now you have to make sure that surveillance keeps film; you have to have statements from everyone involved; you have to have progressive discipline and all that stuff. Since gaming has spread to many different states, customer service is a huge part of the game. So, I think Steve Wynn even calls his floor supervisors in the pit something like *Table Games Ambassadors*, or something like that, to emphasize the role that customer service plays. That's huge.

RON SACCAVINO

Can you tell me a little bit of what it was like to be a casino manager then, in a small joint?

Some joints, for example—the first one was obviously the Las Vegas Inn, little joint. The problem there was, you really, there was nothing to work with, much, and on graveyard shift, they'd have one table going, and if they were getting fucking buried, they would call me up and wake me up. And what do you think I got to do, I gotta get in the fucking car and I gotta go down there.

And what would you do when you got there?

Well, I'd go upstairs and I'd look on the camera, and I'd watch. And it was pretty basic, I never really tried to figure out how a guy's beating me. I would just simply go up to the guy and take my losses, and go up to a guy, customer, and I'd put my arm around him and I'd say, "Sir, we don't want your action anymore, you gotta take it down the street." "Well, what for?"

“Sorry, we don’t want your action anymore.” And I’d run him off. Take my losses, and run him off, and never know how he was fucking me.

JOE FRIEDMAN

I took a job, much to my chagrin, I would find out almost immediately, as a box man, ‘cause the dealers there [Hard Rock Hotel] were making crazy money. No one gave that place a chance—it was off strip, they pretty much begged people to work there. I mean, the dealers were all young, everyone was young, and the floor people, managers, were kind of people that didn’t have anything better to do. So, it was a real sleeper, and I don’t think anyone, including people that were running it, anticipated what was going to happen there, so it was, I was just happy with Tahoe—a hundred-dollar-a-day job was a good job, so I think about making one-fifteen a day, that was even better. So, I didn’t know much, so I, instead of taking a dual-rate job, I took a box job....

Well, it’s, dealing is fun for a while. And people still, you know, it just seemed like something I wanted to move up. I wanted some responsibility, you get—it’s, it’s nice to stand there sometimes, but you get sick of it. So, I was lucky enough at the Hard Rock—they were desperate.

Yeah.

They were desperate for people, they didn’t pay much, and I said one fifteen on the floor, even back then, sucked. You know, it’s sorta Downtown money. So within a week or two, the holidays—this is November—so the holidays were coming up, they’re like, “Okay, go stand over there, and this is how you work the computer, and now you’re a floor person.”

Okay.

So that was pretty much the training. And, I started training by fire, and just went from there. I got promoted—did the schedule and got promoted to pit manager, and then eventually the assistant shift manager.

So tell me what you’re doing as a floor person there. What are your responsibilities?

Floor person at the Hard Rock, you're really just trying to keep chips in the tray, 'cause it was so busy, you're just trying to, you know, make sure there's enough red, make sure there's fills going out, make sure, you know, people are staying somewhat in line. But it was just, I've always seen the floor person as being part of that, you know, the service chain, you know, not to bring up Wynn things, but it's, uh, I think you're part of the customer experience. For better or for worse that, you know, the stone-face dealer, the stone-face pit boss—those days are gone. You know, and they just don't hold water anymore. So you, I think you have to be talking, and plus, it makes the night go by faster if you're talking to people, you're out there, you know, shaking hands, kissing babies. It was so busy, you were just, really just trying to keep up.

Okay. How many games would you have?

Anywhere from four to six. It was a lot, and it was always busy. And the limits were fair, and it was always busy. There was never—all shifts. I mean it was, most places die out, maybe one or two, and this place didn't die out till five or six. It kept you busy.

So what shift were you working?

I opened on swing, and spent time on all the shifts. I've never been a graveyard guy, I mean, I worked graveyard, but never really liked it. Some people love it, but I did work all the shifts there....

Floor, maybe a year or two to get promoted to pit, and then another year or so to get back up shift.

So when you got promoted, did you have to switch your shift to another shift?

They rotated. Every year, or so, they just would rotate people around, rotate shifts, pits—sorta everyone had a look at things, you know, perspective's good.

Yeah. So what was that like making that jump? So, now you're running the pit—how many games were you doing?

Usually you're just, you're running around doing everything. You're putting out fires. There were no cell phones at the time. (Laughs) So you had a pager, and your pager went off, and you went to a phone, and you put out another fire. It's, the nice thing about the Hard Rock, since there wasn't that infrastructure, is you got to do a lot of things, you got to wear a lot of hats, which I enjoyed, because it would serve me well later at other properties where they did have a lot of infrastructure but you kind of still knew what was going on. It was—one boss, Brad, he'd look at his pager, and he'd say, "Joe, it's the cage, handle it." So, it was, sort of that "handle it" mentality, and you got to do stuff, and usually you were right, you know, or at least you did something, wasn't crazy. But yeah, you never, it could be valet, it could be, you know, the front desk, could be Mr. Lucky's.

HOWARD DREITZER

Did you start moving up into management at the Flamingo?

Yes, I became a box man there, and then I was sort of working box man and floorman there. And then, it was interesting, what happened at that point—I haven't thought about this for years—they had this inquisition, and I'll never forget it. They called me into the office, and all the senior management was there and they said to me that they knew that supervisors were taking money from dealers as I was describing before, as tips from the crews. So I didn't comment. I mean, everybody knew that, there was no mystery about that. Everybody knew it everywhere in town. Then they said they wanted me to—did I know anybody that was doing that. And I said, "Well, not really."

And they just kept pushing me on that, and of course I did, and they knew I did, but I wasn't going to say anything. And then they said, "Well, who do you think is doing it?" And I said, "Well, I'm not really comfortable saying that because you're going to fire them," and I said, "If I know somebody's taking it, I'll tell you," which was a bit of a lie on my part, but I

had to tell them something. And I got fired over that. That was the only time in my career I got fired.

So how does moving to property manager change your focus—now you're not looking at a particular shift or just table games—how are you getting your new knowledge about what's going on in the casino?

Well a lot of it has to do—you just have to stay in tune with all the news that's being published. You keep your contacts live, I mean, you're always meeting with people from other casinos to discuss issues to see if they're having the same experiences as you—from other jurisdictions, various conventions, there were already one or two in those days. You got to those to try to stay updated, you deal with the manufacturers to understand what their focus is and where they're heading, and they're also trying to pick your brain to see what you want. You do research, you start getting involved in research through marketing and focused studies of product, as well as marketing programs. Now, marketing can become, also, very consuming if you allow it.

My philosophy was to hire a good marketing person and just sort of stay in touch with them. You lead them by direction, but not by specific programs. So you just need to be aware of what they're doing, but you have to stay in touch with, most importantly with marketing, you have to stay in touch with how they measure what they're doing, because as creative as they can be with their programs, they can be even more creative with their measurements, and obviously, when you've got the same department generally measuring their own productivity, a lot of times you have to really dig in there and make sure that their assumptions and the way they're measuring is correct, because marketing can squander millions and millions of dollars, and make it look good.

And you're the Chief Operating Officer there?

Right.

So how's that different?

Well at that point, I did take in a bunch of different departments—IT and HR and all of that. And that became a challenge in terms of trying to spend the appropriate amount of time in each place. You had to make sure you didn't neglect anybody, but on the other hand, you couldn't be focused too heavily in any one area that would detract from revenue enhancement at the end. So that's where I honed my skills doing that. And fortunately, the property was doing well, so when the property is doing well, it permits you to have a much different focus than when you're struggling for revenue.

And are you ever interacting with the players at that level?

Oh yeah, I always have forced myself to do that, because I don't want to lose touch. It really is where the business is, so I would still walk the floor, I would still talk to customers, I would still go to customer events and sit with customers, and talk to them, and give speeches to them. I think that's a part of the business that if you—some people are in these positions that don't really enjoy people. They enjoy management or power, whatever their issue is, but the danger with that is it's very much a people business. And we have no product, really. We're basically letting them buy time, and you have to understand their motivations and their likes and dislikes, and you have to be seen, I believe, as a person who likes them. If they don't see that, then they disconnect from the property and from the management and eventually leave, particularly the better players. So, yeah, I spend a lot of time with them.

ELIOTT SCHECTER

I started off as the relief boss, 'cause I was the youngest of the group and had the least casino experience, so I was working all three shifts for the first six months. That was interesting. And they let me—because I was pretty young, I decided to do it in reverse. Instead of working day shift and swing shift and graveyard shift, I turned it around and managed to work grave, then swing, then day, so I technically worked five shifts in four days. When you're 24 and 25, you can get away with it. Of course, by the time shift four

came around, the day shift, after the quick swing turnaround, you didn't really want to be near me the first few hours of the shift. I was very tired and cranky.

How did becoming a manager change your perspective?

I like to think it didn't. Certainly, I had more responsibility. I certainly had to answer for a lot of decisions that the people I reported to had to answer for, uh, "Where's the revenue, why are you doing this, how can we do that, what's the production of doing that, how do you make this work, show me the math?" Questions I didn't have to answer before, I had to answer and show proof. So, I mean, that was both new but incredibly exciting. I learned a lot of things on the way. The GM there was basically the ex-CFO, so he taught me a lot about the, the PnLs and financial reviews and justifications, how to put actual presentations and proposals together. So I picked up a lot of skills there, important skills that I'll certainly need for the rest of my career, that's for sure.

DAVE TORRES

It was, it was hard at first, because I thought like a dealer. And, as I was telling you previously, a dealer always thinks he can do a boxman's job. Like, he just sits there, he doesn't do anything, it's easy money, till you're in that position and you realize, like there's a lot more to this than I thought. I'm keeping track of stuff, the boss is on me, was that there, was—so, now I'm not just keeping track of my end or my prop box, I'm keeping track of the game. "Oh my God," and they're asking, that's when I run across as a boss, my first counterfeits and things like that, I had to—so, you run into counterfeit money, and now what do you do? As a dealer, you just think that's funny, you go around, right?

Yeah.

And, as a dealer, it's easy. Some guys haven't talked to the suit. You don't really have a lot of pressure. "Hey, guy wants a comp, hey, guy wants cocktails." You hand off a lot, right?

Yeah.

So, I've tried to liken it to someone being in college with their parents paying all the bills. You think you're an adult, but you're not, really, you know what I mean? You're not in the real world yet, but you think you are. So, then you get to be a box man, and you're like, wow, there's more responsibility. And I started standing up pretty fast, so I was, there was no such thing as dual-rates at that time.

Really?

You were a boxman or you were a floor. But they would start standing you up, and they called that grooming rather than, so I'm grooming you, right. And I was jacket-heavy—what I mean by that is, because I was not secure in being a boss, I made a lot of over-the-top decisions, or yell at people, "Do what I say!"

And the transition was hard, and you're a hard ass, because you try, they see you as their peer, and you're not their peer anymore—you're above them. So, that's why I agree with what the businesses used to do at the time is you had to change shifts. If you were working swing shift, you became a boss, you're going to graveyard. We're gonna train you there, and then day shift. You're not going to back on swing shift for at least a year, maybe two. You worked with these guys and they need to see you as a boss.

Yeah.

Same thing as a floor, you start training as a floor, now you're in charge of two dice tables, or four blackjack tables. "Oh my God," you know, it's different, changing cards, did you make the call, is this guy counting on me, did he cap that bet?

So you have to start seeing things from a different position. Where do you stand, where's the best place to stand? Well, guys would tell you, you want to stand on this edge of the podium, look this way, don't worry about watching that guy, and running down games as you go, 'cause this was when everybody was afraid of counters, right, so everybody was afraid of

counters. So, you start, was he counting?, oh he pressed his bet four units up.

And it's all these things to remember, okay, fills, okay what time do they pull the boxes, okay, this guy—then the boss would tell you and ask you things like, "How long is that dealer in?" "I don't know." Well, now I need to keep track of how long my dealers are in, so you start adding these skillsets as you go up. So, as a dealer, I'm only in charge of this felt in front of me. Then as a box man, I'm in charge of these crew. And as a floorman, I'm in charge of these two or four tables, but all of the details that go along with it—lammers, markers, credit. Okay, I'm issuing credit—what do I look at when I give credit? When's a good time to come in? Do I interrupt the guy? And you're reading people. And the public sees any suit as a pit boss.

CHRISTINA GENTILE

I dealt there quite some [at the King's 8/Wild Wild West]. I actually, that's where I, I went into doing the floor.

Okay, so tell me about that. How did that, why did you decide to do that?

My boss at the time, the shift manager, he encouraged me to step up into a supervisory role, and I did. I covered, when he was gone, I would cover his days off. So I was a dual-rate, it's a little different than the normal Strip casinos, I was dual-rated from a dealer to a shift boss.

Okay.

So, because, being so small, you didn't have floor.

Interesting.

Yeah, and that was real nice.

So what did you have, did you have to get any license or anything to qualify, or do anything to qualify as dual-rate, or did they just make you dual-rate?

No, they just, it's upon, it was upon them to do it. Nothing special was needed.

So what made you want to go into management in floor and shift boss?

Eventually, I decided to go ahead and do more just full time floor, so that I could move up to a shift position, and a daytime shift, I was looking for the daytime hours again. I did have a stepdaughter back then, and my schedule was crazy, and the nighttime shift is just not family-focused.

So what was it like going from dealing to being a floor, to working floor more often, and even doing the dual-rate stuff?

Dual-rate stuff—at the Wild Wild West, it was difficult. We had a new director of casino operations come in, and he and I struggled with our differences of, I was no longer a dealer, I was now a floor or a manager, and I shouldn't stick up for the dealers, you know, that I wasn't a part of their group, and the separation—I struggled with separating myself from them, because we were an entire group.

CHRIS BIANCHI

**So, after breaking into the Barbary Coast, what'd you do, where'd you go?
So you're dealing there?**

I was dealing there for about a year-and-a-half, and then they promoted me as a floor supervisor for about a year. In late 2005 my casino manager at the Barbary Coast informed me that I was going to be transferred to the South Coast as a pit manager. He was so excited to tell me, that he made me call my dad right away to tell him the good news.

Huh.

And I was 25 years old.

Wow.

I actually felt bad I was leaving because Barbary had become my home.

**So tell me a little bit about transitioning from dealing to floor person—
was that dual-rate or was that, did you just go up all at the same time?**

There was no dual-rate. I did stand as a floor supervisor when I was a dealer but I still received my dealer wages.

So, how many tables were you, are you looking after when you're a floor?

Usually around four to six games in your section. It just depends on what pit you're in.

Tell me a little bit about what you're doing as floor—what, what's your shift life on a daily basis?

As a floorman, you pretty much walk in and you get your instruction from your pit boss as far as what pit and section you will be for that day. You're going to get a rundown from the shift before you on who's been playing recently—if they're a big player, if someone's being a problem, or vice versa, someone's being a really nice guy, he's tipping the dealers well, etc. And then you're responsible for those four games in the pit. Any problems that may come up, or if someone's winning/losing a lot of money, you report to the pit manager.

JIMMY WIKE

So tell me about moving up to floor.

Well, it was actually pretty easy for me. I was comfortable around the games, and it was, I mean it's different, but you're still, you're just looking at a crap game from a different angle.

Tell me about how it's different.

Well, it's different—you know, when you're dealing craps, if you're on the pole, you know, you're watching both ends; but when you're dealing, you're kinda responsible just for, for one end. When you're on the floor or you're on the box, you're kind of responsible for the entire game. And multiple people doing multiple functions, including guest service. You know, by this time, this is like '80, '81, and it started to be more important. There had been a little bit more competition, and it was just starting to be more important.

There was a guy, a shift manager down there, his name was Mike Sarge, but his real last name was Gambino, and he was from Philadelphia, but he always went by Mike Sarge. And Mike liked me, and he would have me

watch the pit. Sometimes he would go home and he would say, count out. That's—we used to do a count every eight hours back in those days. Now we do what we call a twenty-four hour drop—once a day, we count the money. But in those days, we used to do it on every shift.

Okay, and what are you doing on the count?

You're taking inventory of the chips. So what happens is, you take inventory of the chips and put a copy in the drop box/cash box. Now when you're going through the drop box, you have your cash markers, your credits, and your fills. And you take that against an opening inventory and closing inventory, and it will tell you what each game won for that eight-hour period. So I used to take the count sometimes.

Mike was the first guy that I ever saw in this business as a boss that, when he went home every night said good night to the staff. The shift managers—they usually come in earlier than the bulk of the supervisors and dealers, and that's just so they can kinda get the lay of the land before their group comes in. And Mike was the first guy that ever came around when he was going home, walk through the pits, and tell all the supervisors, "Good night, thank you." Nobody ever did that. It was just, that was just the business. But he would come around and say, "Good night, thank you." And I remembered that my whole career, and I always tried to implement it. If I was a floorman, I'd thank the dealers, unless there was something wrong with them. When I was a pit boss, I would thank the floormen. When I was the shift boss, I thanked the pit managers, etc. So, Mike was the first guy that did that, and it kinda made an impression on me.

GOING TO BALLY'S

I was an entry level supervisor. I sat box, I worked on the floor, I went in the twenty-one pit, I kinda went everywhere. And I was also the last person on the shift. I was working two jobs at that time. I was working six nights a week at Bally's, and I was working five days at a dealer school. I had a secondary education license to teach twenty-one, craps, roulette, and

mini baccarat. Like I said, I worked four hours a day at the dealer school, and then I worked eight hours or more, usually more, at night.

So, I was the last guy out on swing shift, which means I was always that guy that would send home that last nine o'clock, nine to five—I had a nine fifteen shift. It's just the worst possible shift because people come in at seven o'clock, eight o'clock, nine o'clock, you know, like that, but nine fifteen means you're absolutely the last person out every night.

And in those days, we had to close to an impress bank. So, the crap table was thirty thousand, six hundred; the twenty-one and the roulette tables were forty-two hundred, so at the end of the night, you just didn't close the game and lock it up. You had to credit chips off if you had too many, and then get a fill, so that every day, every bank roll opened up with an identical amount. But that also meant that even if they closed the game at five in the morning, by the time security got around to you, you'd be there till five thirty, quarter to six or later.

Well, it was a really great experience for me being that late guy even though I didn't like it because I got to work all over the casino. I worked in the high limit baccarat, I worked watching the princes play roulette, I watched the biggest twenty-one games, and whatever was in dice, so it was like an invaluable experience, and I was never a complainer; even though I worked overtime, I never complained. In the first place, nobody keeps you there if they don't need you. And I was never a guy looking at my watch going, oh God, when am I gonna get out of there, you know, where's my break—I never complained.

And I remember that New Year's of '87—nine days in a row, I worked overtime, and it was at least an hour every time. The graveyard boss, he told me one time, he says, "Jimmy, I'm sorry to keep sticking you like this," and I says, "That's okay, you wouldn't have me stay if you didn't need me." And about two months after that, in February of 1988 they had a big shake up there and that one graveyard boss, he kind of ascended, and I got promoted to pit manager. I was there for eight months and got promoted to pit manager. That just killed people that had been waiting since 1973 at the

MGM hoping to get, become a pit manager. But, and the only thing I can think of is, I watched all the games, and I never complained, right?

Yeah.

And, that's the way it was. Now, during that time, there was a tremendous amount of change. So from, when I went to work there in '87, until I became casino manager in '95, I was the eighth person to become casino manager in eight years....

So Bally's, it just changed how I looked at the casino, I mean it was just different. Like I said, I was there eight months, and I got promoted to pit manager, and there were seven casino managers before me in 8 years. They were Bob Payton, Alan Anderson, Dan Snowden, Rick Howe, Gerry Alicia, Dale Darrough, Rick Richards, and then me in eight years. And every time, with one exception, every time there was a new casino manager, there was something they had to change.

There's no casino manager in the world that will walk in and say, "Yeah, I like the layout, I like the way things are," because that will beg the question of why do we need you here? The last guy thought this was okay, and he's gone. So, whether it's real or imagined, whenever a new casino manager comes in, they say, "Well, we gotta do this, we gotta do that, change the procedure," you know, do something, they gotta do something different to make it look like they're doing something positive, and all they're really doing is hoping to get lucky and that the hold percentage turns around. But there were all those people, and I survived, and I kept getting promoted almost every time that there was a change.

So after being pit manager, what'd you get promoted to?

I got promoted to assistant shift manager.

Tell me about the change in becoming a pit manager.

Well, pit manager, that was pretty exciting. So, here I am a pit manager, and I was relief pit manager, which was even better because that means I relieve the pit manager in the twenty-one pit, in the dice pit, and in the high limit baccarat pit. So, I got to relieve and anybody in the casino

business knows relief's the best spot on anything, whether you're a dealer, a pit boss, whatever—being relief is good because you don't get stuck in one spot all day long. So, I was a pit manager, and if you're a dealer, you think you know how the schedule should be run. When you're a floorman, you see a little bit more, and you think you know how the pit manager should act. When you're a pit manager, you think you know everything and you know how a shift should be run. And when you're a shift, you think you know how the casino should be run. I never worried about going to the next level. I just always thought, when I was a floorman, I just thought I wanted to be the best floorman I can, and if I get promoted, that's fine. And when I was a pit manager, I just thought, I just wanted to be the best pit manager I can be, and don't worry about it. And then I got promoted to assistant shift manager. Then there was another breakup, and I got promoted to shift manager.

Which shift?

Well, I started out on graveyard, I worked on graveyard. I worked as a shift manager for six years, almost six years. I got promoted to shift manager in February of 1990. Then my first shift was graveyard, and that's another thing about shift managers—all the shift managers think their shift is the most important. The day shift managers, they go to most of the meetings, meet with other department heads, so they think they're the most important.

The swing shift manager thinks, “I'm here when the action hits, you know, this is where all the action is, I'm the most important shift manager here.”

And the graveyard shift manager says, “I'm cleaning up everybody's mess, I'm doing the count, I'm taking care of this, taking care of that, closing the games but not trying to run customers off—I'm the most important shift manager.” And I know that because I worked all three shifts, so I know the mentality. In reality, all three shifts are important, but different....

I was named interim casino manager, and then in December, I was named permanent casino manager.

What was that like?

And with that I was assistant vice president for about a year, and then became a vice president.

Well what's it like knowing that you got eight guys in eight years before you?

Yeah, I'll tell you, my biggest fear was, I wanted to last a year. I just thought, let me last a year, because if I don't last a year, everybody's gonna say, "He blew it, he couldn't handle it, they gave him a shot and he blew it," because that's what the rest of us said about a lot of the people that had been in that job when they would get fired. They'd say, "They couldn't handle it, they couldn't do it." So, I had a terrible fear of losing that job in the first year, but my other fear was executive meetings. I was always comfortable on the casino floor, I mean there was nothing that bothered me or fazed me on the casino floor. But all of a sudden we had weekly executive meetings, and I'm in the company of some highly educated people—the vice president of the hotel, vice president of human resources, vice president of food and beverage, the CFO, and all this. And they're talking in terms that I had never heard before. They're talking about REVPAR, benefit costs, and yielding up occupancy, and turnover and covers in the restaurants, they're talking about all these things, and I thought, oh my God, I'm like an idiot here because this I don't know this stuff.

And do they, I guess they don't prep you at all for that?

Well no, and every Thursday we're having a meeting up in the executive office where dept heads may as well be speaking in tongues. But during this, we always had a roundtable discussion, and then towards the end, it'd be, "Jimmy, what's going on in the casino?" And I would go, boom, boom, boom, boom, right. And, I noticed everybody's watching me intently, and after about the third meeting I had an epiphany, it dawned on me that, yeah, okay, I don't know what all the terminology is for these other departments, but I'm the expert in the casino. I know more about the casino than any of them, so that's fine that I don't know everything about

their departments—they don't know, they know next to nothing about mine. So, after that, I just felt very, very comfortable with them, and I made friends with all of them, and I talked to them, and tried to find out as much as I could about their departments. But I still had this nagging fear that I wouldn't last a year, just because of the history of Bally's.

CHRIS VAN BUUREN

So what was the transition into being assistant shift manager, assistant casino manager like?

It was very little. You don't really have, because the casino is so small, you don't have a lot of extra duties apart from being a dealer. You really do the counts, and that's about it. I mean, once the casino manager is on the floor, he basically runs everything. He'll run the break list, he'll make sure the customers are happy, he'll do the marketing, he'll do that VIP clubs, which we don't have very much of in the beginning. So the assistant is really just there to carry an extra set of keys and open up a slot machine here and there if need be.

Okay.

From there, going into the casino manager role, that was a little bit more involved, to learn a little more about slot machines, which is basically very self-taught. While I was on the ship, there wasn't anybody that teaches you about these things; you basically do it yourself. Also, you have to worry more about paperwork when you're the casino manager. You've got to worry about daily reports, you got to worry about hot and cold slot reports that you have to send shore side, and the money has to balance. I mean, you take responsibility for probably about \$150,000 in cash as well as maybe chips, eight to ten racks, maybe \$450,000, \$500,000 in chips.

GARY SANOFF

A couple years into the Union Plaza, about a year and a half, a gentleman by the name of Jimmy O'Keefe that came from the Tropicana, came to the

Union Plaza as a pit boss, and he befriended me and taught me how to play golf, which he told me would be very advantageous later in my career. He was an old-timer at the end of his career, after his heyday at the Tropicana. And he said, “You don’t want to deal anymore, you should get into management because the future is management.” So he put me on the box.

Back then the crap tables had a floorman to watch the game and a box man that sat in the middle of the game and watched the money. So I went there and I went from this great tip job to making \$65 or something like that a day.

Yeah.

But he said, “This is the way to go, and we’re going to work you up onto the floor,” and that’s how it went. I worked the box for about six months, and then he promoted me to the floor.

Can you tell me a little bit about the transition from dealing to box, what was that like?

At that point, being the person I was, the transition to box was almost a relief because dealing the kind of action, although it was great, we had a lot of 25 cent craps down there, and the quality of play wasn’t the greatest, so I wasn’t thrilled dealing at that point, and I welcomed the box.

You got to put a suit on, and I’m 25, 26 years old at this point, so it felt good to get dressed up and get a lot more respect than you did as a dealer. And I said, “Well, this would be a good way to go”—I don’t mind management, and if I can be on the floor, they would start using you, though not paying you, they would still use you to stand up from the box and work the floor for a while so they could teach you, and I liked that a lot.

But what happened was, I liked working the floor, and I stopped liking sitting the box, because I felt very confined as you were under the table.

Can you talk a little bit about the difference between floor and box?

Well, again, when you’re sitting box, you’re in one spot and you don’t have the mobility to get up and walk around, to talk to customers. You’re kind of

sandwiched in between two dealers, you're down at a lower level, people looking down at you, and although the job was important at the time, it seemed like an old man's job, because that's where old floormen and pit bosses went to retire to a box job. Unfortunately, to learn the businesses, this was the route I had to take. Right now, few properties have boxmen.

Why do you think that is?

It's definitely an economic thing. Certainly, the boxman was there for game protection. What they found out, more boxmen were stealing than not stealing, so what you were paying in salary for that, plus what they were taking out.... I'm going back 30 years ago, 35 years ago, this was the business. I mean, there were guys 65, 70 years old sitting box and getting paid \$65 dollars a day and supplementing their income—not that that was accepted, but I think that's part of the reason boxmen went away.

So tell me a little bit about going up to floor now.

So now, I get the full-time promotion, I'm up to \$77.50 a day working on the floor, and I'm learning all about baccarat, roulette—I learned that in the two years dealing there. Now, to watch those games, a lot of responsibility is put on you, and I guess it was always in my personality to be a leader, and that was sensed, even my old timer boss Rod Morris sensed that, and they started using me on high-end games, and we had good marker action for a Downtown property.

Plus, we weren't automated down there, so there weren't pit clerks, and markers were taken the old-fashioned way, not by computer, by index card. You had to go to the cage to check a credit line. And when you wanted a fill on your game, which means if your game was running out of chips, you would write your own fill slip, deliver it to the cage, they would call you to the cage, physically—we wouldn't have security—to pick up the chips. You'd go to the cage and pick up the chips yourself, carry them to the game. At the end of the shift, you would then go around and I was tasked with what we call counting the games, which is checking the inventory at the end of

the shift, and I was learning a lot and liking it very much. I figured this was the career I wanted.

CLIFF CONEDY

You know, so we were working three, four days a week, but the twenty-one dealers, the regulars, they were envelope, they were twenty-four hour envelope, and so when it came time to file taxes, they were filing on what they made, and we were filing on what we made, and two years in a row, I got audited by the IRS.

Wow.

I'm going, man, I got, here's my calendar, I put down, you know, when you see a line there, that means I made nothing. You know, when you see that twelve hundred dollars, that's what I made for that day, you know. And they said, "Well, the general consensus from other dealers, you know, you made ten thousand a year more than what you're claiming." Well, you can't compare twenty-one dealers with crap dealers. But that didn't fly, I still had to pay, so that's when I made the decision to go into management.

Okay.

And I took my first box job at the Imperial Palace. I worked at the Imperial Palace for eleven years.

What was the transition like going to box?

(Laughs) The guys I dealt with thought I was crazy.

Really?

Especially because of, right before Christmas and New Year holiday (unintelligible) money, and they were all making three, four hundred dollars in tips and everything, so it was a step back in order to take two steps forward.

Okay.

It was kinda tough, but I needed to know how much money I had coming in. I couldn't, it was like I was stressing and sweating whether I was gonna

make any money or not in order to pay my bills, you know, I have babies at home, I need diapers and milk. I wasn't a strong arm hustler-type of person; I felt guilty asking somebody to make a bet for the dealers, and so eliminate that and eliminate the IRS issue, I just said, well, I'm gonna have to sit on a box, they're gonna have to take theirs off the top, 'cause it seems like no matter what I claim, they still say it's not enough....

But going on the floor, like I said, at that time was a lot easier, because you had a box man and a floor supervisor for every game. And it was more pushing paper, you know, you have to make decisions on questionable calls or claims or things like that. I like the floor much better than the box.

What do you do on the box?

Box—you just sit there and drop the money.

(Laughs)

The stick man watches one end, he watches the end the dice land on, the box man watches the opposite end. And, that way, they feel like the playing surface is covered. And he makes corrections on his end, the stick makes corrections on his end. "Give him another nickel, you shorted him," you know, or, "That's not right, bring that back," or whatever. The supervisor, somebody that comes up and asks for markers, and that was, the Imperial Palace wasn't a big marker house, it was mostly cash. If you did get a marker it was five hundred dollars or something like that, but that was—and then they started tracking play. And it was all by hand. (Laughs) You know, write out the player slip and then as, while I was a pit manager, we had to log them all in, and that's how they initially started tracking.

CHRIS TONEMAH

Yes, going from floor to pit, it's different because you have to know the skills of each one of your floormen. You have to observe them and watch them, and that's where being on the floor and working with floormen, you become aware of each one's strengths who would work best in certain areas, and I could tell who wasn't and what I needed to do to help or teach, who I need placed in a different pit area. And because you're a pit manager, you

can see the schedule for the next day, and you can ask your scheduler to move people because of business needs—not because of personality. You can never let a personality—for me, as a manager—I can never let someone's personality get in the way of the job. If they are an excellent floorman, and I have high limit guests, I'm going to want them on that game, because I know the procedures will be done, the payoffs will be correct, the game will be protected, and the integrity of the game—those are my things, and that's where I have a problem with my upper management, because they tell me, "Don't worry about that, don't worry about the pace of the game, don't worry about watching the money, just don't worry about it—make sure the guest is happy." And I'm going, how can you run a business this way?

TO THE STRIP

HOWARD DREITZER

What was it like going from Downtown to the Strip?

Well, that was great. That was a big move. I hadn't anticipated being able to make it that soon, and when I got up there, my income increased significantly. I was able to start saving money and living a little bit better. I had met my wife by then, we weren't married yet. So I started getting settled and thought about—well not at that time—but not long after, started thinking about my future.

JIMMY WIKE

I worked there for a little bit more than a year but I wanted to get a Strip job. So, I didn't know anybody, I had some juice at the Tropicana, and after that first year at the Vegas Club I was supposed to go to the Tropicana. Well, the Tropicana, they just turned over, turned over management teams all the time. And so, I called this person that was a parent of a friend of mine, and says, "I'm ready to go to the Trop," and they says "So-and-so just left here," or like the week before or something like that, so that was that. So now, I'm just out trying to hustle a job on the Strip. Do you want me to continue in this?

Please do, please do, yeah, this is really interesting.

So then, I start pursuing, I'm looking for a Strip job. The MGM was going to open up, they opened up in December of '73. I went out there, but they said I didn't have enough experience, but there were people leaving from other properties to go there so jobs were opening up. So, I was going out auditioning, but I did want to stay at the Fremont about a year, just so I felt comfortable dealing a bigger game, and also, you get—hustling sounds negative, but just that whole aspect of how to treat customers, how to ingratiate yourself with them. So, I went out, I auditioned at the Hilton, I auditioned at the Flamingo, I went to the Riviera, I went to the MGM, and I went to the Stardust. I ended up going to work at the Stardust.

Is this before Argent owned the Fremont and the Stardust?

Yeah, I'll tell you the whole story if you'd like. I was there when Rosenthal took over.

Okay, yeah, please. But before you do that, tell me a little bit about the audition process back then. What would you do?

You would just go in and ask for the pit boss and say, "My name's so-and-so," and you always try and look presentable. In those days, people were wearing long hair, but in the casinos, you didn't, except for the Horseshoe—Horseshoe, you could, they didn't care. You could come to work blind drunk on drugs, and as long as you could deal the game, you're okay. They, Binions didn't care. But you had to perform.

So I always try to maintain myself, you know, neat and presentable, and I just would say, "I'd really like to come to work here, could I get an audition?" And most of the time, they would say, "Got nothing for you, kid," you know, "Got nothing for you," or "Come back and see me next week."

But I went out to the Stardust, and the guy that was the pit boss on days was a guy named Jimmy Horn. And he says, "Okay, let me take a look at you." And he puts me on a game, and he leaves me there for two hours, and he's gone. And, finally I says to the boxman, I says, "Most auditions are

twenty minutes". Most auditions they put you on the stick for five, ten minutes, and then put you on the base on a busy game for ten minutes, and they get a general look at your hands, you know, your capabilities. I mean, it's not a hundred percent accurate assessment, but they get a pretty good idea in twenty minutes.

And I'm on this game for two hours, and finally, so I told the boxman, I says, "How long am I gonna be here." And he calls the floorman, he says, "Hey, he's been on here for a couple hours," and they knew. It turns out later, they know, but they just do it, and used to do it to everybody.

So, they take me off the game. I go to Jimmy Horn, and he says, "I'm sorry, I didn't get a look at you," he says, "I got busy, I didn't get a look at you, go back on there."

So they put me back on there for another forty minutes. And then I get off and he says, "Ah, you did okay, come back and see me next week."

So next week, on my day off, I go out, and he says, "Let me take a look at you." And I don't want to say anything, 'cause I want the job. And so I go on there for about another forty minutes, forty minutes to an hour. And he pulls me off, and he says, "Yeah, you're fine," he says, "Come back and see my next week."

So, I go back the next week, and he says, "Well, let me take a look at you." And I says, "Okay," but I've auditioned twice," and he says, "Oh yeah, that's right, that's right." He says, "Come down here tomorrow morning and fill out your paperwork and start." So I says, "Okay,"

So I went down to the Fremont. I told them "I'm quitting, and I'm going to work at the Stardust." And I went to work there—the first day I worked there, I went down there about nine thirty, ten, and filled out the paperwork, and Jimmy Horn says, "Well, we need you at eleven, to work at eleven, had a call-in." So I says, "Sure, great," I wanted to work.

And so, I go on, and the dollar chips were silver. I dealt chips, but never silver. And silver is, I don't know how much heavier they are than clay chips, but they're much heavier, and you have a tendency when you deal is to over-pick. You know, if you need eight chips, you grab fifteen just so you

don't run out. But with silver, it's so heavy and your hands just aren't used to that. So by the time I got off at seven o'clock, my hands were kinda cramping up a little bit.

And then this guy comes up to me and he says, "We need you at nine." I says, "Okay, I'll be back at nine in the morning." He says, "No, nine tonight." And I just kinda went, "Huh?" And he says, "Do you want the job or not?" And I says, "Yeah, I want the job, I want the job." So I called home, and said, "I'm not coming home." And I was there till five o'clock in the morning. And then I did have to come back at eleven o'clock the next morning, but by then my hands were just like claws from dealing the silver.

GARY SANOFF

And I stayed there until August of 1984 when I had the opportunity, strictly through juice, because you couldn't get into an elite Strip job without some juice, and my family had some connections in town—can I mention names?

Yeah, sure.

Burton Cohen.

Oh yeah, I knew Burton.

Burton, well, you see a picture on my wall with me and Burton. And Burton was a friend of my family, and he said, "Well, he's been dealing enough and has enough experience, I'm going to introduce him to George Devereau, the casino manager of the Desert Inn, send him in to see me." So in August of 1984, I went to see Burton, who introduced me to George, and I sat in George's office, and he said to me, "Well, I have a job for you, it's dealing twenty-one."

I said, "But George, I've been on the floor for almost four years now, I want to be on the floor." And he said, "Kid,"—back to the kid thing—"Kid, you don't want to be on the floor here, you want to deal."

And I said, "No, I want to be on the floor." He said, "Kid, I'm telling you." I said, "But I've moved away from dealing, I really want to be in

management.”

He said, “Well, here’s what I got for you, I got a twenty-one job dealing; do you want it or don’t you want it?” So of course, I took the job. So I went into the Desert Inn in 1984, started dealing blackjack, which wasn’t my main game, but had learned it Downtown at the Plaza.

And I dealt that there for about a year and a half, and George was always saying to me, because I would hit him all the time, “Well, if I’m going to be dealing, I want to deal craps,” because back then, and this is big, craps went table for table....

Now, I couldn’t get into dealing dice there until George felt I had paid my dues, even though I had that great juice. So he had me deal blackjack for about a year, and then in the second year, he said, “I need you to cover summer vacations on graveyard.” I was working swing at the time, which was six o’clock at night to two in the morning. So he said, “If you cover graveyard vacations in dice, I’ll see how you do as a dice dealer, and I’ll make my decision afterwards, maybe I can put you in dice on swing.”

Long story short, I cover, hated graveyard, absolutely hated it, but suffered through it, and after the summer was over, he put me back in twenty-one, and a month after that, the Desert Inn was in the midst of a sale (it was sold five times, and I was at the Desert Inn for almost full fifteen years, so this was the first sale). Summa owned it when I got there, and they were selling it, I believe, to Kirk Kerkorian. And before the old management team left, they put me in dice full time.

HOWARD DREITZER

So tell me a little bit about the shift from being a pit boss to being a shift manager. What’s that like, how does that change your perspective?

Pit manager, I think, is one of the best jobs in gaming because it’s the last management job that you can pretty much come in and do your eight hours and go home, and you don’t have to think about it too much. I mean, you do, and the more industrious guys, the guys who want to move up, do,

and I did at the time. But if you want to just be a pit boss, which pays relatively well, and you don't have to take your headaches home, and you can do a good job and not have to be obsessed with your career, it suits that. When you go to shift manager, you've made a commitment.

Everybody that becomes a shift manager is ambitious. Well, some people are in it just for the power, and some are in it for the money, or both. Some want to just move up in a natural sort of ambition. And when you become a shift manager, you sort of own the shift you're working on, particularly if you're not a relief, and you're day shift or swing shift, and sort of like a mini casino manager, you're concerned about how the shift performs, the morale of the shift, the productivity in terms of efficiency of the shift, and so on, and the perception of other people of how the entire shift works. So it's your first foray into kind of being a casino manager on one level. In fact, some places actually call them casino managers.

And are you dealing with table games exclusively, or are you also dealing with slots?

Most places, you deal with table games, exclusively. It's sort of a weird setup, or it was in those days, it may have changed now, but you pretty much handle the table games, but even though slots have obviously moved up in terms of their contribution and level of profitability to being the majority player, the issues to deal with in slots are not generally as complicated as tables, and don't involve singular, large players as much either, so as a shift manager, then, you basically approve large slot payouts, and you'd handle slots, but pretty much the slot guys took care of the day-to-day stuff, and there weren't a lot of issues that came out of it. Tables where all the issues were in sort of the glamour and the focus, inappropriately so, as the profits were changing. And some companies realized that.

So on a day-to-day basis as a shift manager, what are you doing—what happens, when do you come in if you're working swing shift, when does your day start?

Well, it would vary, but swing shift, let's say you started at eight, so you'd show up there between 7:00 and 7:30. You'd find out who was in house, who's playing, credit situations, any staff issues, callouts, that sort of thing.

Scheduling, you think about what you want to open or what you want to close, any special events, any shows, things like that—restaurants that are having anything different, or opening or closing lines, any regulatory issues that are floating around, and then any projects. A lot of times, we'd be working on different projects as shift managers in terms of administration, whether it is evaluations or head counts, or different scheduling issues, different things like that.

And what kind of problems make their way up to you as the shift manager?

Well, as a shift manager, you've pretty much dealt with all the day-to-day problems of all the staff on your shift. So you would deal with callouts that fell outside of the normal parameters of what's going on or needed your approval. You would deal with any gaming-related issue that the pit managers and floor people couldn't handle, or that the customer wanted somebody's boss to deal with. You'd walk around and be responsible for making sure that the floor was balanced, that the table limits were appropriate, that the pace of the games was correct, that all the things that are supposed to be happening are happening. You'd liaise with surveillance to see what, if any, issues they were having, or if you wanted somebody watched, whether it's a player or a staff member, for whatever reason. And you would also deal with the regulators to make sure that they didn't have any issues as well.

6

Memorable Players

Dealing or managing table games, the players are the center of the action. Without them, after all, there would be no dealing jobs, and no need for pit bosses, shift bosses, or casino bosses. In this chapter, interviewees recall patterns of player behavior and memorable players.

ED WALTERS

How big would they have to be to be betting big in those days [the early 1960s]?

Those days, four hundred dollars would be a big, that'd be equal to ten thousand today.

Four hundred a hand?

Yeah. You gotta realize, the Sinatra show only cost \$6.95 to have dinner and see the show. So, it's another world. Most, a big player would bet a hundred, very big player. But we had categories, we had, at the Sands, '59 to '66, we had gamblers that were there because Frank or Dean, or—gamblers, they all come in with cash.

Okay.

Then we had what we call the special people. These are usually people from New York, Chicago who are very big with business, entertainment, stocks—the big elite. They could come out here and sort of be naughty.

Yeah.

So those people—we never mentioned names, it would be Mr. J., or Mr. L., we never mentioned names. So, like, the head of the New York Stock Exchange I used to handle, but out here he was Mr. J. And he could come

and there were, remember, there was no signing anything. He didn't even sign his name on the room.

Really?

No. He would call one of us, we would tell him what room—boom. When he gets in—in those days they had a plane and a cab, and boom, we tell him what room it's under. These were like very wealthy industrial businessmen coming out to be legally naughty, see, legally naughty.

Yeah.

They might come out with their wife, and I would treat her wonderfully, and then get them in to see Sinatra, or Red Skelton, or whatever the wife wanted to see, but sometimes the entertainers were so great, we booked people based on who was there.

Really?

Oh yeah. A guy might say, "No, I've seen Frank, my wife wants to see Jerry Lewis." We plan it when Jerry's there, you know. 'Cause these were fantastic shows in those days; there's no lions and tigers and all that shit. These were guys who grew up in (unintelligible), grew up on stage—they could entertain an entire room, but the same guy who treated his wife, you know, three weeks later he'd come out with his girlfriend.

And I would say, "Hey, Mr. J., how you doing?" and treat them just as good. We were the naughty, legally naughty place for the wealthy power players in the United States. To keep the players who liked to go to Europe, we opened Baccarat.

When did that start?

I'd say '64, maybe '65. Sinatra had a hand in us decorating the place. You've seen what I wrote on that, you know, so he helped because he's the only one who'd been to Europe and seen it. We'd never seen it. But we needed Baccarat because we had so many Europeans who wanted to play it.

They didn't play twenty-one, they didn't play craps. Another thing you need to know when you talk about history—on a Saturday night at the

Sands, you might have 12 crap games going—12!, and about 18 twenty-one. And the craps, through the years, went down. By the '70s, they were down to six tables because all the guys that had learned how to play in the service when craps was a big thing, it was just going downhill, and twenty-one became the very endgame, because now they play on the machines.

ELLIOTT SCHECTER

We were dealing with people who could barely afford their ten-dollar buy-in. So I mean it was much different. We had—the socioeconomic status was certainly a much different thing. People didn't have first exposure to actually playing poker in a public setting, so a lot of people didn't know how to behave. We had a lot of people thrown out, and a lot of people given warnings. It was—overnight especially, of course, because we never turned off the alcohol spigot, it could get fairly rambunctious. I had to have extra security staffing the poker room all the time.

What kinds of things would people do?

They were very quick, very quick to pick fights. They would take beats personally, they would miss out on jackpots, people would intentionally muck hands so other people couldn't win jackpots. This would of course start very tough fights. We had a lot of pissing contests. It was pretty strange. More so than in bigger stakes poker games. It was a lot of people who were just trying to forget about—it was almost like a bar. I mean, the game itself was slow motion video poker, but the atmosphere was much more like a bar.

Were they good players at that level, or are they just messing around?

So, it was strictly recreation. I mean, you certainly couldn't hope to beat a game where the maximum pot allowed was ten dollars. Once we got ten in the pot, we'd stop the action, run the cards out, and pushed the pot.

Really?

Oh, yeah. Yeah, it was quite unusual. So, of course, it was in everybody's best interest—the people who figured it out quickly knew that it was key to

get aggressive as possible early in the hand with as many people as possible in the hand. This way, every person's contribution to the pot was the absolute minimum. I mean, if you've got seven or eight people dealt in the hand, then you can get up to ten bucks. At least most of everybody only has to put in a buck and a quarter, buck and a half at the most. If you get it down to two or three people, all of sudden to fill that ten dollars, it might cost you three dollars and change to actually get the ten in the pot and then see if you can hit the jackpot. So, they learned.

CRUISE SHIP PLAYERS

We had a, we, to keep them busy, obviously, I mean they took about a good forty-five minutes to get out to sea, just like the other—took about forty-five minutes to get out three miles, so we'd feed them a buffet—anything to keep the customers busy so they wouldn't be trying to roam around the casino, so we get everything prepped up to start and maximize the action during the allowable gaming time. So of course it's an all-you-can-eat buffet, and I mean, it's not like we're ever going to run out of food. We easily staffed the galley, and had it outfitted with plenty to eat, so of course the—Sundays, our brunch cruise, very popular, used to run eleven a.m. to seven, and I'll get to that story in a second. They finally shortened it to eleven to five, thankfully. So okay, it's brunch. All of a sudden, there's almost no plates in front of the buffet. So of course, I mean, they're probably all in the dishwasher, they're all in bussing tables and trays, they're all just waiting to be brought back out. We're never going to run out of plates, I mean, shoot. So of course, there's one plate left, and there's two very old people waiting, and of course, they both grab the plate at the same time, and "No, it's mine, no it's my plate," as if we're never going to bring another plate out, and lo and behold, one guy manages to get a hold of the plate, and he just, I mean, whacks the other guy on the head as hard as he can. It's like, you've got to be kidding me. I mean, yup, and we had already sailed, we weren't going to sail back, but we have our own brig, as most ships are wont to do, and we had them in the brig for the entire time of the

cruise, and of course, the local police were waiting to take them into custody when the ship got back in.

Wow, over a plate?

They treated the other guy's wounds—and these are two seventy-five to eighty-year-old gentlemen. It was just the silliest thing you'd ever want to see.

RON SACCAVINO

Some customers were, I mean, you would be dealing, and all of a sudden, you look down, they'd just stand there with their twenty-five cents, and they would piss—I mean, unbelievable! I remember working with a kid—Johnny Red, who died not too long ago, he went from there and dealt at the Desert Inn—he was a good friend of mine. A customer spit on him one time, see.

Wow.

And a guy by the name of Johnny Ward was the shift boss, I think, and he threw him out. And then next day, Johnny was dealing on the crap table, and there was the customer on the table, and he said, "Hey Johnny, this is the guy that spit on me yesterday!" He said, "Well, yeah, but I told him I'd give him a second chance." Johnny said, "What is it, you get two spits before you get thrown out?" (Laughs)

(Laughs)

You had all kinds of weird customers.

RUSSELL TERBEEK

All the time. I could tell you some stories where—ah, I can't remember the guy's name—he and his family owned Coca-Cola in England, and we beat him out of like a \$160,000 over one summer. He was stuck and steaming!

Was this at Circus?

This was down in Laughlin at the Edgewater.

So how would a guy who owns Coca-Cola in England get down in Laughlin?

Who knows how he wandered down there. But he was an advantage player.

He would play twenty five and fifty a hand then spread to three hands of five hundred and we would shuffle. We did this all one summer and he was down about \$160,000. He ended up going to court and won a judgement against the company. The judgement was structured so that he got his own private table with his own rules. I think the rules ended up being that we had to deal him at least twenty-six cards out of the deck, so twenty-six cards would have to be dealt and exposed, and then if there were twenty-six cards out, then would finish the hand—then we could shuffle after that. He played with those rules for a couple of months and eventually won his \$160,000 back. So, it was basically all black action all the time with him. He had trays full of black sitting on the table—and that was big action for Laughlin. But you also see movie stars that came down on the river to vacation, and they would play five hundred a hand, three hands, that was big money for down there.

And they would sweat the money. They would much rather have a lot of twenty dollar bills come across those tables instead of dealing to any big black-action games.

I'll never forget that a guy beat the crap table at the Edgewater for about \$18,000 one day. He had a phenomenal hand. First he had a forty-minute roll. Then the next time he shot, he rolled again and had another forty-five minutes. Amazing. He pressed up his bets with "house" money, full odds. I sat box the entire time.

The next day I got called up into the executive office and was scolded for not being nicer to the guy. The casino manager was telling the general manager how we could have got 20% of that back if I was nicer. I'm thinking for a second—wait a minute. I was real nice to the guy. I bought him dinner in the steakhouse, offered him a room, the whole red carpet treatment.

I couldn't believe that the GM was buying into his crap. It was that kind of sweat mentality. I mean we called the tops of the dice, made sure that he wasn't cheating. The dice were hitting the back wall, all the payouts were correct, so it's just the way that it runs sometimes. So yeah, Circus is kind of a grind joint, mostly, and a lot of them didn't want to fade that action. And if somebody won some money, look out!

I can't blame them, you know. It's not like they had action like Caesars or the MGM or someplace like that, living and dying with those big numbers. I remember just the talk when Kerry Packer would whack a casino for a couple million in one trip, and that would hurt them for the entire quarter! So I mean, I can understand why Circus didn't really want to cater that kind of play. You have to have a steady stream of big play so you had big winners but big losers to fade the action. Plus, we heard that if the casino lost, it would cut into their quarterly bonus checks.

I remember when I worked at the Rio. They would send the jets and the limos, and, in fact, the Rio even built the suites in back.

The Palazzo suites?

Yeah, the Palazzo suites, which were incredible. We toured those several times, wow, those are unbelievable. But I think that Packer only stayed in it once and then didn't come back for whatever reason. We would have guys fly in, blow a couple million on a baccarat table and be in L.A by 9 a.m. for their business meeting. Lots of action there.

KANSAS CITY

Harrah's Kansas City was interesting to where there is a real mob presence still in Kansas City. I would hear guests and employees talking, especially the guys that had been at Harrah's for a while. They let me know who were the "real deal" and who were the "wanna-bes". It kind of reminded me of the movie *Casino*.

So there are basically four casinos down in that area, and friends and co-workers were saying, "Hey, these guys are the real deal, be careful!" They mostly played in the poker rooms and seemed to me to be real mellow,

low-key guys. That was until I had a couple of incidences with some of them.

I remember where one of the guys—and there's like five main guys (and then a lot of wannabes that hang around them) and I remember one time, this average joe player beat one of “The Boys” out of a hand at poker. He kept jawing at him, and wouldn't shut up.

I'm thinking, “wow, he beat the guy that wore the 1980s rose-colored glasses”. Probably would have been OK but he just kept throwing snide remarks his way. But “rose-colored glasses” let this player jaw at him on a poker table until the guy with the mouth eventually got up, excused himself, and went to the restroom. Well, “rose-colored glasses,” who was, you know, one of the “Boys”, followed him into the restroom. A minute later, “rose-colored glasses” comes out of the restroom and the guy with the mouth runs out screaming and his face is all bloody. I'm the shift manager, and the MOD [manager on duty] and I get an urgent call to report to the poker room.

I go over and ask security, “What happened?” The guy with the bloody face yells out “He just hit me with, or... slammed my head into this ashtray.”

And in the restrooms there, they had these little metal ash trays by the urinal, mounted on the wall. Well, apparently, the guy just slammed him face-first, right into the metal ash tray and busted his forehead wide open. Blood everywhere. The guy with the mouth was yelling, “He did this! He did this!”

So I mentioned to Security, “Well, unfortunately, we don't have any cameras in the rest rooms.” Security said that surveillance had the guy with the rose-colored glasses exiting the restroom followed a few seconds later by the player with all of the blood on his face. I then had security interview and take statements from both men.

So I cautiously walked over to the “rose-colored glasses” guy and asked him what happened? He said to me, “I don't know what you're talking about.” That's it! He was as cool as a cucumber, and the other guy's standing

three feet from him, yelling at him with blood all over himself. He looks at the guy; he looks over at me, shrugs his shoulders and said, “I don’t know what you’re talking about.” I said, “Well, you guys went in, one after the other” and I said, “We don’t have any cameras in there—obviously, you know that.” And he goes, “Yeah, I don’t know what happened to that guy.” I mean, it was just like something out of the movies. He was just like, “I do not recall that event” type of thing.

HOWARD DREITZER

What were the players in Atlantic City like? How were they different from the players that you’d had in Las Vegas?

I think a lot of them were the same players, but because we were on their home turf, they were a lot tougher. In fact, there was a time when I was working at the Golden Nugget in Atlantic City, and we had a lot of questionable players—not questionable players but questionable as to what their businesses were—that used to come in there, and they were pretty tough there. And I went back to work at the Golden Nugget in Las Vegas for a while, and when they’d come out there, they were just really nice. And I think there’s this mystique about Las Vegas that you can’t fool around there, you can’t get too loud, from the old days when you couldn’t. Well that never happened in Atlantic City. I mean, early on, there were a few incidents where security was kind of strong with people, but that got attacked pretty quickly, so it became sort of a hands-off policy after that, and so the players back there, the east coast players, got very tough.

They’re demanding, they would demand comps. I remember, it was a disappointment for me, because as a supervisor, one of the things I enjoyed doing was rewarding people with comps, and in Vegas they were always appreciative, just sort of, “Thank you,” and you’d anticipate it, you go out there and offer things, you didn’t have to ask. In Atlantic City, they demanded, and it just took some of the pleasure out of the job, where you

became more of—if they got it, they expected it, and if they didn't get it, you had an argument.

Did a lot of players take shots?

Well, I don't know, as a percentage, if a lot of players took shots. But there were a lot of shots taken in Atlantic City. Anywhere the industry's new, you get lots of people doing that, and most of them were not that bad. It was lying about their play, or lying about a bet, or this and that. They weren't too hard to deal with. But then you had others that, because the action was so heavy in Atlantic City, they'd come in and take some fairly obvious shots, and get away with it. They'd come into a crap game that was four-deep, and just start grabbing chips out of the rail and walk off, or they'd set a bet down, a big bet down after a winner was called, and get paid, and there was so much pandemonium on the table that it didn't get caught; by the time it was caught, they were gone.

What were some of the things that you saw in Atlantic City—unusual players, any interesting incidents that happened while you were there?

Well, I remember one time when I first got out there, and I talked to this friend of mine from the Flamingo into coming out as a shift manager at that time, to the Brighton, and we had this customer come in who was out of Philadelphia, and it's quite loud and boisterous, and a big player. In those days, he would bet \$2,000 or \$3,000 on the don't, and \$2,000 or \$3,000 here and there, but he'd like to bet late, and just before, really, he shouldn't.

And the guy I brought out—he was used to Vegas where you're in control, and people didn't challenge your authority, especially players, and so he asked me, he said, "What's going on?" and I explained it, and he said, "Well, you know, he can't do that." I said, "Well, John, I mean, you can tell him if you want," but the guy was a real tough guy, I mean really tough. And so he was standing there, and he went to make his call bet on the border of being late again, and John called No Bet on him. Well this guy—John was a black guy—and this guy started just really berating him and

calling him some horrible names and stuff. John wasn't even mad, he was just stunned that anybody would talk to him that way. And then the guy went to leave the casino, and he was dressed in jeans with a short-sleeve shirt, not tucked in, and as he's walking out, I saw on his back pocket, he had a gun just tucked into his pocket.

Oh boy.

Yeah, so that was a little interesting. I'm glad that didn't go any further. And then, at the Nugget we had plenty of them. At the Nugget, we had a lot of wise guys used to come down there. I remember, I was watching the news one night—you know what I remember, this is funny. When CTRs first came in, in '86, we were floundering around trying to understand it. It seemed very alien to us that we were going to report people for having money, but that's what we were doing.

And one customer—in those days, we didn't understand the issue of counseling, and that it was inappropriate. It really hadn't been taught to us, and we were actually taught the opposite, that if it was a good player, and they were starting to approach the \$10,000 threshold, that we should approach them and let them know that, should they go over \$10,000, we'd have to report them, which we thought was sort of doing our job, doing our duty, but in reality it wasn't.

And this one really bad guy from New York, nobody wanted to talk to him, and he was starting to approach it, so I got the task and I went out there to talk to him, and he just stared at me the whole time I was talking to him as best I could, trying to not make him mad, and then he walked away.

It was about a couple hours later, I was approached and I was told to stay—I was a shift manager at the time—and I was told to stay three pits away from him at all times. The Nugget at that time only had seven pits. So, I said, "Do you want me to stand on Pacific Avenue?"

(Laughs)

I don't know what to do. He said, "Take a few days off" so I took a few days off.

While I was home, watching TV, they were talking about this big bust in New York City of these crime figures, and sure enough, he was one of them being paraded down the tenement steps in handcuffs, and I guess it was alright for me to go back to work.

DAVE TORRES

Walked in—the guy had been playing a lot, come up from Arizona every weekend and would win. When I walked in this time, he was on his knees crying, crying, and they were telling him, "Nope, you don't wanna play." "Oh, I can do it." Back and forth phone calls. What is, what is the right decision here? Right, he's gonna go play, do we—"Well, yeah, let him play," and he's crying. Well, he had been embezzling money from a company on Friday, and then putting it back in the safe on Monday, 'cause he was always up. So, the first time he was stuck, he had no way, so he killed himself, actually on the way back. And I saw that a couple times; it was sad to see people completely lose everything. They lose their lives. And then you see other things too, like people, you start realizing there was a much different world out there. When we built the Palazzo suites, and we got to tour it, we're like, "Wow, look at this ninety thousand square feet of opulence." Said Dave, "This is just like, you check in a hotel, this is just a hotel room to them. They live palatially."

Yeah.

So you start realizing that. You meet a lot of interesting characters there. Some of my favorites—Larry Flynt, fantastic.

What was he like?

He's hilarious. He wants to play Blackjack and drink Louis [XIII cognac] like out of the bottle, you know what I mean, so he's just a hillbilly with money, and he doesn't try to be anything but a hillbilly with money. He's a nice guy, never abused the dealers, never—we had one guy, I can't say his

name, but you'll know, maybe you'll figure it out. So this guy used to come in and we had a—he used to come in with a bunch of girls.

Okay.

So, he calls me one time, "Hey, we're coming in, can we get a room?" "Yeah, I'll call you back." He says, "Uh, I'll call you." "Don't worry about it, I'll call you back." "No, you can't call me, I'm on Air Force One with the president."

Wow.

So it was like, "Whoa." So then, a few weeks later, he's with a bunch of girls, and these are top notch girls. He brings them with him. I don't know what he pays for them, but, so one of the girls is smoking weed in Club Rio, and she gets busted. Security pinches her, they take her to holding, she's got a bunch of weed on her. "Hey, I think that girl's with Mr. _____," okay, so we go over, "Hey, one of your girls got pinched." He's like, "Don't worry about it, let her go, I'll take her." "Uh, security ain't letting her go." "Don't worry about it." Picks up the phone and makes a phone call. All hell breaks loose like four minutes later. "Get that bitch out of that holding cell, put her in a limo, send her to Hard Rock, give her ten thousand cash." "Okay, here we go, take care of it." I don't know who he called, but it came from on high. "Get that girl!," and she was not, she was not worried at all. "It'll be okay, don't worry about it." The cop—and the security's telling her, "No, you're going to jail." She's like, "I'm not going to jail, I guarantee you, I'm not going to jail."

Wow.

And sure enough, she did not go to jail. So, it's just, you know, that's when you start really realizing there's two sets of rules. There's the very wealthy, there's what you think is rich, and there's the, and then there is.

So tell me more about that. Like, you see people coming in who are rich, and then you see people who are really—

Above it.

So how do they interact, how do they do their thing, you know, what's life like for them?

Again, it's gonna be personality-driven, like Mr. Packer was probably one of the nicest gentlemen you will ever meet in your entire life, okay. I'm talking about the old man, Kerry, right. Generous, legendary George—the biggest George, legendary. And everybody couldn't wait for him to play because he's a George, right, we're gonna make a lot of money. He would have the top of Masquerade reserved. He would have, but it was all his entourage that wanted that.

Yeah.

They wanted lobster, they wanted steak, they wanted another bottle of Dom Perignon. He asked for, first it was Mountain Dew and Nathan's Hot Dogs, and then it became Diet Slice and Nathan's Hot Dogs.

Huh.

That's all he asked for; he never asked for anything else. They went to dinner—sure enough, it was gonna be comped, but while it was playing, Diet Slice, Nathan's Hot Dogs—fresh. So, okay, "Got it," they're the butlers steaming it up, you know what I mean, here's your hotdog.

CHRISTINA GENTILE

What's the biggest player you saw at Red Rock, would that be the ten thousand dollar player?

Ten thousand was the maximum bet. There was, at times, requests by players to bet more, and depending on their hands played—I know there was a gentleman who played at Red Rock, and he had his own reserved game, two reserved Blackjack games, and I was the one to track each and every bet he made so that I could adjust the amount bet each and every hand, because that was where—the management was concerned with the true comp value, so every bet he made, I had to adjust in the system what he was betting. And, at Red Rock, three hands was our maximum hands—

three at ten, two at fifteen, or one at twenty-five, I believe was our standard for the special limit player.

And where do those players come from? What do they do for a living, how do they get their money?

I was never allowed to ask. (Laughs) This gentleman was an Asian gentleman, and what he did for a living, I still do not know. He was nice, and he was a player of the Red Rock and the Wynn property. Funny enough, we did share players, even though they are worlds apart. There was some sharing of some of their players, and it might've been maybe a lower-level player at Wynn, but it was our higher-level player.

And what kind of comps are they asking for?

They want airfare.

Okay.

They want airfare, they want a discount on their loss, they want rooms, they want gift shop, but not just your average gift shop. They want watches, they want jewelry, they want the top-floor suites. So their requests are high. One of our players—I remember he wanted a stereo to play his iPod, so we had to run across the street to Best Buy and purchase one.

Okay.

I've run to Costco to get the Fiji water.

So who pays for that?

Well, the casino pays for it.

Do they use credit card, or what do they do—if they make you pay for yourself, you get a receipt?

Yeah, they would do a reimbursement on that or use petty cash.

So what are some other interesting things you've seen happen in the pit?

You know, that's hard because once you're in that environment, you become desensitized. So something that might be odd or outrageous or outlandish to the normal outside observer is just so customary that I've tried to think about what really stood out to me, and—just the gentleman,

the one that got me is the gentleman betting that ten-thousand-a-hand, you know, and it was fast, and then the dealer had to count out ten thousand dollars, and it was fast action, and he had the appearance of being on drugs, okay, with the box of tissue right next to his chair, and the blowing the nose, the stopping to go to the bathroom, coming back with the nose, so things like that are just no big deal, but to somebody else it might be.

Seeing all that money at first was, like I said, it's a little like, whoa, you know, and where's all this money coming from? Who knows?

Hmm.

There was a player, I didn't get to experience or see it firsthand, but I was told he dumped an entire bag of money onto our dice table, and it took the dealers over an hour to count it.

Wow. So does he walk around, does he sit there, watch them—what's do he for an hour?

(Laughs) I do not know, I didn't get to see that one. The gentleman playing the Baccarat game, he was just in a hurry to make the next bet. So, we have to hurry as fast, or the dealer has to hurry as fast as—it was a female, she could—and count out that ten grand, so that the next hand could come out....

One lady at Red Rock, she was a local. She'd come and play, and she was a little out of her league in the high limit pit, what she was playing, and she was a big personality, and when she lost, she cried, and would not leave the tables.

Wow.

And she cried just, not just a sob, but she had a total breakdown in tears, and it lasted for days, because she would come back because, of course, she was there so often, it feels like family, this player thinks that we all care and like her because, well, that's what the casinos want you to portray to your players. And some might be true and some of it's just business, but she cried and cried, and it was hard. You do, as a human, still have compassion.

This job takes a lot of compassion. But I've seen people throw things, throw a chair across the room, take the cards and rip them, throw them on the floor. They throw fits, almost like toddlers.

CHRIS BIANCHI

It's interesting to watch and listen to some of the customers. Whether it's watching their betting strategies or them saying how they know how to beat the game and they have endless amounts of money to do it with. Ten minutes later after they lose it all, they look like someone just killed their dog. But that's part of the job... Dealing with their mood swings. One minute you're their best friend and the next you're the enemy. That's something that UNLV really doesn't teach you whole lot about. That's where pit experience helps out. Gotta learn it hands on.

What do you do?

I try to accommodate them with one of our many amenities. Maybe get them a room, a dinner, trip to the spa, etc. Normally when a player loses big money, they want some sort of comp.

Okay.

I've literally given customers hugs, because they're so tired of losing all the time and they start crying. One customer cried after losing their rent money for the month.

Do you remember any big runs that players had, where they were down, they were up, or anything like that from either your time dealing or management?

At the Barbary Coast there was a guy that was down to his last \$3 on a \$5 minimum table. He asked if he could just bet his last \$3. Not only did he win that hand, but he ended up running it into five thousand.

(Laughs)

He wasn't even betting that big, but just from three dollars he caught the run of his life. And then you see other people that hit a big jackpot on a slot

machine, and they've got a wad of cash in their hands. And just like that they blow it on a blackjack game in no time at all. So, I've seen both sides. One minute they're telling you what they're going to buy with the money, and then five minutes later, it's gone. Or the flip side, someone's down to their last three dollars, and turns it around in an hour to thousands....

The staff on my shift has a favorite player. We call him Mr. Saturday Night.

(Laughs)

He's here every Saturday night and the reason why we all like him so much is because he enjoys coming in to gamble, he has a certain limit that he can afford to lose, and more than anything else, he's a real personable guy. He shares his life with us and we do the same with him. He's a breath of fresh air.

CHRIS VAN BUUREN

How are the Las Vegas customers different from customers in South Africa or Korea?

Las Vegas customers are a lot more demanding. I think American people in general are a lot more demanding. They hold us to a higher standard of performance, I guess, and when things don't go their way, I find them very abrasive. They want something resolved right now, they want something done about it right now, and for the most part, they want something in return.

Can you give me any examples without naming names?

Yeah, sure, I mean, what would happen is a person would come to the table and they would be betting ten, fifteen, twenty dollars a hand, average, and the dealer might make a small mistake, which, at the time, when you catch it, hasn't really cost the player anything yet. So, on occasion, they don't like the decision that the floorman makes, you have to play out the hand, or you can choose to take your money back—we give them that option. And when this happens, they always kick it up, want to kick it up to a casino manager, "I want to talk to management, this is not right, I would've

won that hand, I would've done this, I would've done that"—we, basically, always err on the side of the players; so we always give them the benefit of the doubt, they always get the first one. Second, third, and fourth are not so lucky.

So when this invariably happens, the casino manager has to come over, and I have to normally give them something to calm them down, either free breakfast, or a discount on their next hotel room, or whatever it is within their power to do, they have to do just to calm them down. And I find that that happens a lot here in the U.S. and it doesn't happen almost at all in South Africa.

Something really badly has to go wrong in a South African casino before it gets kicked up to the casino manager and before he actually will give them something.

So, in Korea, again, it's all about the gambling. Nobody complains, nobody talks, they're just there to gamble, that's all. If somebody interrupts the flow of the cards, everybody at the game gets very upset. If somebody makes the wrong decision on blackjack, it's not like here, people are like, "Yeah, it's your money, you can do whatever you like." There, they physically almost assault the person.

Really?

Because they feel that person has affected the outcome of the game, which they absolutely have not, but that's the stigma—Asian people love gambling. And I think Korean people might love gambling a bit more than Chinese people if you can believe that. They would bet on anything. I went out with them and played golf with them, and they have certain games set up for the golf day. You can either play a game of this name or a game of this name—each game has separate rules. And they settle up the money, you either bet for five dollars a hole, that can grow to twenty dollars a hole very quickly, plus forty dollars for birdies, and the money is just flying after every hole, it was very intimidating.

So I feel like they'll bet on anything. They'll bet on see which drop hits the ground first when it starts raining. So they don't care about anything ancillary. They only care about the actual gaming, which was good to see, but when you then have to move back here and more deal with customers and their needs and wants, it's a very juxtaposing position, I guess, very much so, because here it's all about the customers; there, it's all about the gambling.

BILL ZENDER

When I got to the Western, I found that there were a lot of problems. They had all break-in dealers, and making a ton of mistakes. They were overstaffed, and they had a shift manager/floorman had no idea what he was doing. If somebody was winning, he'd run them out the door. We had a real eclectic group of players that would come in on graveyard. We'd have anything from tourists staying in a hotel, to casino workers that got off work looking for a cheap drink, and to pimps and hookers, because at 9th and Fremont, I used to say you literally have to step over the homeless to come in the front door.

I told my dealers, basically, "I want you to be friendly, and I want you to get the hands out." Once they started getting the hands out, we started to win the money. I had a cocktail waitress who would not come out and serve the table. So I told her, "You need to get your rear end out here in the pit." She says, "Well, I'm getting taxed on my tape, how much free drinks I take out to the pit, and those people don't tip." And I said, "Well, you come on out to the pit, and if you build a relationship with these people, we've got almost the same people every night, they'll start tipping you. If you come out and scowl at 'em, never give 'em a drink, they're not gonna tip you. Now, you either do this," because we were union at the Western, "or, I'll have Ray call down to the union hall and find someone else to replace you, because I need someone to come out and service the tables."

So little by little, we starting building up the business, building the clientele, getting the hands out, winning the money, being friendly to everybody. I got the cocktail waitress out to the pit, who three months later thanked me because she was making more money than she ever done before. We went back to all the things that were the core features that customers like; that's attention, a mistake-free game that's being dealt quickly, service, and of course, relationships. We built relationships with our customers....

Oh, man. I got, I know a couple really weird, but I'm not gonna tell ya (Laughs). One of 'em's like really out there—when I was on the floor back in the early eighties, and Downtown was a zoo.

We had a guy come in one night—it was cold out, it was in January—it's gotta be about thirty-five degrees out, and 'cause we had air doors at the Western, and they were closed. And the guy walks in, and he's got a pair of pants on, no shoes, no shirt. And he was walking in, and I look up, I'm working the floor and we had one game open—I had, this guy named Bob Walker dealing. We had like three players in a table.

This guy walks in, and I go, "No shirt, no service." And he goes, "Man," he goes, "You can't make me go out in the cold again, you can't make me go out." And I go, "Yeah, you gotta leave." He goes, "You gotta have mercy on my soul, man." He goes, "Some guy at another casino just maced me." I say, "Well, he couldn't have maced you, because I'm allergic to it," and I stop right then—my nostrils started to flare up, my eyes started to water, right.

And I'm going, "Security, security!" And he goes, "I can't believe you're making me leave." I look over at Bobby my dealer, he says, "Bill, I can't see anymore." (Laughs) And this guy is like within ten feet of the table, I mean, the smell of the mace, it's setting us off. So we just made him leave.

There's some really screwy stuff, too. The first time I was working at the Western, we had a young guy sitting on the table playing. He runs out of money. So he reaches over—when I say young guy, he was in early twenties. He reaches over, and there was an older man sitting next to him, he picks up five dollars in chips and puts it in his betting circle. Dealer calls

me over, “Bill, guy just picked five dollars off this guy’s bet and put on his.” I grabbed the five and put it back on this guy’s stack. The young guy looks at me, reaches over and grabs the guy’s money, puts it back out on his betting circle. I said, “You can’t, that’s not your money.” He goes, “It’s my money if I say it is.” And I tell him, “Then you’re out of here.” He goes, “Oh, like you’re gonna throw me out.” Just then, I had two security guards working.

Normally, I only had one guard on duty, but we just got through doing the box drop, and we always need two for the drop. The two guards come walking up on either side of this guy at the blackjack table. Not noticing the guards directly behind him he says, “Who’s going to throw me out, like you are?” Just then he looks up at the security guard and one guard tells him, “We’re with him,” and they grab this kid off the table. The kid starts to swing on them.

They take him down, and put handcuffs on him. Anytime there was any physical altercation with someone we were ejecting from the casino, we had them arrested for disorderly conduct, to protect us. They take the kid in the back room, and hold him for the police. A little bit later, the swing shift security that stayed on says, “You’re never gonna believe what happened back there.”

I go, “I hope you guys didn’t like drop kick him or anything like that.” He goes, “No, no, no, we didn’t, but Metro PD ran this guy’s ID,” and, “He’s wanted for murder in San Diego; he killed some guy about three days ago and left to come to Las Vegas to lay low.” I thought when you “laid low”, you weren’t supposed to get in altercations in a casino. So, he had murdered somebody, wow.

CHRIS TONEMAH

And when I became a floor person, I had to go to graveyard again, so it was that graveyard thing again, getting up at two o’clock in the morning and driving in when there’s no traffic, which was beautiful, going to work. Staying awake was something else, but you got to deal with great people;

you got to know guests; you got to know players that were real players. I got to deal to Kerry Packer, I dealt to him for years.

Really?

Yes, I dealt him, he was an amazing man.

When you were on the floor?

When I was a dealer at Caesars. Kerry Packer was a very generous man, and he only liked to play baccarat. High limit baccarat was his game, and he decided he wanted to play blackjack, and the baccarat dealers had a fit because he came down to the main floor and wanted to play blackjack. And we couldn't believe it when he would tip us. He would put \$5,000 out there for us, and that was, I mean you got \$100, and once in a while, \$1,000 check, but a \$5,000 check out there—that was phenomenal, we couldn't believe it. And he loved the game, but then when he started playing the game, he got to know the dealers and he started—well, he thought, because the baccarat dealers told him, everybody got a share of what he tipped them. And when he found that out, he stopped playing baccarat at Caesars and started playing blackjack only, which was great for us, it was phenomenal. He was great, and he could bet, when he first started playing blackjack, he could bet \$25,000, all six spots, and you were there for a check all the time. And it was great, I got to deal to him. He was so normal. He wore blue jeans and shirts and he liked to have fun. And he was a very generous man. There was a cocktail waitress there, her daughter had a heart disease, and, you know, people talk in the casino business, and you get relationships with players, and when it's a high roller, they like you to make them feel more personal, get to know them, keep their secrets, but he heard some of us talking about the cocktail waitress and how she was having a hard time, and he was a generous man, and he paid off her home for her, he made sure her daughter was flown to Los Angeles to UCLA, got the best treatment. He was just that way. And us, as twenty-one dealers, he was so kind to us that we realized, and his son at the time—no, was it his son or his, I think his son had asthma—and he would talk and share these

stories, so one time we made a great score from him, so we took a large sum of money and we bought fifteen asthmatic machines, and we donated them to UMC.

Nice.

And the next week or a week later, we donated them to Sunrise Hospital, but we donated them without recognition. We didn't want anyone to know what we were doing in town. And that's one thing about Caesars that I'm so grateful for because if you were sick, they took care of you. You always got an envelope. And we had one girl—Carrie Cambaro—she had cancer of the brain. And we carried her on our tokes for eighteen months. Every day, she got an envelope, her family got an envelope to take care of her and her family. You did those things. We had another gentleman who died, and we carried his family for six months. And the casino never interfered in our business, because it was envelopes. And that was our money—once it went in that box, we could do what we wanted with it, there were no questions asked. There wasn't any pettiness, and I never experienced that at MGM—I never experienced that anywhere.

7

Dealers

In doing their jobs, table games managers spend much of their time supervising dealers. While, once above the rank of floorperson, they are not directly managing the dealers, they are responsible for settling—or escalating disputes. This gives them a unique vantage point into the stresses that dealers face—and inflict on others.

JOE FRIEDMAN

You know, you have dealers tap off their game to say, “I’m done,” you know, “I’m done dealing,” like, “Bye.”

In the middle of the shift.

In the middle of the shift, you get that.

And do they ever say what brought it on?

It’s usually a combination of things. It’s usually just, they, they’ve just had enough. I mean, I get it, it’s, after, you know, let’s see, after Hard Rock, I hadn’t dealt for about nine years. Between Hard Rock and Wynn, I worked at Green Valley for six months as a dual-rate, so I had, so as a dealer, so I’m like, okay, this’ll be interesting. So, I pushed in, I’m dealing, and it was fun for a week or two, and then people were yelling at me about stuff, and I’m like, oh, this is why I left, this is why I didn’t want to deal anymore. I could—as a floorman or a boss, you can walk away. You’d be like, “Goodbye,” and go somewhere else.

DAVE TORRES

We had a guy—it’s funny, when I saw *Casino*, I thought of this guy—we called him Seven Out Sam. Basically, it was Eddie Mush. Whenever Sam came to a game, the game was gonna die.

Okay.

We had another little guy named Neil. He was about four-foot, used to be a jockey, and he would sit there and, and he would write down every roll of the dice, like he was tracking something, and he had years' worth of dice rolls from many different places, and he swore there was a pattern, and that it was gonna make a lot of money. Now Neil was probably in his seventies at that time, and it hadn't made him any money yet, and I never heard his name again once I left, so I doubt the veracity of that. Some interesting players. There was a timekeeper there who had worked there for many, many years. The El Cortez had profit sharing. Jackie was way ahead of time in terms of offering profit sharing, so people worked for him for a long time, and were fiercely loyal because they got money. This woman who was the timekeeper—and she ran it like, like a clock, like people had to line up. And bosses—shift bosses line up—and they would not talk in her line.

Really?

She was not, yeah, she would rap on the window, and then you had to come in, give her your badge, she'd swipe you in, out, and you lined up. And I think when she retired, she had close to a million dollars cash, so, just being the timekeeper for Jackie. You had every small-time grifter. They would come in to take shots at you because you were a break-in.

CHRISTINA GENTILE

Yeah. (Laughs) Dealers—we, myself included—we're a funny breed. There was one occasion where I, when the dealers came in, I was to tell them who was going to break next, and I told the gentleman, take out, you know, so-and-so on this game. And I was talking to another dealer to tell them what, where to go, and I had looked up back at the dealer where I first told to go, and there was no dealer on the game, just a table full of players with no dealer, and that's just something you just don't see.

Yeah.

And my heart dropped, and it was like, where did he go? So the dealer went and tapped off the other dealer. The other dealer left, but the other dealer went to go blow his nose, so they're, you know, the one dealer who was on the game just clapped out and left without turning around to his relief, so that was, you know, a little silly. I've had dealers call me over to their game, they want off this game, "This guy's cussing, this guy's rude." Some of us dealers are just crybabies. I don't know how to say it nicely—crybabies. Every little thing they would call you for and, "This guy just said the F word, tell him to quit cussing, I can't deal to this person." And it's like, we all know in the industry, we have to have a little bit of a thick skin.

Yeah.

Me, myself, as a dealer, at one time I stopped my game and screamed for my boss to get over here because I would refuse to deal to this gentleman across from me, so I do know the feeling, but it took a lot of harassment from this gentleman, till finally it was like, "That's enough."

BILL ZENDER

Oh, yeah. I mean, I'll tell you what, I've known some real doozies. When I was at the Maxim, we had some really strange people.

There's this one dealer named, and I'll go by first name, Caroline. Caroline was probably in her mid-thirties at the time, and she was one of these people who couldn't keep her mouth shut. So it was getting kind of close to the end of swing shift, and what we do is start closing games. So, it wouldn't be unusual for a dealer to deal during a twenty-minute period, deal on two or maybe three games. Whoever is supposed to go home went home, and that person took over their table. Caroline's standing behind me, I'm in the side pit doing the schedule, and it's about, oh I don't know, it's about three in the morning. And she was standing there, she taps the dealer on the shoulder, and looks at people at the table. There's a woman in the center of the table who's kind of a large-boned woman, and she's got a really thin mustache. Caroline leans over and asks me, "Hey Bill, you think that's one

of those, those trans, trans-?" I say, "Transvestites?" She goes, "Yeah, you know, guys that dress like women?" I say, "Caroline, I don't think so, I don't care, don't worry about it, just get on the game and deal." So she pushes in and she deals, and I know she's got to be staring at this woman. All of a sudden, the woman gets up from the table, cashes out, says goodbye to the rest of the people at the table, and walks away. Caroline can't handle it, so she leans in while she's shuffling, and she says, "Do you think that's one of those transvestites that was right here?" And the guy looked at her, he goes, "No, that was my wife."

Jeez.

What are you going to do? We had this big tall guy who usually dealt the Big Six Wheel, and basically, he was another guy who couldn't keep his mouth shut. His first name was Leroy, and Leroy was on the Big Six wheel dealing and this guy's sitting there, and he sees this really pretty girl go by. And he said, "Wouldn't you like to do something to her?" And the guy goes, "Well, I have, because that's my wife." But they both laugh about it. Well the guy gets off the Big Six wheel, he runs into his wife, tells his wife all about it. She goes ballistic, grabs the general manager, and the general manager fired Leroy. You know, he couldn't understand why he got fired.

(Laughs)

We had a guy dealing at the Aladdin. He was a really good kid, and he was from somewhere in New York City in one of the boroughs. So I get a call from my shift boss, Mike Phillips who says, "Bill, this kid just went off his nut on the table."

He was standing there talking to this player on the table,"there was only one player on the table and they're going back and forth, and I guess the guy he was talking to was from another borough in New York. All of a sudden, the dealer reached down and grabbed his toke box, runs around the table, and started hitting this guy in the head with the toke box.

Wow.

I said, "Oh, man." And he was a really good kid, too. So I get down there, and in the shift manager's office is the guy that got clobbered. He's got a cold compress to his head, and he's going, "I want this guy, I want him arrested, I want you to call the cops, I want him arrested!" I go, "Okay, I'll call the cops, have him arrested. Let me get you a drink?" "Yeah, a drink would be great."

I got a cocktail waitress over there right away. The guy's still got this cold towel against his head. I said, "But, you have to understand one thing, I'm going to do whatever you want me to do, but let me talk to my people first and find out what they got to say about it before I do anything." He said, "Okay, but you better make it quick."

So I go and I grab this kid. "Okay, tell me what happened." He said, "Oh, I lost it," he goes, "I'm on the table, he's from a different borough from me, and we got talking, and we started getting in each other's face, and he made a couple bad comments, and my mother's name got brought into this," right, "And I lost it, Bill, I really lost it." I says, "Well, I'll tell you what, I can't keep you employed anymore; you went off like this, you're a liability." I said, "But, this guy wants you arrested. Now, I'm going to go back and try to talk him out of it. If I can get him to drop charges against you, would you apologize to him?" He said, "Oh, yeah, I would, I'd be more than happy to apologize to him, I'm really sorry."

So I walked back to this guy, and the guy's sitting there, he's got like most of his drink down, and then we order him another one. I said, "Okay." I go over to the phone, "I'm gonna call the police, but first I'm gonna tell you something about this kid." I said, "Now, I know you guys are talking back and forth, I know you're both talking trash, it wasn't just a one-way conversation, but I'll call and have him arrested. Here's what's gonna happen, he's never gonna work in this business again—he's definitely not gonna work for me anymore, regardless. He's got a wife and two small children. He's always been good help. Are you sure you want me to pick this phone up and call the police to get 'em down here?"

This guy looked at me, he goes, “You’re right, I was giving him a hard time. You know what, no, I don’t want him arrested, I don’t want him arrested,” and he says, “But, I’ll tell you what, if he comes in and apologizes to me, I won’t have him arrested.” I’m quite relieved at this point, “Okay.” So, I grabbed this kid, I bring him to the shift manager’s office, and I said, “Apologize.” He says, “Oh man, I’m really sorry, you know, Jesus, I can’t believe I did that.” And the guy says, “Oh, man, that’s okay, I was giving you a hard time,” now that they started hugging!

Wow.

Now, the guy looks at me, the player, says, “Can’t you keep him on?” I say, “I can’t, he’s a liability.” Now I’m in trouble, that guy’s mad at me, right? But the most important thing was I saved the kid from getting arrested.

That’s good.

Years later, I’m going through the Santa Fe Casino, and I hear, “Bill, Bill!” I look over, and there he is on the table. He goes, “I just want to thank you for what you did for me”—he was a dead game, so I could talk with him – “Man, you really saved my life, saved my career.” So, those things make you feel good, you know, really good.

Yeah.

One of the things I noticed with dealers, you catch somebody doing something wrong, the people that really have honesty in their heart admit to it. You know, you got a dealer, I had two dealers that we caught that were intentionally tipping (exposing) their hole card to a player. Now, I found out that the two dealers, a man and woman, had been playing in poker. This player in question had loaned them money to play poker, separately, at different times. He said, “To pay me back, this is what I want you to do, I want you to tip your hole card to me.”

So, first the dealer, Steve, I bring him in the office, and he looked at me and he said, “I know what this is about, this is about me giving up the hole card to this guy.” I go, “Yep, yep.” And he goes, “Well, what do you want to

do with me?" And I says, "Well, I'm firing you, but let's just, let's do this: you quit."

He goes, "I'd love that, love that, I'll quit."

So then you bring the woman dealer in. She worked on swing shift—denies it. "You're crazy, I never did that, I don't believe it." Arms crossed. The thing was, when they have larceny in their hearts, they won't admit to anything. When they're basically honest, they roll right over and confess. So I can't go and have her arrested because I told him I wasn't going to—I'd have to arrest the pair of them, I can't do that. So I end up firing her, too.

I had a dice box man caught stealing money from a customer's wallet he had found. In a certain area of the casino, we would allow the employees play slot machines on duty. He was in that area playing a slot machine, when he looked down, finds a wallet, and puts it in his jacket. When he gets done playing, he turns in the wallet to security, but for some reason he goes outside the building first. The owner comes down looking for his wallet, retrieves the wallet from security, opens it up and says, "Where's my three hundred dollars?"

So we went back and reviewed the surveillance video that shows our box man going out the door. So I said to the shift manager, "Bring him in here to your office." I'm sitting in the shift manager's office, and the minute he walks in the door, he goes, "It's about the wallet, isn't it?" I say, "Yeah, what'd you do with the money?" He says, "It's out in my car." I tell him, "Go get it." He comes back with the money. I said, "I can't keep you employed anymore, but I'll allow you to quit." So, I allowed him to quit—it was right before Christmas. I said, "Why'd you steal it?"

He goes, "I'll be honest, I've been gambling, and I blew a lot of money that should be going to Christmas, that three hundred dollars looked really good." So, I let him quit. Gave the wallet owner back his three hundred dollars, so he was happy.

JIMMY WIKE

Well, at the Fremont, and especially working with the older guys, obviously, you're interested in making tips. And I went from making two, three dollars a day at the Vegas Club to thirty dollars to forty dollars a day at the Fremont. This was like in early 1973, February, 1973. That was actually pretty good money at the time. And you'd have scores, make a hundred, hundred and fifty sometimes. Sometimes, you got a goose egg, you blank, but all of a sudden thirty, forty bucks a day from two, three dollars, that's kind of a big deal. Plus, they paid, I think it was twenty-five dollars a shift they paid, which was great because the minimum wage at that time when I started was a \$1.40 an hour. I think it was still that a year later when I went to the Fremont, and here they're paying twenty-five dollars a day, plus making thirty, forty bucks. By comparison to what your purchasing power was, that was a pretty good job and I rented a house and bought a new truck....

I think I was probably averaging around a hundred and thirty-five, hundred and forty a day in tips plus twenty eight dollars a shift. And that was almost all tax-free. The box man, they made I think around maybe sixty-five or seventy dollars, the floormen made maybe eighty-five dollars. Now, we would take care of 'em. There were floormen that were in and floormen that weren't in. Most of them were in. So, we make a hundred and fifty each, you know, we're all kicking in, there's four of us kicking in thirty bucks, we're giving the floormen sixty, and three box men twenty. So we don't make one fifty, we make one twenty. However, for that, you kinda get privileges.

Such as?

Such as, well for hustling. And, there's soft hustles, there's rough hustles. You know a rough hustle is, you're winning, say, "Hey man, put a five dollar chip down for me." A soft hustle is, "How am I doing for you, am I doing okay for you?," right, that's a soft hustle, especially if I remind you, "Don't forget your odds, sir" or, "Did you want to make a come bet this

time," I mean, first of all, I have to read their style of play. And if they come out on eight, "You want the six right"?

Yeah.

So, and that's the soft hustle. Like I said, the rough hustle is, is, "Hey, come on man, put a red one down there for me." You would get fired in a heartbeat for that if you got caught, but since most of the boxmen and the floormen were in, you didn't have to worry about them. But you had to worry about some of the other bosses. If a player ever went to a boss and said, "This kid's asking me for money," you were just gone, you were gone. But crews put a lot of pressure on each other to hustle. And they just would, because you were trying to make as much money as you can. And they would put pressure, but you could do it a couple of different ways. You know, you can do it soft, rough, and everything in between but you have to do something.

Okay.

Alright, and I would just, especially since this is being written down, I'd like to go on record and say that I was a very soft hustler.

(Laughs)

(Laughs)

What were some other things that the rough hustlers would do?

They'd say, okay, so if you're on pole they'd say, "Here, throw me a nickel for the hard eight, you know, points eight." And then just say, "Throw me another, that's for me on the hard eight." And they would tell you afterwards, but the, really, the golden fleece, I mean, the jackpot is to find what we would call an acorn. Have you ever heard that terminology before?

No.

An acorn. That is somebody that doesn't know how to play. And, in those days, you know craps is a pretty difficult game to learn, and a lot of people know to put something on the pass line, bet a hard way, put money in the

field, but they don't know about the come bets and the odds, and place bets. So, we saw somebody that didn't know how to play, you're betting five dollars on a pass line, and in the seventies, five dollars was a decent bet. That's not a, that wasn't that bad.

So you're playing, point six. "Hey, what's your first name," "Oh, Dave," "David, if you put five dollars behind there, you get six to five." "Oh, really?" "Yeah, that's why they don't have it marked, 'cause they don't want you to put your money back there, 'cause you get more than even money. If you think they're gonna make a six, or an eight, whatever the point is, put five bucks back there, you know, you win one, you lose one, you're still ahead." "Oh, really?" So you put it back there, and you always get three or four bites at the apple, I mean, sometimes they win, sometimes they lose, but you're trying to help people.

Now, during the course of a night, if you're talking to X number of people, twenty people or so, a couple of them are gonna get real lucky. And generally what we would do is, after they win a couple of bets, then you can say, "Why don't you try one for me right next to you?" "Oh, sure, sure." You know, they're winning, they come to Vegas, everybody comes to Vegas with money, X amount to lose. You say, "What's your count." "I brought five hundred to lose," or, "I bought five thousand to lose," whatever it is. And they expect to lose, so if they win, they're just open for anything.

So, now you want to press 'em up, because if they're in a hundred dollars, you're gonna say, "Now bet ten, now bet twenty," and whenever they catch a hot roll, the next thing you know, they got like three, four hundred in front of 'em. And they'll do whatever you ask them to.

A lot of times, the best move ever is they'll try and give you money. They'll say like, "Well, here's a five dollar chip for you, thanks." There's two things you can do. You can say, "You know what, you haven't won enough yet to give me any money, I'll tell you when it's okay." And then, if they win another bet or two, and you say, "Now's the time," they can't bet enough for you. You know, they can't do enough for you.

Yeah.

Or, you can say, “You know what, don’t give me any money, put it next to yours, that way if you win, I win, I don’t want any money if you’re not winning.” So then, and then, if you win that bet, and you say like, “Hey, we’re lucky together, there’s another bet for you, right, there’s another bet for you.” And that’s kind of stuff, and I, I was kidding around earlier, pretty much, that was kind of my personal style on a crap game. I’m not looking to burn anybody out. I just don’t have it in me to just rough people up.

Were there any dealers or crews that didn’t hustle?

There were a few people that just couldn’t do it. But they would get tremendous pressure from the other dealers. And, it’s like, ‘cause you split four ways, right, and if two people are doing all the work, one guy’s so-so, and one guy won’t do anything, I mean, there were actually dealers that actually wouldn’t even say hello to a customer. You know, there’s just some people in life that just don’t do well with the public. But they shouldn’t be in public professions. I mean, obviously, I’ve got a lot of bullshit in me, and I’m a talker, right, so it was a good job for me.

(Laughs)

But, there would be people, and people would be betting for ‘em, giving them money, and sometimes they wouldn’t even say thank you. I mean, and it’s, I’m telling you, there used to be fights in the parking lot. Guys would actually get into fights over that. It’s like, the least you could do is thank them when they give you something, what the hell’s the matter with you. There used to be some big, big beefs. It was wonderful—dealing craps table for table was wonderful when you had four guys that could actually work together, kind of in harmony, and they could follow each other up, and just, so it’s seamless, ‘cause you’re going on, you’re moving every twenty minutes, you move. So, that part of it, that was great. But it was very, very frustrating, if you get a couple of guys on the crew that won’t, or can’t follow up. If you were playing and I’m helping you and reminding you “Dave, don’t forget your odds,” and you’re like, “Oh yeah, thanks.” And I go on a

break, and when I come back, you're not playing odds anymore because the guy that followed me isn't helping you out, isn't telling you what to do. So there was friction, it was, it's like the best of times, the worst of times, depending on who you work with....

But anyway, so September 2003, I went over to Caesars, and that was an interesting place, they used to call it Dealers Palace.

I've heard that, yeah.

Yeah, and the reason was, if you had juice, you got a dealer's job—if you didn't, you got a box or a floor job, but the real power was with the dealers.

So why did the dealers have power there?

Well, they got juiced in.

Okay.

So they got juiced in. If four dealers walked in looking for a job, it didn't matter—with rare exception—it didn't matter how any, how well any of them dealt, it was just somebody had a friend or an uncle back east that called somebody and says, "Hey, give my nephew a job there," and they got the job. And there were people that got hired there because they were talented, but for the most part, people got juiced in. You had to know somebody to go to work at Caesars. And, I mean, dealers are dealers, and I could go on and on.

Tell me a little bit about the dealers.

Well, the dealers at Caesars, they were unique for a number of reasons. When I became casino manager at Bally's in '95 the place was 22 years old and for the most part had an older staff.

Yeah.

When I went to the Hilton in 2000, it had been open since 1969 and also had a veteran staff, so I was used to working with that demographic, and the majority of them are great but they do get entrenched.

Now listen, when you hire a dealer I used to tell them, "There's only three things that you have to do, is just do the job the best you can—everybody's

not an A dealer, there's some B dealers and C dealers and that, but just do the job the best you can; number two, you have to be extremely nice to the customers; and number three, when your boss tells you to do something, you not only have to do it, but you have to do it with a good attitude—and if you can do those three things, it's a home run for you, nothing will ever change. You get paid, you get benefits, get a chance to earn tips."

And the company never changes the deal, you know, if you're there two months, two years, thirty years—the company just wants you to deal the game the best you can, be nice to the customers, and when they tell you to go on, let it ride, just go, "Okay, I'll go on, let it ride." You know, right?

Mm-hmm.

That's all I ever wanted, and I recognized that everybody's not an A dealer, but they're still valuable employees.

But the dealers changed—the company never changes what it wants from a dealer, but the dealers change what they want from a company. After a period of time, the longer you're there, the more important seniority is, right, and all of a sudden, a lot of dealers, they became marketing experts, management experts. They just, they become experts on all things that should be happening that are extraneous to what their basic core job is. They also become disgruntled for a wide variety of reasons. That's probably six hours' worth of conversation there.

8

Bosses

The managers interviewed had strong feelings about casino owners and managers. Because of their management positions, they were more privy to the inner workings of operations at the top of the casino pinnacle than line employees. Having worked for a number of organizations, the interviewees had a good basis for evaluating those above them in the hierarchy.

HOWARD DREITZER

Well Steve [Wynn] had a great reputation. As long as you weren't too close to him, he was loved, and he knew how to play to that. And he was definitely a showman, and he had—whether it was because of an altruistic nature or not—his actions sometimes were, like the bonuses and the cars, he was sort of larger than life.

There were some personalities in Atlantic City in terms of operations, but most of them were kind of, I don't know how to put it, they just didn't have that personality. They were more like tough guys, like Riviera tough guys kind of thing, whereas Steve was sort of the entrepreneur, and he did the commercials, he had the stars there, and he'd walk around in the casino with them, and he was very flamboyant, and people were very attracted to that....

I had gotten a call from Frank Modica who asked me if I was interested in considering going to Showboat. So from a status point of view, I wasn't, because the Showboat didn't have much of a reputation, and the bowling alleys and that kind of stuff, and I was used to Steve Wynn and Donald Trump, so I thought, well, I don't want to be discourteous to him, so I'll go and I'll have the interview, but I'll just price myself out of the job, so that

there's no harm or no foul. And then when I went to the interview—well there were two interviews.

The first interview was really funny, it was with Jackie Gaughan, Frank Modica, and Kell Houssels Senior, and I met with them, and they asked me a couple questions, but then they mostly talked between themselves trying to remember things from thirty, forty years ago.

It was kind of fascinating and sort of funny, in a sense, and then when Kell Houssels' son, who was the president of the property at the time, asked me how the interview went, I said, "Well, I'm not sure if I was even there." He just laughed, he said, "They just wanted to make sure you didn't have two heads and it's not a problem," and it wasn't.

But after the second interview, they had offered me—whatever I asked for the first time, they not only accepted but they added to it. So I found myself in, I guess, a desirable predicament of not knowing how or why I would even say no, so I didn't, and I took the job, and it almost tripled my income, at that point, so I went there.

And that turned out to be a really good experience because Kell Houssels, who was president of the property at the time, although he didn't have any casino experience, he was a smart guy, a Yale graduate, and he applied a lot of analytics to how he looked at the business, and as you analyzed table games as opposed to slots, you begin to realize that you need more slots, and you need to control your expenses and tables more, so that's where I sort of made the shift, and I didn't have this sort of ownership of tables anymore.

And I became more of a general manager where I strictly looked at the profitability of the property from the operational sense, and did what was the best for the property, and we had huge success there with that. I mean, I was able to maximize slot income, and we grew tremendously in those days.

GARY SANOFF

Did it feel different working for Steve Wynn than it had been working at the Desert Inn?

Well, Steve had changed the business. When he opened The Mirage in 1989, he changed Las Vegas. He was solely responsible for the huge amount of baccarat play that all of a sudden hit from the far east market, and he was known for treating—and he had a bad reputation very early in his career. When I was working Downtown, he owned the Golden Nugget, and he would go through the pit and fire his staff and his management arbitrarily if he had a bad night; so, his reputation was bad until he opened in Atlantic City, when he had made a complete turnaround and was buying his floormen Cadillacs for Christmas presents.

So, here he opens this iconic hotel—the Bellagio, what's going to turn out to be an iconic hotel, and he's great to work for. I mean, everything, when we got here in '98, there were flowers in the EDR every day, and it was a huge family, everything was top, top shelf. He had invested a lot of money to open this place, and everything was top shelf. I was fortunate to come from the DI because the DI was also known in its day as one of the most elite places, and our clientele was very elite.

So I had all that experience behind me, so coming here was not a change as far as clientele or personnel, and the DI was a superb place to work. It was small, the smallest hotel. People used to wonder how we made so much money. They'd walk in and it was slow, but that's how good our clientele was there. So coming here was not a big change in person. To me, it felt like almost the same kind of property on a bigger scale.

RUSSELL TERBEEK

Tell me what it's like going to work, switching from Bill Bennett to Steve Wynn. What kind of differences do you notice?

Well, there's a lot. Steve Wynn obviously runs a first class place. The back of the house, I don't know if you've ever been in the back of the house in some of Steve Wynn's places, the back of the house is as nice as the front of

the house. At Treasure Island, the dining room—you could actually bring in a guest once a month, and it looked like a sit-down restaurant. You could time order your food, or if you're a supervisor, you got a half-hour to forty-minute break for lunch, and it was just absolutely gorgeous. Bennett had Circus Circus and other properties that were built and were nice, but they catered to more of a budget clientele.

What was the cafeteria like at Circus Circus?

Just basically, you know, you have your buffet line and you go and serve yourself. It was like the buffet for the public but smaller. At Steve Wynn's place, you felt like you were in one of the restaurants for the public. You can order whatever kind of sandwich you wanted, hot sandwiches, cold sandwiches, food to go—it was kinda night and day. Circus was, I hate to use the term "a grind joint", but I mean, it was still nice. At least you weren't paying for your meals, that sort of thing.

The dining rooms at the Wynn properties were just incredible. Even in Laughlin at the Golden Nugget, it was small but very upscale. Mr. Wynn really took great care of his people. They had a workout facility at the Nugget that the team members could use. Who does that anymore for the employees? It was real nice, first class.

Did you see Steve Wynn on property at the Treasure Island?

Yeah, every once in a while, he would come through, and he was always with an entourage, depending on what they're doing. I actually saw his wife Elaine a lot more. I was involved in doing charity work for the Boys and Girls Club in Laughlin. I helped set that up. She would help me raise money for different projects that the kids needed. I helped to build a baseball field for the kids at the Laughlin grade school and helped them get a trailer for after school programs for the Boys and Girls Club. My daughter Kristen worked at the Boys and Girls Clubs there and had a great time with all the kids.

It was tough at times. Laughlin's a pretty transient community, or was when I was down there, so there were a lot of kids that, their parents

worked and didn't have anywhere to go, kinda "latch-key kids".

But we tried to do little things to improve the community. I coached little league baseball for years. We had a group of kids from Laughlin that went over to play in a league in Bullhead City. Can you say "Taxi?" Eventually I was a Laughlin High School baseball and basketball assistant coach and went on road trips and attended all the practices and games for both sports. I put in a lot of miles for all the Laughlin Kids. I still hear from some of them. So I tried to stay involved in the community to help it be a little bit less of a transient town.

JOE FRIEDMAN

And, look, when Steve [Wynn] gets on, there's not too many better, and Steve does his speech, he tells you how great it's gonna be, and it's gonna be this and that, and people are on the edge of their seats. I mean, he's fantastic. You know, Arte [Nathan]'s equally as fantastic if not more so, and when they tell you how things are gonna be, and it's gonna be this and that. It's just, to get a room of a thousand people really on the edge of their chairs dying to go to work, from dealers to housekeepers, to up and down, front desk—it's, it's incredible. And they give you the, of course the property was in disarray, they give you the tour, they do all that. But it was, it was when they offered me the position, it was like joining the Yankees.

You know, and I'm not a Yankee fan, but you know you're in rarified air. I mean, there's still that caché that, it's, you know, working, working for individual owners, which is weird—I've worked for Peter [Morton], where a guy would call you on the phone that owned the place, or a guy would come in and say, "Move that," and that's weird. And then working for another individual owner, the same things—it would, that's the guy. It's not, you know, the corporation CEO—this guy thought of it, invented it. That's, that's different. That's a different vibe.

How would you compare Peter and Steve?

Well, Peter—both visionaries, Peter didn't have the gaming acumen that Steve has, and I don't think that's talking out of school. You know, there would be times at Hard Rock, where the phone would ring in high limit, we'd have player, you know, answer, "This is Joe," you know, "Peacock Lounge." "Hi Joe, it's Peter." "Hey Peter, what's up?" "How we doing?" "This is what's going on." "Who's playing right now?" I'd say, "Oh, Bob Smith is playing." "How's he doing?" "He's winning about ten grand." "Is he playing right now?" "Yeah." "What did he do that next hand?" I said, "He won that hand." "So now how much is he up?" "He's up twenty-two grand."

And you'd go through that for a while. When Peter was in town, he'd come up to a high limit and say, he'd bring you in, "Hey, Joe," "Oh, hey Peter." "How much are those chips worth?" "Those are thousand dollar chips." "How many of 'em does he have?" I said, "He's got twenty of 'em," and that's the truth. And it was, he wasn't concerned. I mean, it wasn't a sweat, it was, "Okay," you know, and then he'd go back and do what he was doing.

Where Steve was, he knew the nuts and bolts of gaming. You know, he knew the, whether it was tutelage from Bobby Baldwin, from the short tutelage from Jack Binion after we opened. He knew that side, and had people around him telling him that side of the business, that were helpful.

So it was, but both visionaries, both have that spirit or ethos of customer experience, I think similar in that respect.

DAVE TORRES

Jackie [Gaughan] owned [the El Cortez], and my shift boss was a guy named Wayne Starker. I don't remember who the casino manager was. I never saw him. It was Wayne Starker. I think Jackie was actually, basically ran it. So, it was Wayne, Tony Estrada, Rich Applegate, Rich Stewart, Jay Lee. There was a few guys I remember from time.

And George—there was an African American—he still worked there as of last year. And he would, he would always tell you, "Good heavens, good

heavens, Mr. Torres, why would you do that?—Good heavens, good heavens.”

And you hear people say that today, and you know that they broke in with George, you know what I mean? “Good heavens!” It was fun....

Okay, Tony Marnell and his son Anthony, to me, are—Steve Wynn’s in a class by his own—I don’t know Steve Wynn, I don’t work for Steve Wynn. I knew his daughter, I know of him, I have a lot of respect for his business. Mr. Marnell and Anthony, I worked for—I loved these guys, right. So, they knew how to treat people. The EDR was burgers made to order, steaks, and for everybody—the porter, for everybody. Everybody ate well, it was nutritious, it was happy. We come in to work one day, and there was a sign that said, “Thanks a million.” So Tony Marnell took a million dollars of his own money and chopped it up according to seniority, and everybody got a check that day just for walking into work.

Wow.

There you go—you got t-shirts, three-day Christmas parties, Wet ‘n Wild rented out for you. You and your family—two days at a time. “Come on, there’s no charge, eat and drink on us.” So people worked hard for these guys. I think in the whole time that I was at the Rio, we hired, with the exception of an expansion, we hired maybe twelve dealers from the outside the whole time I was there. People didn’t leave that dealing job. Take a look, SLS isn’t even open a year—they’re hiring dealers every week, so that says something. He had a very loyal team, so you could get consistency, right.

And they were willing to spend to make sure—if, one burn in the carpet, get rid of it. One burn in that, get rid of it. Everything had to look brand new. But Mr. Marnell’s construction guy, so it’s a little easier when you have your own construction company—“Fix that, fix that.” And Anthony really knew how to take care of people. We were trying to lure a guy from Indonesia. So Anthony jumped on a plane, flew over with a gift for his birthday. No obligation to play, I’m not asking. Here’s a gift for you. Well,

sure enough, and then he flew back. Sure enough, they start playing with us, you know what I mean.

Those personal touches—the owner goes out there. And these are not soft guys. And behind closed doors, they can be pretty rough, you know what I mean, these are construction guys. Hey, he's a tough guy. But he knew how to treat people, and he wasn't cheap. He paid people right, and everybody had a shot at the money. You knew you could work for him, and you were gonna get paid. He was never gonna screw you out of an hour. Never gonna do this sixty/forty FTE kinda, you know what I mean. You got it coming to you, you got it coming to you, do a good job for me. Then when we transitioned to Harrah's, that was my first glimpse of true corporate-style thinking where the obligation is to the shareholders, not—they don't see us as shareholders, right.

JIMMY WIKE

The movie *Casino* is probably the most accurate casino movie I've ever seen. That's funny, 'cause knew all the people who were in there. I worked at the Stardust twice. I worked there from '74 to '77, and then I worked there from '81 to '87. So I worked there when Rosenthal kind of ascended, and also when he got put out. He was a bookie you know, he wasn't a casino guy.

One of the inaccuracies in the movie *Casino* was him spotting somebody cheating on a twenty-one game across the casino. There were people that could spot that there, but he wasn't one of them. He was just, he was a conduit for the skim, and he just made sure that that happened. So, he didn't bother us too much in the dice pit, but he had other guys there that would bother us, and like I said, they were rough then, you know, they're all wise guys. All the guys that I broke in for, and all the guys I worked for early in my career would be considered criminals anywhere except Las Vegas. They worked the illegal games in a number of different areas of the country and when the Kefauver Committee shut down gaming all across

the country, they came to Las Vegas and became legitimate. But they didn't come from a gentle background. They were rough characters. There were running illegal games, they were doing this, doing that, they were involved in ancillary type activities—loan sharking, everything. They were just rough characters. But Rosenthal, he was, things got better when Rosenthal took over.

Really?

Yes. The money got better, and we had every wise guy from Chicago, Milwaukee, and Kansas City used to come in and play. We had a tremendous amount of business from there. And the one thing about 'em, you know, they all tipped. You could never hustle them, you know, never hustle them. You didn't do anything but, "Hi, sir, how you doing, sir," and you might say, "You forgot your odds, sir," but, and you always knew who they were....

Rosenthal, I mean, he did that TV show for a minute, he put that sports book in there, and I'm sure you're familiar with it. Bob Martin put the one in the Union Plaza, but then he put that in the Stardust. That was brilliant, I mean, that was brilliant.

And then that poker room—you could get anything out of that Stardust poker room that you wanted. I mean, he could buy a contract on somebody's life out of that poker room. You know, it didn't matter what you wanted, if you wanted drugs, a stolen car, whatever you wanted—you could go in the poker room and find somebody that could supply it. And then the race book, he had everybody in there. And maybe you've heard of Bobby the Midget—I don't know if you know those names.

Yeah

Some of the names. Jack "Treetop" Strauss used to play in there, and then they used come over and play, and they used to play craps too—Stewie Unger, and all those guys, so, but they were in there because of the book. And I mean the Stardust became a really hopping joint. When I first went there, it wasn't that busy, it wasn't—I mean, it was busy, all the casinos were

busy then, but when Rosenthal took over, financially for us, it got a lot better. And then, plus, when Rosenthal took over, there were no females dealing. Women weren't dealers. There were a few Downtown Union Plaza opened up in '71 with some female dealers. But all of a sudden, one day it was between sixty and eighty female dealers came in, and they fired sixty, eighty guys—twenty-one dealers. They just fired 'em, I mean, that's, like I said, that's the downside. I didn't get fired, so I didn't suffer any consequences from that sort of thing. But all of a sudden, sixty, eighty male dealers are gone, there's sixty, eighty girls dealing there.

ED WALTERS

It's an evolution. You'll notice that since the seventies, most of the CEOs are from the finance division. They're CFOs. So we've gone through that era, but then look at Harrah's—you know, I say this nicely, you got an overweight bloated guy who made an overweight bloated company. So the finance guys may not be the answer, because the finance experts don't have any of the skill or knowledge that Steve Wynn has. To do what Steve Wynn, guys like him, they have an innate, they're almost part entertainers, part businessman, part artist—do you see that three?

Mm-hmm.

The greatest men in the casino I've ever seen had that—Carl Cohen. Carl Cohen was a businessman, was an artist, you know.

How so?

Carl loved all the great books. When he found out Frank [Sinatra] was giving me books, he started opening up, turns out he'd read books on past lives, he would read books—he had this other world going. He's the first one to introduce me to Oscar Wilde. This is Carl Cohen who everybody thinks is a mob guy.

Yeah, yeah.

This is why I love Carl Cohen. I'm in the pit, and Carl brings me a book—no, no, I bring in a book called something like *The Spiritual Traits of Man*.

I was looking at all that then.

Yeah.

So I put it on the desk. So Burky, a pit boss worked for certain people—comes down to me and he looks—right at then, Carl Cohen walks up, and Burky said, “Carl, look at this shit Eddie’s reading, do you believe this shit?” He holds the book up.

Carl Cohen says, “That book’s for me. Thanks, Eddie, for bringing it in.” Just flattened the fuckin’ guy. See, that’s Carl Cohen....

A line that’s actually in *The Godfather*, today you’ll know where it actually came from. David Janssen is in the Baccarat pit—this is like sixty-, no, ’69, yeah, ‘cause Mario Puzo was there, but anyway—he was a degenerate roulette player—but anyway, David Janssen was a big TV star at the time, *The Fugitive*, you know.

Yeah.

Alright. So, and he has a gofer with him, he’s the guy from Hollywood, you know, but he’s drunk, and he’s causing fuckin’ trouble. No one wants to say anything to him because he’s David Janssen, you know.

Alright anyway, so I call Carl, typical Carl, he says, “Where are you?” I said “Right here.” He said, “Stay there.” He come in—I’ll never forget it, he’s standing here, and I says—he says, “Alright, I’m gonna go over and talk to him.” I says, “Carl”—here I am trying to warn Carl—I says, “Carl, he’s drunk.” Carl says, “Eddie, when I get through with him, he’ll think he got an award.” He walks over, and I can’t hear it, talks to him, says something, which I’ll tell you in a minute—Janssen gets up and him and his gofer—he walks in, they’re walking by. He says, “Eddie, we’re going to the dining room.” “Okay.” Later, I says to Carl, ‘cause I’m learning, you know, I says, “So Carl, that’s great work.” He goes, “Yeah, yeah, sometimes you gotta be nice, sometimes you gotta be,” he said, “not so nice.” I said, “He just got up, what’d you do?” He says, “I made him an offer he couldn’t refuse.”

(Laughs)

Now that buzzed around the pit, because then a wheel dealer—who later has a jewelry store downtown—told that to Mario Puzo, and he puts it in his script, and he has the godfather saying it. That's where it came from.

CLIFF CONEDY

What was Frank Rosenthal like?

He was a strange, strange bird. He was very, I call it nitpicky, you know, little things he just didn't tolerate. Incompetence, as he saw it, he felt like everybody should have the degree of common sense that he had, and if you couldn't look at something and see that that didn't make sense, then you were no, had no purpose as far as he was concerned. But he was a class guy, nice and quiet, very observant, didn't, couldn't get much past him. But, like in the movie [*Casino*], they had the scene about the blueberries in the muffin—that was a true story.

That really happened?

True story—he cut it open and looked, “Do you have more blueberries than I do?” (Laughs)

(Laughs)

And that was a big thing to him. And the thing about him sitting behind his desk with his pants off, that was a true story. He'd get up, put his pants on, he wanted no wrinkles, no nothing, he was very particular about the way he dressed and the way he looked, and the image that he projected.

[Ed Torres had] no, no human compassion whatsoever, unless you have big boobs and a short skirt.

(Laughs)

But he was another one of those nitpicker, kinda reminded me of Rosenthal, but Rosenthal wasn't, unless you did something really stupid—that's what irked him—this guy, it didn't matter who you ever, you know, but you go out, pick up cocktail glasses and helping the cocktail waitresses trying to set up a date or something like that, you know.

But it was so funny because, at that time, he was running the Aladdin and the El Rancho, and so they would call from Aladdin, "He's on his way down." It was like, everybody would snap to attention, like this guy was General Patton or something.

We had two box men, a dealer, and a floorman, on every game. And he wanted to shield the game. One of the box men had to get up and throw the dice, so it was no standing around telling jokes or stories or just relaxing and waiting for customers—it was always working. You're always throwing the dice, you're always calling numbers, so we'd throw the dice and let 'em sit there—about five minutes later, you'd throw the dice again, let 'em sit there. (Laughs)

9

What Makes Good Management?

The interviewees had strong opinions about what made good casino management. Some felt that it was important to take care of dealers, first and foremost. Others—particularly Bill Zender and Jimmy Wike—believed that a truly good manager keeps an eye on the bottom line and protects the casino's interest first and foremost.

ED WALTERS

[About Carl Cohen] And I'd say, "Hi, we're losing on number fourteen, twenty-one game—losing eight, we're gonna fuckin' lose." He'd say, "Kid, kid."

"What?"

"Eddie, settle down; you see the guy winning?"

"Yeah."

"Well, he'll be back. And if he leaves, we'll still be here."

"Now, we're losing on fourteen, we're losing on eighteen

"Eddie, we're winning on all the rest, settle down." He gave you that wise advice.

And he'd say, "The guy winning?"

"Yeah." I said, "Yeah, but he's drawing a crowd."

"Eddie, that's what we want. We're built on winners, we're not built on losers. Those people are all thing. What we want is a player that wins and yells and screams."

JOE FRIEDMAN

So what's the toughest thing about being a pit boss?

I think, two parts, I mean I think it's realistic expectations from customers. It's a service business. It's like a restaurant, except, you know, a restaurant, you order something and you get it, where a casino, people have higher expectations, whether it's, "Hey, I'm gambling this much, I should be treated this much better." And this much, to them, you know, twenty-five dollars to them might be a lot, where in the grand scheme of things, it's not that much.

So, it's managing those expectations, and I think there's also, you're managing people that are in a monotonous, repetitive job, and to keep that, keep staff engaged is challenging. It's, I always, one of my favorite examples is Starbucks, you know, as far as customers, because you're on that game dealing—you're doing the same thing over and over and over, and it's human nature; eventually, you're just gonna tap out.

Yeah.

But, Starbucks, you go up there, and you order, "I want a half decaf, half this, half that," and most of the time, they're like, "Okay!" You know, and they say, not one time do you go up there and say, "I want this, I want that," and they're like, "Ugh, okay, fine." And you'll see that, you go in the casino, and you'll come up to a dead game, and you'll be like, "Hi," and shuffle, you know, like, "Oh, crap," you know, not, you've bothered me. You don't get that vibe here. And it's, I know it's pie in the sky, but that's sort of that engagement, you need to have staff being less, "Hello, welcome to Caesars Palace, my name is Bob." You know, you have to have genuine interaction with people. Some people aren't cut out for that.

How do you, how can you do that?

Well, hiring. In the beginning. I mean, this whole, the hiring and HR—whatever they're doing, it's insane. It doesn't, you know, it's a specific skillset that I think you have to be able to identify and look, at Hard Rock, we hired a lot of people. You know, people would come in, it was the hottest job in town. We had people—day shift people would come in every day. "I want to work here, I want to audition." No one wanted to floor there, but

people wanted to deal. And you have to be able to pick out that certain, you know, that spark. We're not, we weren't geniuses, but we were pretty good. I mean, if it was, you know, we hired some good people.

We were very fortunate—and even good people have bad days. I'd rather have a good person with bad days than a mediocre person who never has a good day. You know, there's, too many times, you walk through a casino now, and you wonder, on what day did that person present themselves for an interview that the guy across the table went, "Yup, that's, that's the way we're going today." It boggles my mind, I don't understand, but it, just like a team, or whatever, there's no weak spots. When you hit that floor, you're on. You know, there's no, sometimes people think that there's a, it's not like buying chicken in a bad neighborhood. There's no Plexiglas shield between you and the customer. You have to have that interaction. You don't have the luxury of being able to walk away—you're stuck. You gotta be able to deal with people.

GARY SANOFF

Can you tell me what makes a good floorperson?

A good floorperson is somebody who is very, very attentive. Now there are two aspects of the business. There's the technical, procedural aspect of the business, and then there's the soft skill.

And the soft skill is, no matter what you do in this business, and we'll single out floor because floor is much more interactive with the customer, but it's about liking the customer service industry. It's about wanting to please people that can call you—look, when people gamble and lose money, they're not always pleasant. You can't expect them to be pleasant. So part of that is putting your ego aside, and being able to take some crude language at times, and just be an even-keel person.

That's the soft skill, that's the most difficult thing to teach. When I mentor other people, when I interview floor people for jobs, it's hard to judge their soft skill because it's something you cannot teach, and you have it or you

don't have it. I can't teach you how to be a nice person or not to get offended when somebody calls you a dirty name, or anything to that effect. So that's half the job.

The other part of the floorman is somebody who pays strict attention, and you have to care. You have to want to do your job, you have to want to go out there and walk your section and not lean on a podium. You have to go out and learn what the regs say, and make sure that you're adhering to all the regs instead of just saying, "Well, I'll blow this customer off and I won't rate them," or, "Here, five thousand cash, and I'm not going to do that," so you have to care. So a good, good floorman is one that's procedurally intact, that is on his toes all the time, and willing to deal with the customers.

What kind of demands do the customers make on the floor?

That's interesting because customers don't know the difference between a pit boss and a floorman, so everybody's a pit boss. They watch all the shows and all the movies.

(Laughs)

And everybody is from the movie *Casino* and getting stabbed in the neck with a pen. So, a pit boss or a floorman is the enemy, it's an adversary. The perception is they're stern, they're always sweating the money, they want you to lose. So you're at a disadvantage as a floorman right from the very start, because the dealer's the friendly one that talks to you, rooting for you because you're tipping them, so they're in there. The floormen are back there writing on a pad all the time, which looks very suspect, but all they're doing is filling out rating slips, and they're the enemy. So you're up against that to begin with.

One of the things as a floorman you do to break the ice is you develop communication and you develop rapport. You walk around, and aside from all the technical things that I spoke about, that soft skill is, you develop friendships, to the point of where you're a professional friendship. You don't talk about going to play golf or doing that. You may talk about golf itself,

but you're still protecting the game. So you break down that barrier to where you're not the bad guy....

Can you tell me a little bit about the qualities of a good pit boss?

I can. (Laughs) A good pit boss wears many hats. As you move up in management, the first level is the pit manager. The pit manager role has changed over the years from when I was Downtown. Then, you did two things. You made sure your pits were open and the numbers were closed and your dealers were on the game. And then you made sure that your customers were happy, and that your limit signs were going on.

As the business has changed, a good pit manager is somebody that's totally engaged. We didn't have email when I first was a pit manager, and now email is such an important part. So a good pit manager realizes that they are a part of a pretty high level here at Bellagio. They're level 13s, which is up there, just to give you, by reference, I'm a level 16, and VP's a level 17, so you're up there.

Yeah.

And one is willing to sacrifice and not watch the clock. You give up that eight-hour job when you stop dealing on the floor and you punch the clock for the hourly wage. You're now a salaried employee, so a good pit manager doesn't think about time. They don't think that your day is an eight-hour day, you don't think it's a six-hour day, you don't think it's a twelve-hour day, either. It is what the day demands, but that's a mentality that you have to have, and I do have some that are and some that aren't, but the first basis is that you realize your position.

That's going to be the first step to making a good pit manager, that you are now an important part of management. The next good part of the pit manager is that when you start your day, you engage your employees from the very, very start. Don't worry so much about the numbers because the numbers will always take care of themselves. With the amount of computer spreadsheets we use now, you don't have to worry so much about being so task-oriented as you have to be personnel-oriented and guest-oriented.

So you go in and you start your day by communicating to your staff and seeing how their day is going and opening yourself up for respect, and that's going to help you run a very, very smooth pit. The other thing that makes you a very good pit manager is not to rush to judgment—that there are always two sides to a story, and somewhere in the middle lies the truth. So you have to have to have an open mind, and when your dealers, by nature, who complain a lot—and I was a dealer for many years and that's just the nature of the beast—but they're going to say, "This player abused me, and this player was doing this," because dealers are closer here at Bellagio than they are to starting. When you start your career, the hotel can do no wrong. When you're ending your career, they can do no right. You have this sense of entitlement. And we can talk about that a little bit because that's my biggest challenge as a director is to motivate a staff that's closer to retirement than starting their careers.

So as a pit manager, you're the first line of that management that's going to keep the casino together. You have to be able to accomplish this, willing to accept it, and willing to understand. At the same point, you also have to understand that, and I use this analogy, as you get higher in management, you see a broader picture. When you're a dealer, you see a very narrow picture. You care about delivering your cards or handing out the dice and watching the roll, and you collect and pay. When you go onto the floor, you broaden your vision a little bit, and you get involved into, issuing markers, because you can't issue credit, you I can issue markers, and you have to settle some disputes.

Now when you move up to pit manager, that's when I want to see you start to understand what the concept of our company is, so when I call up and say, "I need to close certain games," that they're on the same page with me. And I understand because I was a pit, can you care about satisfying the guests' needs, saying, "You can't close this many games today," but the reason we're doing this is because there's a company initiative, whether it's to save FTEs during the slow time, or whether we're trying to raise the stock price—it's always a bigger picture. So when people at that pit manager

level start to be able to see and broaden out your vision, you're on your way to being a good pit manager.

So moving up a rung, what is, what are the qualities of a good shift manager, what do they do?

They're broadening that vision we talked about, first and foremost, and then they get into the role of mentoring. And I believe everybody should mentor because pit managers can mentor as well, but when you're at the level of a shift manager, it's time to start, and I say start because it ends with your VPs and directors and stuff, but it starts to get people ready to do your job. We have so much to do that not every single person should be doing everything. You should start training people who are better than you are. You should start building up and strengthening your team and doing teambuilding to where if it's, if I disappear tomorrow, you can do my job.

But a lot of people have egos, and they don't want to do that. A lot of people think it's better for them to get weaker people to do their job. So a good job for a shift manager is find the strongest, strongest people that you have, and build them up to do the job that you do. It's okay—I have an old saying that was, actually one of our HR people gave this to me years ago, and it says, it's okay, you have to treat people fairly, but not all your employees are treated the same. Those that give you more should get more. So as a shift manager, that's the mentality I want you to have. Now with that comes all that technical stuff—you have to close shifts, end shifts, you have to do rating variances and all that. I can teach anybody that. I'm going back to that soft skill, and the best shift managers are the people that have the best soft skills. And then what made me a good shift manager is just being able to multitask. You have to be even keel, and you have to be able to do more than three things at one time. You have to take the phone call, and you have to go upstairs, and then you have to get back to your desk, and then you have to go to a meeting, and you have to stay even-keel at all times.

How about casino manager, director of table games, VP, whatever that next step up is move up above the shift, what do you need to do that job well?

Based on my success that I've had here, what I do at this level is I give feedback to my staff that's underneath me. I have an open door, I make sure to come in early so that I can talk to the graveyard shift and find out what's going on, what would make their job easier, what did they need to succeed? I come in early and I stay late. I do the same thing with swing. I'm here mostly during the day, so I have more opportunity to do that with the day shift staff. I also make myself visible.

At no point do you ever forget. It's not beyond me to go upstairs on the floor, and whether this makes you a good director, this makes you a good boss no matter what you are, but it's never beyond me to go up, and if a floorman is buried, to write out a rating slip, or when I pass by, a chair that's out—I don't grab a floorman and say, "You, come out here and pick up the thing." I put the chair back under the table. When people see that, they want to emulate what you do.

I also believe largely in accountability, and I'm not one that likes to fire people, and I don't think that VPs and directors need to be on the hatchet train, but your good employees want to see, and down-the-line level employees, they want to see accountability for those that don't do their job, because everybody gets paid up there dealing the same, and so do all their salary, pit managers get paid the same. So it's okay to give accountability.

My motto is, "Always fair, but stern," so they know what they're getting. I don't want a waffle. A good director, a good VP never waffles. The consistency is so, so important, and once you have that respect, you're well on your way to success.

HOWARD DREITZER

So what do you think makes a good casino shift manager—what should they be doing?

Well, I think the biggest thing about that is a sense of ownership, to have to feel that they own that shift, and they have to have people skills, they have to enjoy working with people—staff as well as players—have to be flexible because everybody's trying to bend you every way there is, but at the same time, they have to know when not to flex, or when to stop flexing.

They have to have good knowledge. They don't have to be great, but they have to be good. They have to know enough to make sound decisions, or to know where to go to get the right information to make those decisions, or who to rely on to get input from. And this would go as a pit manager or a shift manager, or even a floor person, which is something I think, lacking today, they have to have a sense for when things are wrong. Quite often, senior management, or just management nowadays, has no sense at all of when things are wrong. And as a case in point, I'll say that there are times like that time in Atlantic City recently when the cards were not shuffled—they were supposed to be pre-mixed, and they weren't—and you got a floorman and a pit manager watching this, and have no idea something's wrong. To me, that was incredible.

What was the hardest thing about being a pit manager? What made that job challenging?

Actually, it wasn't challenging for me. I mean, there were some times, if you didn't get along with your boss, and they would not support your decision, or they would make different decisions, that could be a little bit frustrating, but you are in control of your own little world there, and as long as you keep issues from floating up, you were doing a good job—that, combined with winning money. So, I really liked the pit manager job. Like I said, it's sort of a combination of host and operations. The only thing that used to get to me, eventually, was feeling a little bit like a caged animal, you know, you couldn't get out of your pit, so you were stuck there. That, as a shift manager, was good. You had more mobility, and you could get more variety in your workday.

DAVE TORRES

...and they were really good about training you in procedure. So at that time, the Barbary Coast had the reputation—if you did a year at the Barbary Coast, you could go anywhere. Those dealers knew how to behave. They knew how to dummy up and deal, because the bosses were going to abuse you. I got my ankles kicked, you know what I mean?

Really?

Yeah, they like, kinda hit you in the kidney, like if you blew off money, or—they would fire you if you blew off too much money, “Get out,” yeah.

What do you mean by blowing off money?

So, a guy comes down, he buys in a hundred, and he leaves with a couple thousand—four or five thousand. Do that too many times in a row, you’re an unlucky dealer—hit the bricks. So, blow off money means you lose. And they remember the blow offs. They don’t remember if you kill a guy, so you know, that’s supposed to happen. But they don’t, they remember the blow offs. So, they actually start to indoctrinate you. I didn’t even realize it was happening, into becoming what’s called a house dealer. And you hear dealers be like, “This guy was playing, and I beat him out of everything.” “Wait a minute, your money comes from him.”

Yeah.

“But you’re rooting for the house”—you don’t need to root for the house, the odds are stacked in their favor. So, it was, I had fun, and, again, I met people who are still my friends to this today. As a matter of fact, the guy who made me my first boss worked there. He just died two weeks ago.

Who was that?

Mike Kirko. Really nice guy, to me. At the time, I hated him, I wanted to wait for him a few times and run him over and stuff, ‘cause he was tough on you. But he would push you, they would push you to be better than you were. And they would razz you and razz you and razz you, and then once

you were actually pretty good, and they laid off; you don't even realize it's happening.

They lay off, and now they're starting to throw you on big games, "Hey, go take care of that game." And they go, "Hey, well that must be pretty good." Because they're putting you on big games. And the Barbary—Michael Gaughan, a prince, very generous person. Frank, friendly Frank [Toti] was rough at the time, I have a lot of respect for him—good guy now. They would do so much for their employees. They would, if your family was coming to town, and they wanted to stay in a room, they'd comp it, no problem. All their meals comped. "Yeah, your families stay here," wow. Lose five hundred dollars, "Jesus Christ, what were you doing?!" scream at you, and it's like, wait a minute, you just comped off like eight hundred bucks worth of stuff, and that's okay, but to lose the five hundred....

So even though there's really only one pit boss, the public thinks the suit's in charge. You can do anything—"I want a comp, I want this, he can back up cards, he can," actually I can't do that, but I can call somebody who can. So, you get more freedom, and you like it, you like the money, you like the prestige that goes with it, but at the same time, you start taking out more pressure, and you see it from a different view.

So, what's the pressure like? Is the casino, is the shift boss pressuring you to keep the money coming in?

It's personality-based.

Okay.

Okay, so I had a shift boss there—his name was Keith, Keith Higgins, he passed on—who was so mellow, and his attitude was, "Everything's gonna be alright." Okay, no matter, and he would tell me, "Dave, it's a casino, we play games for a living—nothing's gonna happen in here today that we can't fix." 'Cause as a green floorman, as a green horn, right, you panic, like, "Oh my God, a drink went down and I need new cards." Relax, we'll get it there, right. And it's not like they don't stall, but it's gonna happen in time. We come out, everybody okay?

This dealer's been in...dealers will notoriously freak out if they're in an hour and one minute. "I'm in an hour, ah, I need a break!" "Oh my God, the dealer needs a break." Relax, you know. He gets two hours' worth of breaks a day, we'll get him his twenty minutes, so Keith left everything really, really calm.

And I'm glad I learned under that tutelage because I began to see casinos, "Everything's okay." Guy's taking a shot, no problem, that's why we have surveillance. We'll figure out if he had the bet. We'll make it right. "Sir, you didn't get paid? Let me check the tape. We'll pay you if you got it coming to you, no problem." "Oh, okay," and you get everybody to relax, have fun, have fun.

The next shift boss that I worked for—very high-strung. That guy's winning five hundred, "You didn't let me know, why didn't you call me?"

Well, I also had a drink down, this guy was asking for something, I just didn't get to the phone. "Oh my God," you know, so everything was tense. So the pressure in the pit is gonna be personality-driven. And that can be all the way up to the guy in the casino manager's chair. If he's a sweater, that's it; there's gonna be pressure all the way down. If he's not, it won't be. Now, he can be completely gone, and there's no order to the pit then. Each three shifts work differently, there's no cohesiveness, so there is a balance you have to strike between very casual and heavy-handed.

CHRIS BIANCHI

One piece of advice that one of my shift bosses always told me was, whatever position you are within the chain of command, you do everything in your power to solve the problem before you have to pass it on to the next manager ahead of you. And that's something that really stuck with me because it really made me think, "Have I done everything I possibly can before this pit manager has to come in and do my job?" Or even as a pit manager, "Did I do everything I could before this shift manager gets involved?" And I think it's a really good way of going about your business

because it shows that boss in front of you that you are trying everything. And they gain respect for you, they trust you more.

Okay. And what latitude do you have—so let's say a player takes a shot—"I did this, and he hit me, and I meant stand"— can you say, well, "Cancel the bet," what can you do?

If it's a first time offense, let's say the person really did get confused, you can burn the card. And—or you could offer it to the next person, you know, a ten came out, and the next person has an eleven—do you want that ten? "Well, of course, I do." Okay, now the whole table's happy, and you move on.

Yeah.

If it happens again, with that same person, now it's, "Okay, fool me once, don't fool me twice, now we're calling surveillance." And we're going to see exactly what went on. And then if it continues to be a problem, if you're a floor person, that's when you report it to your pit manager, and then they're going to make a decision on whether the player needs to call it a night.

CHRIS VAN BUUREN

The most important thing for me is empathy and the ability to work with the people that work with you. I find that a lot of the casino managers that I've worked with when I was just breaking into the job were very heavy handed in that whatever they said was going to be what was going to happen. And I found that condescending at the time, and I still do, to be honest with you, because I feel like there's so many people that you can learn from on this planet.

A dealer might have a cracking idea, but because you never ask him, he's never going to volunteer that information. So you might be losing out on a really great fountain of information that you never knew you had. I understand that the casino managers are always afraid of the people snapping at their heels, they're afraid of losing their jobs to maybe younger, better people; so I get that, I mean, it's not that I'm adverse to that.

But I'm of the school of thought that if you empower the people that are beneath you, they're not going to rise up and take your spot, but they are going to make the operation much better, much stronger. I find that a lot of people in Las Vegas are much older, in those positions, so maybe they lack vision, maybe they lack the ability to embrace the future, embrace technology, embrace all sorts of different things.

A very good example was the table game program that we wanted to start. Maybe if there were younger people involved that saw the value in that and that we would only want to increase the amount of people that spent money in your casino, it may have been able to have worked at a later date. So I think a good casino manager has to start with that. You need to have empathy for the people around you, you need to feel sorry for the dealers when they don't make money, and you need to be understanding of the dealers when they have some good ideas. I don't think that a lot of them keep in touch with the low man on the totem pole. I feel like they are very busy, they have a lot of things that they have to take care of, they're under a lot of pressure financially, as well as performance-wise, but I feel like they could probably do more, they could probably get out there and encourage the people that work with them more, just give them more information.

We've gone through a period of change at SLS where they cut a lot of employees because there was no business, and the people didn't know that they were going to be cut, or that things were going even remotely badly until they actually were out the door. And I found that that was maybe counterproductive because people are worried. Especially in today's economic time, things aren't going as well as they were in '06, '05, '07, and the worst thing that you can do is have a front of house employee who worries and who expresses that worry through his face. That's going to translate in him not making money through the tables because he's not talking to the players, he's going to make mistakes because he's worried, he's going to be tired because he's worrying at home.

So I feel like communication is also something that I've advocated for my entire casino management career, which I haven't really seen much of out

here in Vegas, admitting, though, that my sample size is very small. I haven't maybe met enough casino managers to know that all of them do the same thing. But I mean, my experience in South Africa as well as Las Vegas has been very similar with high level employees, is that they're unwilling or unable, perhaps, to communicate effectively with the people that work for them, in such a way that they can get the best out of their employees at all times, I think.

BILL ZENDER

While I was at the Desert Inn probably about nine months—I was approached by management for the Maxim to come back to the Maxim, but this time to come back as casino manager. When you say casino manager, any time before like 1990, 1995, when you said casino manager, you meant table games manager. Slots were always on the back shelf, then the table game manager, casino manager. You usually oversaw table games, and you had keno and sports book also, and poker, under his umbrella. Slots has always been a little bit different. So whenever I say casino manager, that's what it really means, is table games manager. So I went to the Maxim, and I was there for about nine months. As you can see, I don't hold down a job very long. I used a lot of the philosophies and theories that I had developed over the years about getting the hands out and just generating as many decisions as possible dealing deep enough into the deck and the rest of it.

My team ended up with the second best year the Maxim ever had in table games.

Really?

One of the things I did was, I—there was so much waste in comps. Everybody was comping without question—they were giving the place away.

One situation we had this woman blackjack customer that came from New Orleans, and she owed a hotel there. I looked at the tracking sheets

on this woman. In Friday, Saturday, and Sunday—she came in Friday, left on Sunday, we paid her airfare, we paid her room, and we paid her food and beverage—comped it all. During that weekend, she played for four hours at twenty-five dollar average bet. Now using the rule of thumb, you figure the casino wins one average bet per hour. She played for four hours at twenty-five dollars an hour—we beat her for a hundred bucks. We ended up comping about eight hundred dollars' worth of stuff.

So about three or four days after she left, a package shows up. It's an elongated package, and the floormen go, "Oh, oh,"—I think her name was Rosemary, "Rosemary sent us a package." And they rip it open, and there's all these ties. And they're starting to pick the ties apart, and I said, "Well you guys better enjoy those ties." And they go, "Why?" I says, "Probably be the last group of ties you have." "Why's that?" I said, "I just took her off of room, food and beverage, and airfare. When she comes in next time, she's gonna have to play a lot more time." "But Bill, you don't understand, she brings a lot of people with her." All right, we didn't keep computer information, we kept clipboards with sheets of player activity. We called them walk sheets. So I took the clipboard with the walk sheets on it, threw it down on the middle of crap table and said, "You guys go through this and show me the people that she brought in here; I want to see who they are, how much they played, how long they played, and let's see if we comped them, too."

Crickets—couldn't hear anything, 'cause these guys knew that they were over-comping this woman.

I had a guy who would come in—I knew him for years. He was Indian-American. So he's from India, originally, but he was an American citizen, and his name was, I'll just call him Peter. So Peter is checking out the hotel. Based on the lack of table game play I had taken a lot of people off room, food, and beverage comps, and they would have to come see me or come see the shift manager before they can be given any discretionary comps.

I looked at this guy—here's another guy, four hours at twenty-five dollar average bet. He had eight hundred dollars in room service, and he didn't

have any alcohol. And so he comes down and he tells me, "You better comp me for that, you're supposed to comp me for that food." I said, "Peter, how did you consume eight hundred dollars' worth of food in three days?" "Uh, my wife and I are good eaters." I said, "Well I can't—I'll take care of your room, but I'm not taking care of your food, I'm not taking care of your airfare." "Well, I'll never come back here again." I says, "If you're gonna do this, I can't afford to have you back here."

Found out later that the guy had ads in the LA paper saying, "Come to Las Vegas, go to the Maxim hotel, come up to a player's suite, and have an elegant dinner on us," for so much money. They were actually having people come up to the room and they were ordering food that's, what's free, and selling it to them at menu prices.

Wow, that's a scam.

He and his wife, yeah. And so they do several of these seatings a night.

But what's the attraction for me to go up to some hotel room to eat dinner and pay? Is he discounting it that much?

Yeah, he's probably discounting it, yeah.

That's still pretty funky.

Yeah, it is, and the thing was, is I was going through one thing after another. The Maxim, as I said, I keep running into another problem, another problem, another problem. I got, the floormen and the pit managers would do favors, and they would get chips, and they'd get cash. I said, "Okay, from now on, nobody gets any cash." Now they're getting merchandise. "Okay, from now on, if you get anything in merchandise over twenty-five dollars, you gotta turn it in—guy brings you a box of cookies, keep 'em. He brings you a suit, you turn it in." And then started telling players, "Listen, go to the sports book and get a sports book ticket, give me a sports ticket." So I said, "No more sports tickets, you gotta turn 'em in." And then I find out that they were going to the bellman and having people drop stuff off for the bellman. So it was like, when I finally was able to solve one problem, another problem would come up. But even with that, all the

pushing and getting things done, we still had the second best year ever at the Maxim.

JIMMY WIKE

Bill Bigelow, hands down, best president I ever worked for. Just heads above everybody else.

What did he do that was so good?

He had tremendous leadership. People liked working for him. He's one of those guys that, if he said, "I'm going to this casino, I want you to come with me," you would just go—"Okay," you know, "Okay."

What did he do that was so much different?

He saw everybody as equals. I was a person that always said hello to the porters, to the security guards. You know, their job is just as important to them as mine is to me. That's how they pay their rent, that's how they feed their kids, etc. Bill Bigelow was like that—he talked to everybody in the casino, I mean in the hotel—not just the department heads, he talked to everybody. He had tremendous common sense, was smart, and he understood the importance of fun, I mean, of having fun in the casino. I mean, he knew you had to make it fun. And, like I said, the leadership, his common sense—he was just a tremendous guy to work for....

Paul Henderson, incidentally, he's the best marketing guy I knew. I never worked for him when he was a President but he was instrumental in resurrecting Bally's. He was a casino guy that understood the customer, not just some guy with an MBA, although some of them are pretty good. I'll tell you another guy who is a real good marketer and young too. His name's Stuart Richey, and he's general manager at Primm right now. He was in charge of slot marketing at Bally's and Paris in '99 when we opened it up, and then he became head of marketing at the Stardust. But, I mean, as far as the best marketers go, Paul Henderson just understood gaming. Stuart Richey, same way, just understands gaming. And being in charge of marketing is different than being a host....

Dealers—you know, as far Dealers Palace, what happens is if you had juice, you became a dealer—if you didn’t have any juice, got a job as a floorman or something like that, and some of these people, they matriculate up to, they become pit bosses or assistant shift managers or shift managers, something like that, but still, if push comes to shove, a lot of the time, the dealer wins, and that’s why it was called Dealers Palace. So I went there in September of ’03, and it was pretty rocky at first. I’ve always been an instrument of change, and I was never shy about doing what I thought was in the best interest of the casino.

Just as a side note, there’s three things that need to happen, there’s three priorities in a casino. That’s the casino’s interest is first, then the customer, and then last it’s the employee.

If you take care of the casino first, the customer second, the employees automatically get taken care of, but if you start taking care of an employee versus a customer things go sideways. If you’ve got a rude employee, and they’re rude to a customer, and you take the employee’s side rather than the customer’s side, that’s bad.

If you’ve got a customer, and you do too much for the customer in contradiction to what the casino’s best interests are, then that’s bad. The casino comes first—I would advocate, I would advise anybody in management that wants to get ahead or, you know, is ambitious, if you remember, take care of the casino first, customer second, employees last.

10

What Makes Bad Management?

The interviewees were not as voluble about bad management as good, but had strong feelings. Anxiety about casino losses to patrons, or “sweating,” is the primary complaint interviewees had about bad managers, although some also highlighted overly-strict disciplinary regimens.

ED WALTERS

And when you work for Eddie Torres, it is fucking rough.

Tell me about that.

Eddie Torres started from New York, sent out here to the Fremont. He was called the entertainment director. He's the guy who hired Wayne Newton.

Really?

Yeah, ask Wayne Newton about it. But he got so well-known with Wayne Newton and the Jets and these other guys, he almost became good at it; but yet he's a stone cold something, you know. So anyway, he ran the El Rancho, he ran the Riviera for the mob. He ran a strict place. Dealers had to show up on time on the minute, I mean he was fuckin'—he ran it like a penitentiary. Didn't trust the dealers—didn't trust anybody. Eddie Torres—famous stories, you know—he walked down and put his hand on a slot machine. If there's dust on it, that fucking guy gets fired. So, he ran the cleanest place, what we call carpet joints, in those days when they had a carpet.

Yeah.

So, business-wise, was he good? Riviera made a ton of money. And, of course, Dean had his TV show so it packed the fuckin' place. But Eddie

Torres is a ruthless, cunning, but very smart man, but no friends, you know.

RON SACCAVINO

People talk, in these days, about, “Oh, they sweat the money.” You don’t know what sweating the money is until you work back in those days.

What would they do?

Well, I think the worst joint I ever worked in that sweated the money—and, you know, I gotta admit, when I became a CM for small joints, I was the CM at Lady Luck, I was the CM at Las Vegas Club, a CM at Foxy’s, I was a CM at Paddlewheel—I used to sweat the money, too; but that was the way it was in those days. Today, it’s a lot different. But probably the biggest sweathouse I worked in in those days was probably the Riviera, when Ed Torres was there. He was some kind of cocksucker. And there are stories where, if you wanted to do cocktails there, you had to fucking blow him, or something—he was a motherfucker. He would sit on his perch there, and it just filtered down. I remember one time, dealing, and I remember I had company come from town, we were out drinking and gambling, and I had to go to work, and—Jesus Christ, I was still fucking ripe from drinking and gambling, and we’re to the Riviera, and I was working swing shift there, and I’ll tell you how I got that job later on, but I remember, “Saccavino, get in there,” and it was a lot of money on the table. I mean, I was a good dealer, I had to deal in school, I took pride in what I did—in those days, you did; in these days, you don’t.

HOWARD DREITZER

That was in the days when superstition still kind of had a big place, and they’d do some funny things like tell you to set the dice on seven when you gave them to the shooter, make you drink ice water, and all that kind of silly stuff.

What were some other ones, because I've heard a little bit this, and it's fascinating, so what are some other superstitions that they had?

God, there's probably an endless amount, I'm sure I don't know half of them, but sometimes, I had—one time at the Flamingo, I had a pit boss who used to walk around the pit counter-clockwise, because he thought that did something. And I had another pit boss that used to dump salt on your shoes.

I've heard about the salt.

I had another pit boss that used to kick your ankles. I had another pit boss that, whenever you were floorman, whenever you hit a certain criteria for losing that he had, he just moved you out and changed you or, they would change cards or change dice frequently. They'd start harassing players, sometimes, if they felt they couldn't interfere with their gambling streak, they would just start harassing them, sometimes to the point of having coffee dumped on them and actions like that.

GARY SANOFF

So what are some of the qualities of a bad pit manager?

Just the opposite. Qualities of the bad pit manager—somebody that rushes to judgment. Worst thing you can do. There's no rush to judgment. Making a quick decision is important, but you must make an educated decision. We have film to look at, we have other people to call, we have shift managers that you can call to get some opinions, but when you rush to judgment and make snap judgments, you're usually wrong, and you usually wind up hurting either your employees or the guests. So that's a very bad thing for a pit manager to do.

Laziness is another very, very bad thing. That sense of entitlement as a pit manager is not a good thing to have. Just because you have the mentality, "Well that's not the way we did it in 1975"—well, I know, I've been around since then, so I know that. You have to be willing to change. It's never going to be the business that it was in 1979 or 1965—not even in 1990. The

business is changing rapidly; the casino industry is in a big flux of change. If you're not able to swing with those changes, it's going to disappear, I guarantee you that. And being a bad pit manager is being closed-minded to that. And that's going to stretch into being a bad shift manager as well.

Can you give me any examples (without naming names) of a rush to judgment, that kind of scenario?

I can, a recent thing. And I talk about specifics—there's a thing on the internet right now called Dice.com, and the dice dealers have named these people dotcommers, and what they are, are people that think they can set the dice a certain way, pick them up, stand in a certain position on the table, and throw the dice, and get an advantage over the hotel.

So are they sliding dice?

They are not. But in the dealer's mind, what these dotcommers, the misnomer that they have given these people, what they think they're doing is trying to slide the dice. We don't allow that, and we've watched many times, but they don't slide the dice. Their whole schtick, their whole gaff is a marketing gaff. They take a lot of time to shoot the dice, they build up a lot of theoretical in play, and then they hit the host for comps. The person making the money is the guy who wrote the website and selling his system. And when you go to slide the dice, and you're the only player on the game, and every eye is on you, that's not how you go about sliding dice, and I've been doing it for a long time. So, they're just aggravated, because these people start dead games. Dealers don't like people unless they're King Kong George, and by that, do I have to explain?

No.

Okay, so and if they're King Kong George, they can do anything you want. They can call your daughter and your mother any name they want, it doesn't matter. But these are not, they bet a dollar for you because they think at least they're going to get your patience by doing that but, at Bellagio, a dollar bet is nothing. So here comes this player to a dead game recently, and he stands next to the stick man, which is where the

dotcommers like to stand, and he proceeds to shoot. Now when he comes up to the game, he comes up with a player's card, and the floorman and the dealer on the stick are having a conversation. In their mind, they rush to judgment, think he's a dotcommer from where he stands, and they continue their conversation. They don't acknowledge he's there.

Finally, they hand him the dice, and the guy goes to shoot the dice, and you could see—and I have this on video—as the hand goes by, it's not anywhere near the face of the stick man, but the stick man takes offense to this, and he takes his stick, and he puts it on the layout in front of the guy, blocking him, and gives him back the dice to shoot again. And when the player asks the stick man to please move the stick out of the way so he could shoot, he refuses. The floorman backs the dealer up, saying, in his mind, you're nothing but trouble, you almost hit him in the face, and he proceeds to break not only procedure but gaming rules by giving him back all his bets and kicking him off the game, including a line bet, which once you have a point established, it's money that is in escrow, so to speak, you can't give this money back. And he gives him this back. He calls a pit manager, and who does the pit manager support? His crew.

Yes.

And he listens only to his floorman—he doesn't watch the film, he doesn't call for any assistance, he makes the judgment call that my dealer or my floorman wouldn't lie to me, that this guy must be a dotcommer, and by the way, dotcommers are legitimate people, and it turns out the guy is mostly a baccarat player who happened to be coming into dice and liked to stand in the position. So, yes, that's a rush to judgment right there. And that took me hours of customer service recovery, which is part of my job, if not the most important part of my job, but in this case, it was unnecessary because to aggravate this customer over this without getting all the facts was egregious by this pit manager and floorman.

So what could that pit manager have done differently? Should he have looked at his play history?

Very good point. I mean, first of all, you look at what kind of player you have. If you would've looked him up, which is a thirty-second thing on the computers in every pit, A, you see that's not a major dice player, that mostly he plays baccarat, so that dotcom theory goes out the window.

The other thing he could've done is viewed the film, because that's what I did. As soon as I heard the story and the customer complained, I said, "Just give me ten minutes, and I'll get back to you; have a seat in our bar, I'll be right with you." I go and I view the film, and the film is so damning to the staff that it's indefensible. So, yes, that's what the pit manager should have done. He should have apologized, he should have said, "Please let me investigate this," and A, watch the film, called up a shift manager saying this thing; but he didn't, he rushed to judgment.

DAVE TORRES

I didn't realize how poorly the business was or how poor the place was run till many, many years later. It was, it was stressful. I would go to bed at night and have nightmares about the game.

Really?

Things I couldn't pay, maybe they were asking for things that I couldn't do. My hands wouldn't work. I went home with tips, or something, I was going to lose my license—it was a very stressful time. And that all faded over the course of a year. So I did a little over a year and half, almost two years at the El Cortez. And that's when I went to the Barb....

What amount of money is gonna trigger anybody starting to sweat the dealer?

Okay, that's gonna be property-driven. And what I mean by that is, at the El Cortez, the guy's winning four or five hundred bucks, that's a lot of money to the El Cortez, but again, you're talking about a twenty-five cent game. At the Barbary, it was about a hundred. At the Stardust, I had to let the pit manager know when somebody was winning five thousand dollars. And we had to call the casino manager if somebody was winning fifty

thousand. At the Rio, I called many times my first day there, and they came out and asked me if everything's okay. Said, "When do I need to let you know," and I said, "As a courtesy, let me know when he's winning the first million."

Wow.

"And then let me know when he leaves," you know what I mean, so it's all property-based. For a new floorman, I think he's gonna be intimidated by a level he never dealt at. So if you've only ever dealt at the Barbary Coast to a thousand, two thousand dollar maximum, and now you go over to the Wynn where these guys are betting a hundred, two hundred, maybe a million dollars a hand, you're gonna sweat above the games you watched, okay, that's why I think you need to go above that. You will have some floormen who will never sweat a game 'cause they just don't care. They'll be on top of it but they won't care. And then you'll have some floormen who take it personally, like you're winning their money, and they'll sweat it.

How does that work, because doesn't the way tips work make the dealers more root for the players?

You would think it would. Until Wynn started taking the tip share for the team leader thing, which doesn't really exist, there was a clear line. There was a reason why boxmen and floormen don't take tips, 'cause I have to make decisions about this money. Your dispute, "Hey, I had, I didn't ask for a card." "You have ten grand down, and you've been tipping." If I'm getting tips, I'm probably gonna give it to you. But if I represent the house, I'm gonna try to give an unbiased call here or at least favor the house. And so, when someone starts sweating the money, they feel like they have a stake in it. That's what it is, okay. Or they're getting pressure, they feel like they're gonna get fired. And it used to happen. In the old days—this is the dark side of Vegas, okay.

Yeah.

So, in the old days, when it was unlucky, Morrie Shenker, all these guys, Moe Dalitz—fire the crew, get rid of 'em, change the energy. Frank used to

do it at the Barbary Coast. “Fire the crew,” right. “Hey, those guys dumped off money, get ‘em out of here.” Okay, because they believe in energy and karma and whatever. The guy’s just unlucky, he’s snake bit. You hear those things, “Oh, he’s snake bit, get him out of there.” And so, that’s just it, and they’re only looking at daily numbers. You gotta figure, if the casino’s making—The Mirage had to make a million dollars a day. And they did it. I’m gonna sweat this guy for five hundred bucks? You know what I mean, what’s the point?

Yeah.

And so, again, it just goes back to management. It’s all in the management style. When I was breaking in, they called dealers “white shirts.” “Oh, that white shirt has to do this, or that white shirt had to do that.” They didn’t see you as people, just a white shirt, and there’s a sea of white shirts, so you can go. You know, they didn’t see you as people. Once you get into management teams that see you as a team or as part of their team, and they see you as people, things changed. Then that sweat started to go, but don’t let anybody tell you they don’t sweat it.

CHRISTINA GENTILE

You know, a lot of the new directors a lot of the times, whether it’s a small casino or the larger casinos, what I’ve experienced is when somebody new in a higher position comes in, they feel almost obligated to make changes to justify, “I’m here because there’s a change that was needed, and these are the changes I’m making,” without spending enough time to learn what’s going on inside of the department, or what could be effective change. They just make drastic change, and we, as humans, when somebody changes our everyday environment or how we do things, and with no explanation, is hard for everybody to accept.

What kind of stuff would they change? Do you have any examples of things?

Oh goodness. It could be something as small as how we button our shirts as dealers, or what we wear as floor people, to something as significant for a dealer as in how you pitch the cards, or how you turn your hole card over—

things like that. Something that affects them each and every day they're at work.

BILL ZENDER

Tell me a little bit about the superstitious, what are they superstitious about at that time [the 1970s]?

This one guy I worked with, his name was Sam, was a pit manager in the dice pit. I'll give you an example. I call the dice pit one night, and I just said, "How's things going?" Sam goes, "I got these two crap games, and one of them, the guys are betting the "do" and the dice are passing, and on the other game the dice aren't passing, and the guys are betting the "don't" and they're crushing me." I said, "Well, Sam, did you think about switching the dice between the two tables?" I'm doing it as a joke.

Yeah.

"You know, I thought about it, but there's just too many moves to get it done." One day I caught him with a salt shaker, and he was standing, looked at a crap table that was losing. He pulled the box man off his chair, took salt and put it underneath the crap table. Of course, he's the full time pit manager, I'm relief pit manager/floor, and I say, "Sam why did you do that?" He goes, "I just need to do something to change the luck on that table." He'd snap at customers, he'd snap at the dealers if the players were winning.

Regarding the issue of superstitious behavior, the Maxim Hotel was a little bit better. I mean, the Royal Inn was the worst. But even at the Maxim management would still play little games.

My favorite one was they would put a "losing" dealer in time out. And time out was the Big Six wheel. So if a dealer was on a game and blew the game off, and couldn't win any money, they lost a lot of money, they'd take the dealer, and they'd put him over in the Big Six wheel. The dealer would stand there the rest of the night. Or, they'd take him off a game and make him muck chips on the roulette wheel.

So why was Big Six a punishment?

The thing is, we would pool the dealer tips. They just wanted the losing dealers out of the way and didn't want them dealing on a twenty-one game. They'd go over there and deal Big Six, you can't hurt us too bad, kind of thing.

And I remember being at the Royal Inn one night—this was back when I first started. I was on a twenty-one game and I wasn't winning. So they put me over on the baccarat game, and in mini baccarat, they wanted you to call hands. So I'm calling hands, which is, you just call 'em out, you deal a hand, call it out, dealing it, you know—nobody's betting. Somebody comes up to the table, and you let 'em bet.

While I'm calling hands, somebody walks up to the table, and won some money. So the shift manager took me off the baccarat game, said, "Go over to roulette and muck chips." Can't do any damage over there. While I'm mucking chips, some guy comes by and hits a couple numbers straight up, and wins a lot of money.

So he called me off to the side and said, "Zender, there's an hour left in the shift, go home, we can't afford to keep you around any longer, and come back tomorrow and let you know if you get to keep your job." So I went home, I was, I'm upset.

So the next day, I come to work, I walk in, I go, "Do I still have a job," and he goes, "Yeah, get over there on BJ 10." And it's like they forget completely about it.

So it was superstition, though, it wasn't that they thought you were cheating?

No, what they're doing is trying to browbeat me into being superstitious as well. When I was going to UNLV, I had classes from Bill Friedman, and even Bill was talking, in his classes, he would talk about being at the Horseshoe Club, downtown Las Vegas, and they took his nametag away from him and gave him a nametag that said "Dump Truck", because he couldn't win over a period of time. So I mean, this is something that went

on and on in the business. Now, several years I left the Maxim, and I became a pit manager at Bally's; I'm finally in the big leagues, I'm finally doing a good job there. I worked there for a year and a half. They made a big management change, and they got rid of everybody that they brought in with the new regime at Bally's, 'cause Bally's used to be MGM Grand. I was supposed to be the next shift manager. All of a sudden, there's a big management change, and now I'm relegated to the smallest pit. They had a four game pit, that was the pit I watched. The new management team was very superstitious, and it was their way or the highway.

Okay.

The group we had to begin with were good, but these new guys believed in the, we'd call it, the "Ed Torres" philosophy where you have to browbeat everybody, and if there's something, if a player's winning, you should run 'em out the door. I'm coming in off my days off, and I'm walking in from the parking lot. One of the floormen, said, "Did you hear what happened?" He says, "There's a new memo came out," said, "If anybody's winning on any of the shoe games, you're supposed to cut the shoe in half, why is that?" I go, "I have no idea. Based on what I know, that's a bad move".

Yeah.

Later, I'm in the pit, and all of a sudden there's the shift manager, there's the casino manager, and they're looking at me funny. I go, "What is it?" He goes, "Zender, you don't like working here anymore?" And I says, "What are you talking about?" "Well, you're criticizing our latest decision." And I said, "Guys, the thing is, if somebody asks me, I'm gonna tell them the truth, I'm not gonna make something up."

And one guy's name was Burt, he goes, "So what, what makes you think your way is the right way?" I go, "You want me to back it up with books on this stuff?"

So, the handwriting was on the wall, they were trying to get me out of there.

So, just walk me through this. So basically, if you're winning, let's say I sit down to play blackjack and I'm winning, they then either run me off or they reshuffle?

Well, in a six-deck shoe, it's kind of hard to reshuffle, but what they do is in, they have six-deck shoe, and they used to cut out two decks and deal out four. Now, they deal out three decks, and the idea was, and everybody always was worried about card counters, is that, a person's counting cards, they can't possibly be winning. So what we've done is, we're telling the, you know, I'm the casino manager now, I'm telling the VP that I'm cutting the shoe in half so there's no possible way anybody could beat me. The only trouble is you beat yourself.

Yeah.

To give you an idea, later on, years later, when I was at the Aladdin on a six-deck shoe, we didn't cut off two decks, we didn't cut off one deck—we cut off half of the deck. Twenty-six cards and dealt out five and a half decks, because I know that I can get more hands out. We actually held and won, we won more money than they ever did there, and we held a better hold percentage. The hold percentage being the percentage of money you won divided by the amount of money that was dropped on the game. Cutting the six deck shoe in half is one way of running the person off, the other one's just being rude to them.

Why do you want to run winners off, because aren't they eventually going to lose again?

Yes.

Given the mathematics and stuff like that, so why do you want them to leave with your money?

Well, you see, the thing is, is that, it's, I didn't say it was the right move.

Yeah, I'm just curious what their mindset was?

It's very stupid, really. But the thing is, is that some casino people believed that anybody who's winning has got to be doing something wrong. There's an old saying in the business, "I don't know what he's doing, but he's doing

something.” So the best thing you can do is run the guy off and you don’t have to worry about him. If a guy comes in today and wins, and he comes back tomorrow and wins, he comes back the next day and wins, and there’s nothing wrong with his play, eventually he’s going to come in and he’s going lose. You want to keep the person there as long as you possibly can.

Jimmy Payne told me one time when I first started working at the Maxim back in the early eighties. He says, “Bill, you’re only gonna need to know three things to be successful in this business.” He says, “First of all, you gotta get the people in the door; second of all, you gotta keep the people in the chairs; and third, you got to give ‘em a reason to come back in the door.” I said, “Well Jimmy, what about filling that in for me?” He goes, “No, you have to do that yourself.” But basically, that’s the three things you try to do. And by running people out the door, that doesn’t work well. Back then it wasn’t highly competitive like it is now. You can’t just run people out the door; there won’t be anybody to come in, you know, to replace them. I’m still shocked at the number of people that have this attitude that are in management in table games. And really, it’s funny is I’ve seen it bleed over into slots as well.

JIMMY WIKE

But Artie was at the Stardust in early ‘74 and was one of those guys that people tell stories to break-in dealers to scare them, you know what I mean, and I’m sure there’s an equivalent in every profession. If you’re working for this construction foreman, or if you’re working for this, whatever it is, I’m sure there are equivalents. But he was the stuff of nightmares.

What kind of things would he do?

He was just mean, and he would just fire you in a second, just for no reason. And, so it turned out, he was the guy that told me, “You want the job or not?” That was Artie Jaeger. I had asked one of the other dealers who he was and he says, “Oh, that’s Artie Jaeger,” and I went, “Oh,” ‘cause I’d heard stories. And when I was telling my friends that I was going to

work at the Stardust, they said, “Oh man, watch out for Artie Jaeger.” And he was the swing shift dice boss. If you want to know names, I can tell you. The casino manager at the Stardust when I went there was Bobby Stella Sr., straight out of Chicago, came there when the joint opened in ’58 or ’59 —’58, I think it was. And the graveyard boss was Lou Salerno, who ended up being in charge of gaming for Argent. The day shift boss was a guy named Bernie Perlove, and the swing shift boss was Phil Ponto. Phil Ponto’s significance is that he is the only made mafia member that ever had a gaming card to work in the casino, and he was from Chicago. He was portrayed in the movie *Casino*, he was the bag man taking the money bag to Kansas City and Chicago.

Okay.

But Phil Ponto, I mean, I don’t know about his entire life, but he was actually a real gentleman in the casino. You know, he wasn’t rough. Most of the people at the Stardust—the guys who were in the Stardust, they were all from Chicago, and they were rough guys. I mean, they just were rough. The three real rough places in those days were the Stardust, the Riviera, and the MGM. So, the MGM opened in December of ’73, but Carl Cohen got sick, and Morrie Jaeger took over—he was the casino manager, but he became more powerful. And so he brought his brother Artie Jaeger and all of the worst guys from the Stardust down to the MGM. And the MGM had been a beautiful place for about the first six, five, six months it was open, and then it became one of the worst places. But conversely, the Stardust became a much nicer place once they left. The Stardust ended up being a very, very good job, you know, money-wise.

Tell me a little bit about what you mean by rough.

Oh, they would just, I mean, they would fire you for anything. I’ll tell you what, I worked at the Stardust the first time— I worked there twice—for three and a half years, and when I, left in ’77 to go to work at the MGM, I had the fourth most seniority on the dice pit in that short of time. They would fire whole crews, they would just fire you for next to nothing. They

fired the whole graveyard dice shift one time. They had three four-man crews on graveyard, twelve guys, and they just fired them all one day.

They also fired the pit boss, floormen and boxmen with the exception of one boxman named Paul Mackay. There may have been several of that 12 misbehaving but it's like cutting off your finger because you have a hang nail. Well, I'll tell you, so I went to work there in March of '74, and around November they just, they flopped everybody on swing and days. If you worked on days you went to the night shift and if you worked the night shift you went to days. There was no consideration for what anybody wanted or needed. There was also no Human Resources so if you didn't like it you hit the road. The only problem was that if you got a new job there was no guarantee you'd get the shift you wanted anyway. There was one extra crew on swing so four guys got to stay. But basically, you know it didn't matter if you've got a family or anything like that. You're on swing, next week, you're on the day shift schedule and days shifts are on the swing shift schedule. And they would fire crews regularly. I was on a crew that was gonna get fired. Somebody says, "Your crew's gone at the end of the night."

And a lot of times, they did this at the MGM, too—they didn't like one or two people on the crew, they'd just fire the whole crew. I mean, just get rid of 'em. But, we'd heard that our crew was going at the end of the night. And in those days, we used to punch in and punch out; there was a time clock and a lot of times, if you thought you were getting fired, you would just go back to the time office and say, like me, "Wike here," and they'd pull my time card, and if there was a pink slip on it, I knew I was done. But, it didn't happen to me. I went back there a couple times, but it wasn't me. But anyway, so this crew I was on, this is probably '76, maybe something like that, we heard the whole crew was gone. This one guy just quit. One guy says, he says, "I'll go on the box," and they were always looking for box men, 'cause all the young guys wanted to deal, 'cause you made a lot more money. One guy says, "I'll go on the box," and the other, and the third guy says, "I'll go on graveyard." So, that essentially just completely disbanded

the crew. I was the only one left, and they just put three new guys with me, and I stayed working. But they would swear at you, and—I made one mistake one time, and I'm not, I very rarely challenge people. I was a pretty aggressive manager later in life, but when I was a dealer I knew pretty much how to keep my mouth shut. And this has some vulgarity in it, is that okay?

That's okay. Oh, yeah, that's totally fine.

I need to stand up for this story. So, I'm dealing, and I'd been at the Stardust, I don't know, about four or five months. And I did think I was kind of a hot shot dealer, and I was dealing a big game, and the pit boss was there. I'm dealing and it's another winner and I pay the line, and when I stand up the pit boss says, "Give the guy in the hook a nickel," meaning I had shorted the guy a five dollar chip. You know, he says, "Give the guy in the hook another nickel." And I just says, "What for?" because I knew I had paid the bet right. And he pulled me off the game, he's about this high, [very short] got the cigar, and he gets right up in my chest and with the cigar smoke going up my nose says in a raspy voice, "When I fucking tell you to do something, you just do what the fuck I tell you to, do you understand?" And I'm like, "Yes, sir, yes sir," right, but that's kinda how they, that's kinda how they talked to you.

Yeah.

But it was fun. We were all young guys. So, if you could just keep your mouth shut and shine it on you'd be okay. I used to tell people all the time that I dealt, I used to tell them, "No matter what you do, if you can keep your mouth shut for two weeks, somebody else will do something incredibly stupid, and it'll take all the heat off you," which was kinda like that in the old days.

11

Las Vegas Casinos

In this chapter, interviewees share their recollections of specific Las Vegas casinos, spanning across the years that they worked there. While there is material in other chapters covering individual casinos, these excerpts shed light on both the big picture and the small details of working—or managing—at those casinos.

The interviewees were refreshingly candid about their experiences, not sugarcoating their thoughts or viewing the past through nostalgia-colored glasses.

DOWNTOWN CASINOS

RON SACCAVINO

And the street was Downtown, it was two-way traffic. So you would deal, a twenty-one dealer would deal for forty minutes, take a twenty-minute break, and a crap dealer would deal for an hour and take a twenty-minute break, so what you do is you deal for your forty or an hour, and you get a twenty-minute break, well, you'd run across the street, and you'd have two, three bucks, and you'd make a laydown or get a drink or two and then run back to work.

I mean, it was great! You'd sit outside the joint and wave to the broads—I mean, it was a different animal. And so, it was like growing up.

JIMMY WIKE

The Fremont at that time was kind of the class of Downtown. It was a dollar game, so you didn't have quarter placements, you know, you had to bet in increments of dollars. And they had a lot of old wise guys there. Mike Levinson was still working there on the floor. The person that built the Fremont was Ed Levinson, and he had two brothers: Mike and Sleep

Out Louie. Sleep Out Louie was kinda the muscle, and Mike was always the accountant of the group.

As a matter of fact, if you ever watch *The Godfather*, where they're talking about Cuba, the guy that plays Meyer Lansky says, okay, the Levines, you're gonna get, I think it was the Riviera (the one in Cuba, not Vegas). The Levines were actually the Levinson brothers. And Mike was about eighty at that time, but he was still sharp, and he would watch the games, and smoke his stogie and hang around the games. I think he was still getting an envelope out of the cage at that time.

Most of the people that ran the Fremont, they were all from Newport, Kentucky. I don't know how familiar you are with the importance and significance in Las Vegas gaming with the Newport group, but the Beverly Hotel and the Lookout, casinos in Newport, were pretty prominent back in the day. They got closed down in the Sixties and most of the workers migrated to Vegas. And the people that opened the original MGM, they were almost all through Newport too. Jimmy Hill, who was GM at the Fremont when I was there and a boss at Caesars and the Riviera, Morrie Jaeger, who was the casino manager at the MGM, they were all through Newport. Paul Brinkman, another Newport guy was the casino manager at the Fremont, and the shift bosses were Jeff Rapp, Al Bailus, Chris Corbin, and Glen O'Rourke. Glen O'Rourke was just a real, real sharp guy at that time and ran the graveyard shift. Jimmy Spence was a Pit boss along with Red Guthrie. I think they're all passed away now.

I read the obituaries, having grown up here and having worked in the casinos. Funny how it used to be all old guys in the paper, but now the people dying are my own age, sometimes younger. In any event the Fremont was a completely different environment than the Las Vegas Club, just by virtue of the fact that it was kind of the class of Downtown. And the thing about the guys from Newport, they really knew how to treat the customers. They were customer-oriented. At the Vegas Club, they were just concentrated on not letting the players cheat—that was their sole focus,

don't let them take shots, don't let 'em cheat. But it was just completely different, the Fremont crew were, "Hi, how are you?"

I'll tell you just one real quick story. I'd been at the Fremont about a month or so and this old guy came up in overalls, some guy, he looked like a farmer, hick from the sticks. We had another young guy on the crew and we're looking at him and smirking. As I said, we kept our own tips, and what they did is they would take two new guys like me and the other young guy, and put us on a crew with two veterans.

The older guys I worked with were a guy named Jimmy Carmen who was in his forties and a guy named Chico Alvarez. Chico had dealt in Cuba for the Levinsons, and he was in his fifties. So that was another great experience, being a young guy, you get to work with the old experienced guys, especially when you're trying to learn how to make money on a crap table. Anyway, this old guy walks up in his overalls, and I look at the other young guy, and we're looking like, you know, look at this hick, right. Next thing I know, here comes the shift boss and the pit boss falling all over themselves going, "Hey, how you doing?", you know, I can't remember what his name was, but, "How you doing, nice to see you," and I thought, "Uh-oh, this guy's somebody." And out of his overalls, he just started pulling wads of money out of his overalls. He turned out, he was one of the biggest players to come in the Fremont.

And the lesson I learned from that was, you don't ever judge anybody by how they look because you don't know, and I should have known better having grown up in Vegas, because I grew up with people from all around the country. I should have known better, but I learned, you just never know, when people walk up to the game, who they are and what they have, what kind of temperaments they have—don't ever just judge somebody based on their appearances. A very valuable lesson for me.

ARIZONA CHARLIE'S

RUSSELL TERBEEK

But it's about how you concentrate on customer service, so you realize, that's a huge piece of the puzzle, especially here at Arizona Charlie's. We don't have the dolphins and the volcanoes out front or anything. We're a locals market. Most of our customer base is within walking distance. Most of them are retired, disabled, fifty to seventy years old that like to play 24 hour Bingo. We don't get a lot of tourists from the Strip, although we do get different bus groups, that sort of thing. So you realize that a first impression is huge. The property isn't a Mirage or Steve Wynn property—it's a little worn. We're renovating the property and putting on a fresh coat of paint on the casino and updating all of our rooms.

I don't know if you saw the paper—we [American Casino & Entertainment Properties] had our best quarter in a long time, actually, very profitable for the first quarter for all the properties. So, although it can be hard to get money for basic remodels and stuff like that, we are making an effort to keep the property looking good so players want to continue to stay and play at Charlie's.

HARD ROCK

JOE FRIEDMAN

So tell me what the vibe was like at the Hard Rock, and you were, what, 26?

I was 26, and it was, everyone was just young and attractive. I had been there during the summer before I worked there, and it was amazing. There was, you know, I'd always—my father always was a gambler, casino guy. And I was exposed to casinos early on. I think I started gambling in Atlantic City when I was 13.

Wow.

'Cause I was tall. I don't know why that equates to age, but that's, so I was familiar, you know, there were only a few kids in high school in Chicago

wearing fight sweatshirts from the Hilton, and it was a different vibe. I knew what RFB was as a young child.

(Laughs)

So it was sort of, I knew about what was going on. And when I saw what was going on there at the Hard Rock, it just, it blew my mind, 'cause everyone was young and hip and happening. And one of the girls, who I still know, I was playing on her game, and I said, "I'm gonna work here," and she looked at me like I was out of my mind. And then, once I got a job there, she looked at me like, she goes, "You weren't kidding." I said, "Yeah, I told you, this is, this place is great."

And for a long time, it really was, it was like having the only gas station in town. I mean, there was no other place—it changed the whole paradigm. I know that's an overused word, but it really was true, I mean, it was, you know, with—there was such an emphasis on authenticity, and the genuine, going out there and talking to people, but the gaming almost took a back seat, you know, there wasn't that nightclub boom today. The casino was the nightclub. And you'd walk out on the floor at two, three in the morning, and it'd look like ten at night. It was packed. It was always busy, always loud, and now that I go back in there, I have no idea how I worked there that long. But it was, it was just a whole lot of fun, a lot of fun.

Did you get to meet any celebrities?

Every, every-, I mean, you know the Stones played there a couple times, every celebrity, I mean, it became, you know, again, this was before nightclubs, so they weren't, celebrities just didn't go to their booth or their table. I mean, they were hanging out in high limit, you know, they were, when we opened up that high limit room with Peacock—anyway, it was, with the Hendrix fest, that was, that was the nightclub, and there was movie premiers, music people, there were sports people, Vince Vaughn, you know what I mean, all sorts, anybody that was happening at that moment was there.

And even the players, as far as the hosts that worked there, it wasn't like today where you have to almost beg people to come to your casino. They would just show up, "But who do I talk to, to get a credit line?" You know, they were just roll in off the street, because they wanted to be where the action was. And that was, I'm still friendly with a lot of those guys, it was incredible. But they worked their ass off, but to have players just falling out of the sky is, is unheard of, especially in the competitive market now, but it was the only, the only gas station in town. It was a ton of fun.

So what did they do right then?

You know, there was a word that Peter used a lot, and it sounds kinda hokey, but it was a definite, it was an ethos. It was the ethos of Peter that he didn't—he wanted things a certain way 'cause they were his, whether it was, you know, layouts were changed quickly, if they had a cigarette burn or whatever, they were changed immediately. He understood that concept of your layout and your chips as a manifestation of your brand. And cleanliness is the manifestation of your brand. The lighting, the furniture, the whole thing is your brand, and it's absorbed through all your senses. I think he emphasized being genuine. When I got hired there, I mean, they hired each person, you know, we went through either Steve Cavallaro or Willey Stevens, and we went, they interviewed every person.

Really?

And I remember sitting on the couch upstairs, "Are you gonna be nice to everybody?" I said, "Yeah," and he goes, "Okay." You know, like your (unintelligible) and I think, you know, since, I've sat through a lot of interviews where they ask you what kind of tree you want to be, or something. I mean, it just doesn't, you have to get that vibe from someone. You have to get, I think they went above and beyond. When I was a manager there, it was the same thing. I'm sure you've heard before, I mean, I can teach anyone to deal.

RUSSELL TERBEEK

And then there was my introduction into the big chips—I was working over at the Rio in the dice pit before I became the Training Manager. I was in the dice pit, working on the floor (supervisor), and they would pull me every once and awhile out of dice to go into high limit salon. And one night, there was a guy that I became a real good friend with—Earl Hayes. He was the swing shift manager at the Rio. And he comes into the dice pit one night, and he grabs me by the arm, and he marches me out of the dice pit, and he said to me, “Terbeek! What did I tell you about doing this, you’ve done this time and time again, and I can’t, I’m not, I’m tired of talking to you about it.” And I’m thinking, what did I do now? And he walks me into the high limit pit, and I’m thinking, “Is he gonna chastise me in front of all these high limit people? What’s going on?”

He looked over at me, “Just kidding, I just need you to come over here and watch this section.” He was a real practical joker. Well, in this section happened to be the late media mogul, Kerry Packer, on one game, who just happened to be the richest man in the world, playing \$125,000 a hand. And on the other game was Glenn Frey from The Eagles and Tiger Woods.

Wow.

So I ended up in the high limit salon watching two blackjack games. And it was Tiger when he was back in town a year after he won his first major. I think that he just turned twenty-one. So he’s back in Vegas to defend his title, and he stayed in the salon with some buddies until the wee hours of the morning. So I kinda had a good idea that he wasn’t going to do real well in the tournament. You never knew. Tiger was like Superman or SuperKid at the time, so maybe he could have pulled it out. (He didn’t). But it was those three guys, I couldn’t believe it.

So, I’m acting like this is nonchalant every day kind of thing, and I’m looking at the \$125,000 a hand that Mr. Packer’s playing (\$25,000 a spot times five spots). And then I look into the rack, and I’m running down the rack (the chips in front of the dealer); I said to myself, “Okay, there’s green

(\$25 chips), black (\$100 chips), five hundreds, thousands, twenty-five thousand chips, and what are these white chips in the middle with all these zeroes on them?" And I'm thinking, those are one hundred thousand dollar chips.

Wow.

And I'm thinking, okay, so there's twenty of them in a stack; so that's twenty - hundred- thousand, no, no, no—two million, plus two mi-, that's four million in that tube. Holy crap!

And I'm trying to stay calm, cool and collected and I take a big hard swallow. I'm trying to act like this is everyday stuff for me, and I was just trying to keep cool, my heart was beating like crazy. And I'm watching Mr. Packer play a hundred and twenty-five thousand a hand. I thinking "He's playing what I paid for my condo—on one hand. Wow.

Then there's Glenn Frey and Tiger Woods swapping stories, and Glen Frey was singing different songs throughout the night. All three of them were chatting it up. It was the best night of my gaming career. It was so much fun, and they were all real super nice people. But, it was kind of a big graduation.

THE MAXIM

BILL ZENDER

I got hired at the Maxim as an extra board floorman.

All right.

At the time, the casino manager was a guy named Charlie Boyle. Another person that I knew really well was Jimmy Payne. Jimmy was an older gentleman who knew Steve Forte. As a matter of fact, he and Steve formed a gaming consulting company that I had done work for. Jimmy says, "We got some real idiots down there at the Maxim, would you like to come work on the floor?" So, I said, "Fine, I'd love to." I worked on the floor at

the Maxim on swing shift, and later moved to graveyard. In about a year after I was there, they promoted me a relief pit manager.

The Maxim Casino operated with one pit manager in the dice pit, which had three dice games, and they'd have one pit manager in the twenty-one, roulette, and baccarat pit. I think we operated about twenty games in that pit at that time. On graveyard, we still had the two pit managers—why, I don't know. The pit manager in dice worked as the floorman as well. We had a pit manager in the, in the other pits, the twenty-one, plus the games.

My first promotion into that position was to do a relief pit manager. I would relieve the dice pit manager three nights a week, because he was also relief casino shift manager. Then I would run the twenty-one two pit nights of the week. That was kind of interesting running the two pits. One of the things I always liked to learn more about the gaming business. When the floor staff scheduling position came open, I said—nobody wanted to do it—I said, "I'll schedule." I had no idea what I was doing, but I could figure it out. Eventually, I got the schedule running really nice. I scheduled both the dealers and floormen.

On graveyard, we had a pit manager and a casino shift manager who would come in and do the count at two o'clock in the morning. Then they would disappear. They would go upstairs, and play slot machines. The employees could play machines on their break. The shift manager and pit manager would go up there and play, and they would give me the responsibility as a floorman to run the shift for the first four hours. I was doing the schedule, breaking down games as they went dead, and sending people home. So I was actually working as a grave shift boss, but I was getting paid as a floorman at that point. It was a normal step for me to go into this relief pit manager position when it opened.

The one thing that I really despised moving up in the business—now this is back in the eighties, I'm in my late twenties—is that every time I had a chance to become a pit manager, management would come to me and say, "Bill, we're thinking about moving you into a permanent pit manager position, but, you know, Joe Blow's been here, and he's been in the business

for twenty years, and he deserves a break." Well I didn't see Joe Blow coming in and stepping up to the plate and working overtime or extra days or doing the scheduling, so I'd always take a backseat to that, and I was passed up several times.

I'm not superstitious, and I'm also not a browbeater, and the pit manager on twenty-one, who was there at this time, was one of these guys that, if you were happy or smiling as a dealer, you must be doing something wrong. So he tried to create turmoil in all that time. If you came to him, and said, "I want an extra day off next week 'cause my father's coming in town," or something like that, he'd tell you no, because he knows that's what you wanted. By now, I'm running the schedule, so if I gave the guy the day off, then he'd get mad at me. He'd say, "Well, I told him no, and you're gonna let him do it." I got plenty of dealers, and we can let the guy take that day off.

The other pit manager in the dice pit was very, very superstitious. As far as he was concerned, the dealers are not even supposed to do anything, you're not supposed to talk to customers, you're not supposed to talk to each other, they're supposed to stand there and deal the game. So when I would take over as the pit relief, the dealers would relax. I would let 'em talk to the players, and I'd give days off away to the people that really deserved it and wanted it, right. So, the two regular pit managers basically went to the, not the shift manager, but the casino manager, and told 'em that they wanted me removed from that position because I was disrupting their shifts, when, the whole time, I'm trying to create a warm and open relationship.

PALMS

ELLIOTT SCHECTER

That felt like I was stepping up to the big time, and I was. I mean, that was when, that was certainly the second golden age of poker, it was certainly right before the bust, so of course the bubble was expanding to its best

point for the economy, both in terms of the stock market and real estate. Vegas was truly a boom town at that point, my God. Thousands of people moving there every month, the action was incredible, clubs opening left and right, casinos always full. The Palms was the playground of the young and the wealthy. I mean, we had star athletes and stars and actors all over the place all the time. It was very exciting. I mean some nights, shoot, we had a lot of red carpets for our movie theater, so I mean, Don Cheadle and Matt Damon would have a game one night, or sometimes Ben Affleck would be there, I mean, Barry Bonds and Gary Sheffield.

It was funny. Bill Laimbeer when he was coaching the Detroit Shock of the WNBA would always have his team do their preseason training at the Hardwood Suite in the Palms, which meant that the team would be upstairs playing basketball and he would be downstairs playing poker the entire time.

CIRCUS CIRCUS

RUSSELL TERBEEK

Circus was kind of a grind joint. It was mostly five hundred dollar max on the games. Once in a while they would raise it to a thousand max but not very often. That was big action for them. One player betting \$500 - \$1,000 a hand on three hands (up to \$3,000 in action a hand), that was gambling. They would have me deal to those players once in a while. And sure enough, if somebody was betting with the count and they pressed their bet, I could shuffle up and deal. And if they chunked it out there and it was minus count and the deck was loaded with small cards, I'd deal that sucker out. I mean the game had to be holding close to twenty-two, twenty-three percent. And that was my introduction into blackjack and card counting.

I used to inform the floor supervisors when I got off the game, "Yeah the guy pressed the bet, it was a plus five with only one ace out so I shuffled".

Players would try to jump their bets up all the time. They pretended that they were just guessing that they might win the next hand when we knew

all along that they were counting the deck down. So it was kind of interesting. Bosses liked me because they knew that I could protect the games from counters.

What were the tokes like there?

Well, you know what, it was the greatest.

Did you keep 'em or did you split 'em?

We split 'em, but if you worked five days a week on graveyard shift, you got tokes for seven days a week.

Really?

So you never missed a day. You came back from your days off, and you pick up three envelopes. The last day you worked, and the two days that you were off, so you're coming into three, four, five hundred dollars from your days off, and you're making money every day whether you're there or not. Even when you're on vacation, they gave vacation tokes seven days a week.

And if they had hit a score, you had somebody that was a "George" and they made three or four hundred a day, you know, it was like stupid money to a kid like me. I wish I would've invested more. (Laughs).

And what was the action like for the players, so you said five hundred was the top?

You know, they had black (\$100) chips, and I don't even remember if we even had five hundred dollar chips or not at Circus Circus. It was if they had any black action (\$100+), you know, they kinda discouraged it. They wanted those twenty dollar bills, especially with the circus acts upstairs.

The parents would be downstairs playing on a table, and the kids would come down and twenty-dollar them to death for the games upstairs. So they'd be blowing money out of both sides.

THE FLAMINGO

HOWARD DREITZER

It was still a glamorous place, and its big sister, the Hilton, the International, was our—everybody's desire to go work over there because the tips and the money and the atmosphere and everything was much better over there. The Flamingo—well, it was very old school. In those days, and particularly at the Flamingo, there were family dynasties within management—not necessarily ownership, but there, too. And there were lots of unspoken rules about—if the boss was dating this cocktail waitress, you didn't look at her—that sort of thing. And I liked it. I mean, it was exciting. You never knew what was going to happen. It had some different sorts of things happen back then. Generally, customers were treated well. When customers get out of line, they were treated kind of brutally and very quickly, and the philosophy in those days was to make sure there was no noise or interruption or problems of any kind to disrupt people, so when anybody started screaming or yelling or something, the next thing they knew, they were out on the street or upstairs somewhere.

ALADDIN (1966)

BILL ZENDER

Joe has a chance to go into the Aladdin Hotel, this would've been 1992. And he got a hold of me, he says, "Bill," he goes, "I'd like you to come to the Aladdin with me." And I said, "Joe, why do you want me to come in with you?" He goes, "Because you speak numbers. You always produce, you always know the numbers. I ask these guys I got here"—he was still at the Maxim—"These guys at the Maxim are in the pit right now, and I ask 'em something, and they go 'well, um, my gut says this,' or 'well, you know, I remember this happening years ago,' and that's what I see in the gaming industry now." He says, "You told me what the correct numbers were, I want a numbers guy with me at Aladdin." So we went into the Aladdin on June 1st, 1992, and we went into a real quagmire. The reason why the Aladdin was a mess, in the past two years there hadn't been a nickel spent on capital improvements or any standard maintenance. As a matter of fact,

it had a big tower, and the tower had spotlights, and only two of the spotlights worked.

Wow.

There was about twenty spotlights on the tower. And I asked the head engineer what happened. He goes, “Well, little by little, those lights burn out, we couldn’t replace ‘em.” So I said, “It died a slow death?” “Yeah, that’s what it did.” We had carpeting with huge rips in it because there was wool carpeting, and they used shampooers instead of emulsifiers. We did use the “official” red duct tape to temporarily repair the carpets. We had eight hundred and fifty slot machines that were obsolete. They were old universal, old Bally’s machines that were totally obsolete. We were winning about thirty dollars a day per machine, when the rest of the town was doing about sixty, seventy dollars a day per machine.

So it was a real struggle, and to make a long story short, that first year was tough, but we ended up starting to make a profit, starting on to the second year. Unfortunately, Joe Burt was killed in a motorcycle accident—the Aladdin was his baby, his dream to go in there, and he was killed. Fortunately, our CFO at the time was Veronica “Ronnie” Wilson, and of all the partners that were in there was, there was Guy Kirtley and Tom Guth. Tom’s the general manager at the Tuscany right now. Guy Kirtley’s the food and beverage consultant for the Boyd group. Dean Bolen ran our slot department, but he’s passed away now. There was Ronnie Wilson, there was myself, and then there was Joe Burt’s widow. So when Joe died, Ronnie took over. For the next four years, we made nothing but money with that casino. No one had been able to make money up to that time. Imagine, in the old Aladdin, when the mob had it, they made money, but they didn’t make money on paper.

Yeah.

Yeah, when the Mob was involved, the money was going through, you know, through Detroit. When we ran the Aladdin that was one of the really good times in my life because I worked with some great people. I still,

sometimes I dream about being back there with everybody, and that was, you know, we left there in '97. The place was sold, the building was sold. The new landlord wanted to build a brand new Aladdin. We didn't agree with him, so we all left.

CAESARS PALACE

JIMMY WIKE

Well, Caesars, the one thing about Caesars, even though I was casino manager, Mark Juliano didn't want anything un-Caesars-like there. So, they had the same blackjack rules in the outer pits as they had in the high limit pit. And all that means is you get a lot of counters out there where they can go unnoticed. And those are retail areas. He didn't like carnival games, didn't like, you know, didn't like that, and when Harrah's came in, they kinda gave me *carte blanche*, and I put retail pits in, I put in carnival games, I put like nine, three-card pokers out there, and those are high hold percentage games and it's for the retail customer of which we had a lot via the Forum shops. Your high-end customer is always going to gravitate towards that main casino in the high limit area, but if you got like thirty, forty other games out there, why are you just giving money away. I changed a few rules here and there, and they just, they made a lot of money. You know, they did pretty well. Then, Gary Selesner, who was the president, he says, "We gotta do something different," we want to brand something, so we ended up doing the Pussycat Doll Pit.

Okay.

And that was a huge success. And then, in 2007, I convinced the company to let me raise the limits tremendously. And, in 2007, if you walked into MGM and says, "What can I bet on a hand of blackjack?" "Ten thousand dollars." You walked into the Wynn, Venetian—all of those places, was ten thousand. Maximum, and they had what they call million dollar limits, so if you had a million dollars you could bet three hands at

fifteen K, two at twenty, or one at twenty-five, but the normal customer in the high limit could bet ten thousand. Craps was five thousand, roulette, it was two hundred any way to a number. Those were the limits.

So I wrote up this big presentation, and I've always been kind of a math-based guy, you know, science. I just, you know, I just understand the math of things, I know things are cyclical, but math always prevails. It's just why people with systems never win, you know, the only advantage they have is when they go broke, they still got their system. So I did a presentation, I did it for most of the people in the company.

So in December of 2007, we raised our limit to fifty thousand a hand on blackjack, fifty thousand on the pass line in craps, two thousand any way to a number on roulette, and, I mean, it's just, I mean there's nothing like it. I remember in these meetings—Tom Jenkin, who was western president, I think he's global president now, but he was western division president—he says, "Well, why don't we just raise the limit to fifteen thousand?" and I says, "Well, if we raise it to fifteen thousand, everybody else will, too." And he says, "Well, won't they do that if we raise it to fifty?" and I says, "Oh, no," I says, "Believe me, I know all my counterparts in town." I says, "Nobody, *nobody* will raise their limits like that because there's too much risk."

Most people in my position are, they're looking to last, not make any waves, just kinda keep the lid on things because historically—although it's gotten much better in the last eight to ten years—historically, there's always been a lot of turnover in the casino managers ranks.

Yes.

But, I mean, I just thought it's the right thing to do, and I know it was the right thing to do, math-wise. And I told everyone, "Everybody's not going to come in and bet fifty thousand dollars, but they're going to come in and play hoping to achieve a fifty thousand dollar bet through a progressive winning strategy. That's what's gonna happen. And so I put that in in December 2007. In 2008—there was an anomaly in 2007 with one

particular player, but minus him, in 2008, our blackjack handle went up thirty-eight percent, over 2007.

CHRIS TONEMAH

For me, I set a goal that if I wasn't dealing at Caesars Palace within ten years, I would leave Las Vegas and go back and get my teaching degree, recertify, and become a teacher. And I just decided one night at MGM, I thought, I've been here, I think I was there almost three years, and I said, you know what, I've been doing this almost six years, I've only got four years to meet my goal—what's it going to hurt to try?

And I was very nervous because Caesars Palace was like the elite place, and I thought, why not just go in there? So I went in there in my black and whites, and I asked for the boss and some floorman said, "I'm the boss, what do you need?" I said, "Well, I'm looking for a job, I'd like to do an audition." And he said, "We don't do auditions." I said, "Okay," I said, "Well are you the boss?" He goes, "No, I'm not," he said, "But his name is Mokie." I said, "Okay, well where's he at?" And he says, "He's not going to talk to you."

I went in evening time on a day off. He said, "He's not going to talk to you, he's not going to talk to a break-in dealer." I said, "Well, I'm not break-in." I said, "I've been at the MGM." He goes, "Honey, you're a break-in." I said, "No, I'm not, I just need an opportunity." He said, "Well, his name is Mokie, you can come in during day shift and try to talk to him."

So I would go in like I would start at the MGM—eight o'clock—I would go into Caesars like at five-thirty, and I'd ask for Mokie. Sometimes I'd wait an hour, sometimes they would say, "Well, he's not here today, come back tomorrow," and I come back.

I did this for months, and finally, I just, I gave up. I said, it's not going to happen. And then I started talking to people and they said, "Well, you need to meet someone who works there." I already knew some people who work there. So you know, you make phone calls, and you tell them you're

looking. And then I got lucky because they knew that a strike was coming up. It was probably, I don't know if it was '83—I think it was in '83, there was a culinary strike coming up. And so they were going to staff up because they knew this was coming, and they wanted to run things smoothly.

And so I talked to a couple people, and they said, "Well, I know they're hiring, but it's not full-time," it's what we call extra board, "And if you want the job, you need to go in there and make your face known."

Well I had been in there, and Mokie told me, "Don't ever come back here." And I thought, "Well, I gotta try." So I went in and he saw me coming, and he goes, "What did I tell you?" I said, "But I need a job, I want a job, it's a dream to work here, just give me a chance, just give me a chance." He said, "Okay, write your name down," so I wrote my name down and my phone number, and he said, "Where are you at now?" And I said, "MGM." He asked me who my shift boss was, I told him Vic Wakeman, Andy Chu, and Span M-, were the bosses I answered to. He said, "Okay." He said, "And where at before that?" And I told him, "The Four Queens," and gave him my boss's name there. He said, "Well, I'll call you."

And I probably waited a good week, and I got a phone call, "Can you come in for an audition?" I said, "Yes."

"Okay, well come here in black and whites, and be on time," and I was there, and they put me on a game. It was the longest audition of my life. At MGM we dealt face-down, and there was a lot of pressure to, you had to be able to shuffle your decks in ninety seconds—they timed you—and they wanted you to deal a shoe, and it was a six-deck shoe, they wanted you to deal a total shoe in under twenty minutes—"Get it moving, get it moving"—and you fired the cards into the spots.

So you had to be quick and correct, and I didn't pay attention, how they dealt at Caesars Palace. I knew there was double deck, and I knew they had a shoe, and I figured, the shoe, I could do that, no problem. Well, I go in for my audition, and they take me back to the sports book area, which

was pit six, it was a small pit. They had just built the OmniMax Theater back there, that's where pit six was, a little tiny pit.

They took me back there and introduced me to a pit manager by the name of Sam, and he said—he was an older guy, and Bob Wilkens, he was an older guy—and they said, “So you think you can deal, huh, honey?” And I said, “Yes.” He said, “Well get on that game and show us what you can do,” and I started firing those cards out and “Oh, whoa, whoa, whoa!” I said, “What?” “We don’t deal it that way.” I said, “Okay.” He said, “Get off that game.” So I got off the game and he said, “This is how you deal.” Well, it was face-up. I said, “Oh, okay, I can do this.” They said, “Okay, let’s try it again.”

I got on that game, and boy, because I was fast, you learn to be fast, so I just kept, and it was like, “Whoa, slow down, take your time, you’re not in a rush, there’s no—take your time, just deal the game.” So I did, I dealt it. There was this thing I was always taught, too; Mr. Brown taught me, deal a clean game, because you’re not dealing from your view. You’re dealing from surveillance’s view or the person behind you, and they have to be able to read the checks, they have to be able to read the pips on the cards, which nowadays, most dealers say, “What’s a pip?”

So I was taught, always deal for the “eye,” because they had walkways back then, they didn’t have high-tech surveillance, they had walkways, and they sat on little benches and looked down, and so I always taught a clean game, a very neat game. But I had to learn to slow down, slow down, slow down. So they kept me on a game for like forty-five minutes out there. I thought, “Okay.” And then they took me to another pit, Pit Three, at Caesars. As you walked in the front door, there was pit one, the main area, this was like roulette wheels; then there was the main blackjack area, and then there was the dice games, and then there was a smaller pit. They put me in Pit Three for about an hour and twenty minutes.

Wow.

Oh yeah, they ran me through the ringer.

For one audition.

Yeah, and then they took me to the main pit and put me on a game with a gentleman by the name of Joe Marcon, was the dealer. He says, “So you think you can deal, huh?” I said, “Yes, I can” He said, “Well, show me what you can do,” he said, “But don’t run my players off because these are my players and I make money.” I said, “Okay.” So I dealt the game, I was there a good hour, too.

Wow, and this was blackjack?

Yes, just strictly blackjack, and I dealt for an hour, and I earned a lot of tips because I was putting them in my pocket, because you put them in your pocket, then. There was no boxes on the table, it was—the big thing about it is the guests loved to see your pockets just getting bigger and bigger and just spilling out, and that’s what you did, and I was putting blacks in my pocket, which I didn’t know you could do. You know, we couldn’t do that at the MGM, it was quarters, you always colored up the quarters.

But when I came off the game, my pocket was full of blacks and, jokingly, because I decided I’d have to have a sense of humor, I said, “Oh, I get to keep all this,” and they looked at me and they said, “No, you don’t even have the job yet.” I said, “Oh, well what do I do with it?” “Well, you put it in this big box right here, that’s our money.” So I put it all in there, and it was twenty-five hundred dollars.

Wow.

And I thought, wow, that’s just in this time I dealt here. These people must make a lot of money, and I wanted that job. And I auditioned, they interviewed me a little bit, and they called me like three days later, and told me I had the job, but I had to go down to the hotel and I had to fill out some paperwork, and I had to go get my shirts, which was very important back then because Caesars Palace had their own shirt—in fact, I still have one of my shirts.

Really?

Yes, because they embroidered your name on it, and that was yours, and they gave you the medallion with the lady feeding the grapes to the gentleman on the lounge, and you had that medallion, and you had your black apron, and it was like, oh my God, you were in.

And I went into, when they told me I had the job, they asked me, "How long would you need?" I said, "Well, I have to give notice," and I was always taught two weeks' notice. They said, "Well, what if we need you before then?" I said, "Well, I'll have to see what my boss will let me do." So I went in and I told Vic Wakeman what had happened, and he said, "Honey, you've got some balls going in there." (Laughs) And he said, "You're a good dealer," he said, "I wish you luck." He said, "You're going to do really well." He said, "It's been a pleasure." I always remember him telling me that. "It's been a pleasure working with you, and you're going to do well."

I was a floor person at Caesars for, I dealt there for ten-and-a-half years, and I was on the floor for six-and-a-half years, I think, about that, maybe six years. Sixteen years, I was at Caesars, and it was just a wonderful experience, because at like five years you got a pin, it had a real ruby in it. We got a ruby, an emerald, and a sapphire, and then for your 25th anniversary, you could pick a ring with a diamond in it, with the Caesars emblem, and a diamond in it. So I got a five-year pin and a ten-year pin, and my fifteen-year, I got a Tiffany watch with a Caesars stamp on the back of it.

You don't get those things anymore in companies for spending all that time, and Caesars was a class act. But when I left there, Caesars had been sold to Starwood, it was a stock manipulation thing, I think. And then from Starwood, I believe it was sold to ITT, and then when I left, there were rumors that the Hilton was going to take it over, and I knew, "Now, I gotta get out of this, I gotta get out," because you had the Hilton and you had the Flamingo Hilton, and you always had people who wanted to get into Caesars, and you knew once they did that, because they let people transfer from the big Hilton and the Flamingo, so you knew they were going to

allow that, and they did. And I left in '99, I went to work at the Venetian, and it was the first time I'd ever opened a property.

Tell me about that, so tell me about opening the Venetian.

It was—because when you walk in there, everything's brand new, and everything's new and nothing's organized and it's kind of like, here's the dealers, you had a week to learn their procedures, the way they wanted things done, and I was lucky in the fact that people that I work with at Caesars had gone there.

MGM GRAND (1973)

JIMMY WIKE

MGM—that was the original MGM. I had worked at the Stardust from March of 1974 until September of 1977. And the Stardust, as I said earlier, was fun—young, making a lot of money, more money than I knew what to do with, and it was a lot of fun. But the Stardust was kind of a second-tier property. I mean, the real great places were in those days, were Caesars Palace, the Sands, the Desert Inn, the Tropicana to some degree, and then the MGM. The MGM had opened up in December of 1973, and it was just so much bigger and so much more lavish than any of the other places were. So, anyway, so I got a job there. I quit the Stardust, and I went to work there....

But anyway, just before I had gone there, I think it was around April or May of 1977, they'd caught about a dozen dealers stealing and cheating. So, it was real, real repressive. I mean, they just watched the dealers, and any, the slightest infraction, and you would get fired.

Now, the MGM, when it had opened, just because of the lavishness—I mean, they had two showrooms, everybody else had one showroom, they had two showrooms. They had the best restaurants, they had, it was just a fantastic place, and everybody that played in Las Vegas went there and stayed at least once or twice and played there.

So there was a lot of money and a lot of high rollers, you know, what were considered high rollers in those days. But it was a tough place for dealers. Like I said, management was so paranoid after getting ripped off by these dealers that they were just, they would just fire you for anything. I went there expecting, you know, kind of an upgrade in that job and in my life from the Stardust, but the first year I worked, the first year I worked at the MGM, I made less money than I had made the prior year at the Stardust.

And were you dealing there?

Yeah, I was dealing, I was a crap dealer there. And the twenty-one job, they opened so many games. The crap dealers, we always kept what we made on that table. So four guys worked together, you split what you made. But the twenty-one job there was a horrible job. It's actually one of the worst jobs in town. One of the reasons was, they spread so many games, and plus they had thievery on the toke committee. There was a guy that just recently passed away—Steve Homick—who was serving life for a number of murders around town, but he was one of the guys on the toke committee, and they just robbed the 21 dealers. Homick and the other regulars on the toke committee would steal the tips as they counted them. And the twenty-one job, I mean, I remember seeing this one twenty-one dealer, kind of a new guy, and he was laughing and scratching, and smiling, talking to the customers, and always had a pocketful of tips, and after about a couple of months, I didn't see him anymore, I said, "What happened to that guy?," and someone says, "Oh, he got fired for talking to the customers too much."

CHRIS TONEMAH

The MGM was great. It was different from Downtown because you weren't family. It was so large, there were a lot of different little cliques. There were the old-time dealers, then the newbies, and then the ones that were in the middle. There were dice, kind of was separate from twenty-one, and it was like that, but I always gravitated toward dice people. I guess

I wanted to learn more and listen more, and it helped me get tougher, because like I said, I was like this naïve little country girl with glasses, looked like a little school teacher, and now I'm just like the rest of them. I can cuss with the best of them, I'm tough, I can do all the things I need to do.

But at MGM, I found it to be a different class of people. It was more money people, you dealt with marker play. That's when markers, credit lines were coming in. There were hosts, but I had one boss—his name was Ben M-, I'll never forget it. He would always come by people, especially women, and give you a little kidney punch. "Damn women shouldn't be in the business, you're the reason, you bitches are causing us to lose our jobs," and all kinds of things. So, not only did you get it from the front, you got it from the back, because a lot of the older guys didn't think women should be in the business. The only thing a woman was good for was running cocktails, or keno, and that was it.

But by law, they had to change, and the women that went before me—I'm glad they did, because I got a chance. It was still tough, and if you were a dealer losing on a game, he'd come by and kick you in the shin or kick you in the heel, say a few bad words.

CHANGES AFTER FIRE (1980)

I mentioned Karen O'Brien, she was a great lady, stocky, heavy-set lady, and boy she knew her business. She was a hardcore woman because she worked with men. But we always had—as females—we always had nail inspection. And if you held your hands up like this and your nail was above there, she'd hand you clippers and say, "Clip 'em, otherwise you're not going into the main pit, you'll be moved, because we need expert dealers that look good." There was pride, and you took that pride and you did whatever you were told to do. It was great, and I really enjoyed it.

So what were the other changes after the fire?

Well, there was not the, you didn't have the—there was a very relaxed atmosphere before the fire. And the ceilings were not repainted. You didn't

have the murals, and the chandeliers were still there, but the carpet's different, the tables were new, they were cheaper, they weren't as steady, I mean, they were not the same tables—they were smaller, which mattered if you were a small person, they weren't as large to get across. Everything seemed put together faster. There wasn't that—for me, I noticed the quality wasn't the same. And that's, I think, when they started outsourcing a lot of things.

Before that, you had, all these casinos had their shops that did all the repair work, and the only thing they outsourced were their layouts and their cards. Everything else was done in-house—all repairs, woodwork, all that stuff was all done in-house. And people took pride in their job. It wasn't just a paycheck, it was a family thing. And Kirk Kerkorian was very good to all of us—we all got stock shares. The only thing is when you left, he bought them back for you at a decent price, and you made money. You had great insurance—that was a big thing back then. You had a great dealer's room, you could place time orders for food, we had waitresses who took care of us, and they made great money, because you always took care of your waitress. You could put a time order in, and you give her three bucks, your order was there when you came on break, and if you didn't get the forty-minute break or an hour-break you thought you worked—at the MGM you worked, it was usually forty on and twenty off, or you'd work an hour and two forty, work an hour, get a twenty-minute break, then catch two forties, then do another. It was a great way to work.

Now you go in and you work an hour, and now every game is different. Back then, you went on a game, that was your game for the week. You had the same floormen, you felt comfortable with everybody, you had guests that would come back and find you, which was great. That's the first time I ever really got to interact with guests that actually came back because of you, because you remember their name, their children's names, their birthdays, things like that. And if you wanted to be a host, you wrote all that stuff down and you kept it all, and you built up your book, and if you moved to another property, from a dealer to say, if you got the chance to go

into marketing, you would, and that's how a lot of people moved up, you know, you built up your book and you went to the next hotel, built up your book and you moved on.

MGM GRAND (1993)

CLIFF CONEDY

So tell me, on the day-to-day basis, what kind of things you face as a pit manager, what kind of situations?

Well, MGM was a totally different animal than anything else because it was so big. It had so many gaming staff, from dealers to, at that time they had boxing, they eventually eliminated them to follow suit with some of the other properties, but dealers, box persons, floor supervisors. They had two shift managers for every shift—they still do, they still do have two shift managers for every shift because it's so big. Just getting from one end of the property to the other is a mini marathon at the end of the day. But, just dealing with all the different personalities, the training of staff. They had a program where anyone, if you were a maid or a porter, and you wanted to become a dealer, you could go to dealer school, and we taught them blackjack, pretty much basic blackjack, and then if they wanted to learn other games, they could break them in later. But, after maybe the second year there, that's, that was their focus was the in-house training and promotion, so we did a lot of that. They initiated a lot of games....

We used to have tournaments there at the MGM—I think it was Caribbean Stud. Anyway, they, MGM was the first company to initiate, and we did a lot of training and had a lot of tournaments and stuff dealing with that. But it was just constant teaching and learning.

WYNN LAS VEGAS

JOE FRIEDMAN

So what was it like opening Wynn?

Wynn was, you know it was exciting because it was definitely the nicest place, gonna revolutionize, and Bellagio was always this, but still the standard bare, maybe, of being nice, and what's gonna take it to a different level, was I started the night as a floorman in the carnival pit, and within—it was that night, they came out 'cause it was busy. They said, "You know baccarat?" I said, "Yeah." And they said, "Okay," and then someone else pushed me out, and I was in one of the salons for the rest of the night.

Dealing or floor?

Floor.

Okay.

I opened Wynn as a floor. And it was, it wasn't busy, but it was a lot of people, as far as action-wise.

So what kind of action are they getting there at Wynn. How does it compare to Hard Rock?

It was night and day. I mean, it was, you know, Hard Rock, if Hard Rock had a guy in with a hundred thousand line, it was on the board in the office, you know, Sam Schmo's coming in with a hundred thousand line, keep a line out for him. I mean, you were shooing away hundred thousand lines at Wynn, I mean it was, you know, the baccarat action, I had never seen action like that. I mean I, my baccarat action from dealing up north, and occasionally you'd get big play in there—twenty-five, fifty thousand a hand. But we were taking a hundred and fifty thousand a hand, and there were plenty of players doing it. And even the low end games were three thousand dollar minimum with full.

I don't think that play really matured until later, until probably Chinese New Year that year, but it was just ridiculous play. I mean, I remember getting floormen in. For a while, it was hard to get floormen. We were working—it was a tough job, it paid okay. This was before the big toke change. But it was, we were desperate for floor. We'd get floor from Coast properties or whatever. I remember saying, "Okay, give that guy a marker

for two hundred." And the girl said, "Two hundred dollars?" I'm like, "No, two hundred thousand." You know, it's like, it just, the numbers—I mean, there were people taking that similar kind of action at the time, but it was fast and furious.

You'd go into one of the salons, and they'd say, "Okay, this group's coming in, they have a five million line, they can go four hundred thousand aggregate," and really it's one guy, it's one guy betting four hundred, but they split it up, so it's three guys betting four hundred.

You'd go in there, they'd play for a while, maybe you go on break, you'd come back, they're gone. "Oh, what'd they do?" "Oh, they blew through that five million." There's another group coming in, same, same, and it's, there's five new guys there. And that would happen a lot. I mean, it was just crazy, so the main floor becomes an amenity for what's going on in high limit, because, big deal, a guy beats you for five or ten thousand. You've got thirty, forty people betting fifty or ten and up a hand.

12

Casinos Outside of Las Vegas

While everyone interviewed for this project had at least some experience in Las Vegas casinos, some interviewees also spent substantial time working in other markets. This chapter includes recollections about those markets, ranging from near (Laughlin and California tribal casinos) to far (South Korea and Asia).

LAUGHLIN

RUSSELL TERBEEK

Laughlin was rowdy. I remember going there—I'm down there my first month.

And when was this?

And this is around 1985. So my family and I relocate and go down there, and I'm working in the pit and I see a couple of the executives, they're sitting at the bar, and they're throwing wads of money back and forth. And I find out later that they were betting on how many fights were going to break out in the lounge that night. It was just a rowdy town back then. There's a plant down there in Laughlin, and these plant workers make, I guess, over six figures a year, and they would come in and just blow their money, get drunk, and get a little rowdy, and, you know, that sort of thing. So it was like a cowboy town, the old west, but it was a lot of fun, and a great learning experience.

Like I said, I actually got moved into management by a guy by the name of Mike Graninger. He was the casino manager, who helped me learn a lot. Some of the guys that used to work there—Moon Mullin, Bob Scaffidi, they were shift bosses there. Bill Sanderson—he's now the director over at the

Cannery. And he was actually a co-owner with Bill Paulos on the Putters bars in Vegas. All these guys were super sharp. And I worked for Bill Paulos in Pittsburgh at the Meadows Casino that the Cannery he owns out there. So, like I said, I've just been really blessed to run into some guys that could teach me about gaming. I was asking the right questions and they happened to see that I was hungry to learn more and more about the gaming business and they mentored me.

TRIBAL CASINOS

RUSSELL TERBEEK

PALA CASINO (CALIFORNIA)

I was hired as a Shift Manager and eventually I found myself training again. We were recruiting from four different dealers' schools in the area and I would go to each, demonstrate policies and procedures, audition potential dealers and then go on to the next school. So it was kind of fun, but it always seems to be I fall into that position at every turn. And a beautiful property—I don't know if you've ever been down to Pala.

I've been there, yeah.

Yeah, it's a beautiful property. In fact, I just did some renovation where they've got a wine cellar and all that kinda stuff. But I worked there for five years and ended up, I had another job opportunity to be a shift manager either at Harrah's Rincon [about 15 miles from Pala] or the other opening was a shift manager in Kansas City, Missouri. Well, obviously, I just couldn't get the job right around the corner—I ended up going to Kansas City, Missouri, which is another fun thing.

So tell, let's go back a little bit, so tell me a little bit about opening up Pala. What was that like, how big was it, how was it compared to Vegas?

We had seventy-five to eighty games to start. We tried to make it just like Vegas, except for craps and roulette had to use cards to determine the outcome. Mike Crenshaw, being the brilliant guy that he is, came up with

this craps game where you threw the dice so that numbers on the dice determined what “cards” you would turn over and whatever numbers were on the cards would be the number rolled. For example a deuce and a four equal “Six—Easy Six”.

The roulette wheel had colors inside the platter (not numbers) and whatever color the ball landed in, then they would turn over the card on that color. But that was kinda strange getting used to at first. But it was as close to Vegas as you could make it.

And then you had what I call the “California Casino Mentality”, and I’ll give you an example. We hired people who were dealers from other California card clubs and casinos. But back then they had other casinos that sometimes got shut down and closed by the state for whatever reason. Like San Manuel [in Riverside], sometimes the state would come in and just shut ‘em down. You wouldn’t know the reason. And if you’re holding some kind of cash voucher or chips to get paid, you might not get paid.

So when I opened Pala, I’m kinda looking over my shoulder, I was hoping that it wasn’t going to be one of those situations. And that’s when everything kinda started rolling for the different Indian casinos down there. No more government closures. The governor of California made a pact with the tribes to allow gaming and it was off to the races.

There were also some other weird California casino quirks. There are these little poker rooms or card rooms that have a house bank for a twenty-one game, and that’s weird. You actually had somebody sitting on spot seven that had trays of chips in front of them. They were like the Bank and Supervisor. So someone who had a spare \$50,000 could come in and bank a blackjack game. I think that they had to pay a fee to the house but it was just strange. Plus, when you played blackjack at an Indian casino back then, you had to put up a fee or ante to play. I think it was \$1 for anything up to a \$20 bet, \$5 for \$100, etc.

Mathematically, you could just retire on the fee and break even on the game itself, and you know, just make phenomenal money there. They were really fleecing the players back then.

But yeah, it was all weird so we tried to make it as much like Vegas with no ante or no-commission to play. It was tough training those dealers because they were very lax, they didn't even have a casino that they could play at that had good dealers to learn from, procedure-wise, so it was a real challenge.

ELLIOTT SCHECTER

So, the Seminoles—when did you go over there?

That was in '94. I was moonlighting. I helped put together the curriculum, and the textbook and the tests for the school. I was teaching dealing classes during the day, and then still working my shifts on the Discovery at night until we finally opened the room, and then I finally left the ship. They knew what was going on, and they were glad to help me out. It was an unusual thing.

The bingo hall was basically a big corrugated structure, almost a warehouse with bingo seating, and then they added another section past the electronic pull tab machines for the poker room, which was set up about as weirdly as I ever set it. They literally set it up in six-table pits, where there was a pit stand every grouping. It was the funniest thing, we literally hired so-called pit bosses, and they were obviously poker supervisors. It was the strangest, strangest setup. And it was all twenty-five, it was fifty cent max bet, it was ten dollar maximum pot. And we were getting a quarter fee per player, per hand. Plus, we were yanking a dollar out of the pot for the jackpot.

Okay. And what were those tokes like?

Well, thank God I never dealt there, but jeez—yeah, I was the shift manager in that room. The dealers were pulling in anywhere from ten to twenty bucks an hour in tokes. I mean, all the chips on the table were a quarter. There's only so many someone can throw you. I mean, they're only winning ten dollars' worth, so there's not a whole lot left to tip.

CRUISE SHIPS

JOE FRIEDMAN

What were the games like on the [cruise] ship compared to in the casino?

There was, I think there was eight, eight or nine games, maybe. A dice game, a wheel, and five or six BJs, a bunch of slot machines. It was, other than getting sick my first day on the ship, which earned me the moniker of Joe Blow for the entire cruise, it was, it was a lot of fun. It was mostly people just—depending on the itinerary, ‘cause a lot of those itineraries were lower-priced, not as exciting. So, I mean, most cruise aficionados have already been up and back through the canal, so that was sort of a blowout, but the Rio for Carnival, things like that, you get a better clientele, better players, a lot of fun.

What kind of action does it usually have?

Very rarely you’d have big action. I mean, occasionally, you’d have actual Caesars players come out there with credit lines, but that was few and far between. It was mostly retailed towards this type of stuff.

ELLIOTT SCHECTER

So what was it like dealing on the cruise ship?

That was unique. We were in the bowels of this old converted cruise ship. Three days a week, we’d sail to nowhere, just past the three-mile international border to open up the casino. So of course, we had zero regulation and gaming commission. In a ridiculously small space, we had nine poker tables jammed in.

Wow.

It was nuts, and of course it was a fully smoking environment, and smoking in any seat, not just, not next to the dealer. I mean, you could smoke anywhere you were sitting and of course, the ceiling may have been eight feet high. It was, ugh, I second-hand smoked at least a pack or two a

night. It was really, really—it was all seven-card stud except for one hold 'em game, so we'd have eight stud games and one hold 'em game going three nights a week. And these people were paying to get on this ship. I mean, even then, it was like thirty-five dollars to get on the boat, and if you paid like an extra fifteen, you got a pretty impressive gourmet meal. But people were paying to go, and they were extracting five bucks a hand, every hand out of the pot for the rake. Not to mention the ridiculously low payout on the slot machines. I mean, roulette was of course double-zero, the dice table was single odds, and people were just playing all these unregulated slot machines—it was the funniest thing. Nice group of people, I mean, and obviously, we didn't get a wide swath of humanity there. It was a fairly affluent crowd. I mean, you had to overcome paying to park, and then paying to get on, and then high rakes, so you couldn't exactly be broke or near it, and be able to play. ...

Typically, the morning cruise was ten thirty or eleven to four or five. And then the evening cruise would go from six thirty or seven till about twelve thirty. So, working a double shift was at least thirteen hours, I mean, and you get a lot of break time in between. There was a lot of dead time between the cruises, and obviously, when you're not allowed to operate. So, to get about, on a typical day, to get about seven or eight or nine hours of dealing time, and you had to put about twelve to thirteen hours in, but the money was good. The money on the Palm Beach Princess was incredible. I remember when I was dealing, I pulling in generally, a minimum thirty-five an hour in tokes, sometimes more. I mean, I had no complaints. If I was dealing six or seven shifts a week, I was easily pulling in almost a thousand a week in cash.

ATLANTIC CITY

ED WALTERS

Tell me a little bit about Atlantic City.

I went to the Brighton to do all the intel for three weeks, they didn't know, 'cause we were gonna buy the joint, we were buying it from the owners. So, I went, and I made notes, I had like fourteen pages of notes on who was good, who was bad. It was a very loose joint, very mismanaged, but a different world. People were coming over on buses to fuckin' play, and a scam going on in the baccarat, I saw.

Really?

So, when the Brighton thing—I was there to consult only for a week, 'cause I didn't like Atlantic City.

Why not, how is that different from Vegas, besides the buses?

I looked at it different, see, I looked at the small block, where you're talking about—the Boardwalk—that at that time had about six, eight casinos. One block away, it's fuckin' drug addicts, but, you know, slums, and I thought, this is terrible. See, in Vegas, you had sand and the thing, you know, this is slums. And I saw, I said then, "They're not going to help these people." Because, between you and me, most of the mayors in it were all fuckin' paid off. So, I can remember telling Pratt, "Hey, in Vegas, we're more legal than they are here." And yet, they thought they were experts. You know, when Atlantic City started, the highway patrol was the major investigating agency?

Yeah.

And the investigative—they had highway patrol and policemen in the casinos! They didn't know what the fuck they were doing. I saw scams going on right in front of cops who didn't know, 'cause some girl would say to the cop, "Oh, could you show me the thing"—it was stupid. So, I told Pratt, I said, "I'm going back to where it's legal, and we do it right." I just didn't like it. See, to me it looked like they're taking off the people, do you know what that means in the casino, they're taking off?

Yeah.

It means they're bringing them in buses, they're taking all their money—they're not going to build Atlantic City. We—do you know in the sixties,

seventies, we cared for Las Vegas.

Mm-hmm.

Most of the, what you guys call the mob guys, end up loving this town. I mean, you don't build a hospital and—you know?

Yeah.

I mean, they ended up loving this place. It was a special feeling in Las Vegas. And we were legal, and we did it right.

HOWARD DREITZER

Well, I was really excited about the job, because I was working as a floorman and sort of a dual-rate pit boss at the Frontier, but I was looking at probably five to ten years before I become a pit boss in Las Vegas, at that time, and he had offered me a pit boss job in Atlantic City at, I guess it was like \$52,000, which was a lot of money back then. And so I accepted it, and I was just really excited. I drove out there, I drove from Cleveland straight to Atlantic City, got there at about two in the morning, and I'd never really seen a place that bad—it was scary. And then I checked into a hotel, which looked pretty horrible, and when I went to check in, they said, "Oh, you're not in the hotel, you're in the annex across the street," which looked worse.

...

It was sort of an embryonic time in Atlantic City. It was 1980, they'd been open for about a year and a half, I guess. The action there was just incredible. I opened up the Brighton, which became the Sands, and that was the fourth casino to open, and it was just, the day we opened the doors, it was just jammed and busy and I always thought Atlantic City was sort of, at the time, a good representation of a combination of the—from a management perspective, the guys from Las Vegas there were used to the level of action, to a point. And the guys from Reno and Tahoe who were there were not used to the action at all, but had really done a lot more when it came to management organization and recording and data and analysis, and that sort of thing.

So the combination of the two, over time, I thought proved pretty effective. Then, just went on there, Atlantic City was sort of like the gold rush. I saw immediately that I needed to get more credentials on my license, so I went to school and got all the other games. I took some other courses, and I managed to get my license fully endorsed with all games and positions, and was able to move up fairly rapidly there.

Tell me a little bit about what the licensing process was like in New Jersey as opposed to Nevada.

Well, it was pretty onerous. They were heavily preoccupied with keeping organized crime out, which was really funny because it was everywhere else, so as a result, they were very, very, very strict. In fact, when I had applied for my Key license, they make me sign something that says you consent to them searching your house or your safety deposit box without warrant, which I signed because I was told that they wouldn't do it, and they couldn't do it because it's a constitutional right that you can't sign away. Well, they showed up, and they didn't search my house, but they asked me to go to the bank with them and show them my safety deposit box, which I did, and I didn't have problems. But I always thought that was fairly peculiar.

They went with—my wife and I went through every check we had written for years and asked about. At that time, I liked to carry a lot of cash with me, and they would ask about checks for four or five hundred dollars, and what was this for, and I would just say, "Just for pocket money," and it was hard for them to understand that. And they made you jump through hoops.

The license itself was something like eighty pages long, the application, and you had to list every roommate you had, every relative you knew of, their addresses, and different information about them. It was incredibly invasive, really hard to fill out, and took a long time, and they took their time investigating, too. It was funny, too, because while I was at the Frontier, I was very nervous about, when I applied, I was nervous about

them coming and anybody knowing that I had applied because, at that time, if they found out you applied for another job, they'd fire you, whether you got the other job or not. So I'd gone to great lengths, I talked to a friend of mine who worked at Summa, in the offices, and I said, "Look, can I refer them to you, and you can give them the information they need so it doesn't have to become public knowledge?" So I worked that all out, and then sure enough, they just showed up right in the pit while I was working, flashed their badges, and started asking questions about me, which really didn't do me a lot of good, but I didn't get fired, surprisingly.

How about the Brighton/Sands opening up? Tell me a little bit about that process and getting it ready to open up and the actual opening.

Well, I was opening up as a pit manager, so my focus was primarily on training, equipment, layout, projections, and those sorts of things. So from that perspective, it was great. I used to work at the training school and getting acclimated to the regulations. I mean, it took a lot to understand all the regulations they had. Quite frankly, some of them were not understandable, they were just ridiculous.

Could you tell me a little bit about those, the more ridiculous regulatory roadblocks they put in your way?

Well, they were preoccupied with things that didn't make any difference. They sort of saw themselves as the social and moral police of gaming. So, rather than just regulating the integrity of the games, which was their primary concern—which they did—they also got involved with what your table limits were.

In fact, in those days, you had to have a certain percentage of \$5 games, and a certain percentage of, I think even \$2 and \$3 games, and rather than letting the business dictate it, they would tell you how big your signs had to be, and not just the gaming signs—any sign in the property. I mean, an information sign, a direction sign—everything. And they'd walk around measuring them. They had total power, and they could shut you down

without recourse to them, if they wanted to, and you knew that. So you were always fairly careful with them.

On a one-to-one basis with the regulators themselves, I never had a problem. I really got along with them, and I used to talk to them. I engaged them and tried to understand what their mandate was so that I wasn't fighting with them, and that worked pretty well. In fact, I remember, one time, this one lady—I can't remember her name—but she was giving these sorts of hypothetical tests to staff, and if they got it wrong, she was writing them up with a violation.

And so I went to her and I said, "Well, how can you write people up?" She said, "Well, they got it wrong." I said, "But it didn't actually happen, it's just a test, it's a hypothetical situation, you can't give them an actual violation for a hypothetical situation," but she did. And it didn't get questioned.

It stopped after a while. Some of the ones that became regulators that had power problems, they were the ones that would come down and flex their muscles in front of the customers and the staff and demand certain things—stop games, and that sort of thing. It was all a process and that process got smoother out over time—unfortunately, not soon enough to save the city.

So how are you getting players to Atlantic City? Are you using loyalty programs yet?

Oh yeah, they had loyalty programs and comping. Really, Atlantic City, at that time, was a monopoly, and it's a shame what's happened to it because it was just a handful of casinos within a three-hour drive of fifty million people with a high propensity to gamble, and they could've done much better. Instead, the marketing and the attitude became very intense and competitive to each other, and that's where the paybacks got out of hand. Everybody would give more, give more, until the point where it became—well, it didn't become unprofitable, but the margin became so thin that it was sort of silly, especially because we were really a monopoly in those days. But, most of the business came out of convenience.

SOUTH AFRICA

CHRIS VAN BUUREN

Tell me a little bit about the South African gambling market back then, what's it like?

The market is very different from what we have here in that the gaming mix is going to be quite different. There's varied days, only one craps game left in the entire South Africa.

Really?

They don't play craps, the people there, I'm not sure if they don't understand it, they find it too challenging, maybe the investment per roll, the spend per roll, or the spend per decision for them is too much, I'm not sure, but they prefer roulette. Roulette is incredibly big in both Europe and South Africa. Blackjack obviously has a market, and poker is trending upwards as well, like in most gaming jurisdictions now. Slots is very, very popular. Obviously, the one-cent games, like (unintelligible) everywhere in the world is really doing well over there as well. Real slots are really being phased out, nobody uses them down there.

So the market there, I think, is very similar in gaming mix, slot-wise, is what you guys have here. Without the big top branded slots, you don't find very many Adams Family slots and those types of things there. But we used exactly the same guys, we use IGT very much, we used Aristocrat, we used Bally's—well, no, not Bally's as much as the other one [Williams].

So, again, problem gaming is a big problem as well. There's a lot of people who gamble way above their means. The casinos, they do try to ascertain what the people's earning capacity is. That's part of the player's club information that they collect. If they know that the people are spending more money than what they're earning, they have a right to stop them.

Really?

So it's not just the self-exclusion program, which we do have, but it goes one step further. It tries to make sure that people don't spend above their

means.

So how does that work? Is that, who stops them?

Well, it's the casino's responsibility, and they get a brief given to them from the gaming board, which gets controlled through the responsible gaming program. When you know that people are spending more money than they can afford, it is your business to first approach the person and see what's going on. You can call them to one side, have a meeting with them, see what their frame of mind is. I mean, we're not sociologically or psychologically able to, how can I say, to evaluate these people, but we do need to take some steps. We do need to make sure that these people don't spend more money than they have. When people do invariably get in trouble, they can come to the casino, and through the responsible gaming program, the casinos have the right to give them money to help them pay their bills, after they've been excluded, obviously.

Okay.

So they're not allowed to come back into the casino for a period of six months or a year, whatever the case may be, but they do give them help to be able to buy food and whatnot if they've fallen in, which like I said, invariably, a lot of them do. The average income per person in South Africa is around about \$450 a month, which is not very high, obviously. But there is a lot of people who gamble.

We have three forms of gambling in South Africa, not only casinos. We have casinos, horse racing, and lottery. The lottery is by far the biggest, like in most countries, because that's where most of the people can afford to gamble. And again, the indigenous or black population are the ones who spend the most money at the moment. I think that's also a sociological problem. They'd never had anything before, and now they do. They have jobs, they have incomes, and they're not afraid to spend, and obviously, to the detriment of their families for the most part, so that's a really sad thing to say, which you don't really see as prevalently in Las Vegas, because it's not as in your face, but if you deal with a local population, mostly, it becomes

very clear that these people have a lot of problems with gambling, unfortunately.

SOUTH KOREA

CHRIS VAN BUUREN

So in December of 2012, I moved to Korea for two years, so this was about a year and seven months all up. And I was there as a casino consultant at a casino called Kangwonland, it was a casino right in the middle of nowhere, only local people are allowed to gamble—no, it is a casino for local people.

Yeah, it's the only one in Korea that allows locals.

It's not that only—local people can gamble, they have a foreigner casino as well, but nobody goes there. It was quite an experience—200 table games and 1,560 slot machines. They just did a big expansion when I had gotten in there, including a \$20 million upgrade on their surveillance room, so they really were top of the line, but they didn't know how to use it. They didn't know what to look for, they didn't know how to basically run an efficient surveillance room. So I think that was part of the reason why I was there. I had to go and write some training manuals, both a rudimentary training manual, as well as the more advanced training manual, which would include card counting, obviously, hole carding, variance, standard deviation, things that they wouldn't necessarily normally think about going into in more detail.

The casino was a madhouse. They take, in one day there, what four Las Vegas casinos don't take in a week. Two hundred table games were full front ten a.m. in the morning when they open the doors, until six a.m. the next morning when they closed. Their maximum bet, aggregate betting on their Salon Prive [high limit] their private rooms in the, on baccarat where you could aggregate bet up to \$1.5 million.

So that was a large amount of money, I'd never seen betting like that before in my life. They would, the highest denomination check they would is \$1,000, basically, and they would have racks and racks and racks of it. It was just absolutely crazy. Also, they work on a ticketing system. So when you come to the casino in the morning, you buy your entry ticket which cost you five dollars, it goes to the government, it's a government tax. And by the way, the government owned fifty-three percent of the casino, so that's why they basically wanted their percentage as well. You then get a ticket for a, you could decide what game you wanted to play, either blackjack, baccarat, three-card poker, and—what else is there—sic bo, which is tai sai, the same game, and roulette; and then you had to stay at that seat for your entire play. If you wanted to leave or you had no more money, you give up the right to that seat. Obviously, while you're playing, and you have money, you can go on a break and have a smoke and have something to eat, and come back, no problem. But once you are finished and you leave that seat and you give it up, that seat's gone, it's gone to the next player.

Wow.

They had, on busy weekends, people standing ten deep behind the baccarat game. And they allowed side betting, They called it side betting, it was basically betting behind a player. So money would come from the ten-deep guy all the way down in a little chain, and placed on a box and bet and play. They don't, which something in Vegas, I really don't like, is that they, here in Vegas, they mark up commission, whereas in other parts of the world, they don't mark up commission, they take the commission out straight away....

So that was an absolutely unbelievable experience. I loved every second of it. Observing the way that the Asian people bet, observing the way that the Asian people run their casino, which is on occasion a little different. They have their MICS, their internal control standards are a little bit different to ours. They have to report back to a government agency who has no clue about gaming. So I guess it's much more difficult for them to explain how

something works to a layman that's sitting in an office in Seoul somewhere, than what we have to explain to the Gaming Board, because the Gaming Board has gaming experience, so they know what's going on.

So I found it very challenging, on occasion, to try and explain to them why the procedures that they're following are wrong, and why they should change because I wasn't really talking to another gambling person, I was talking to a layman, basically. Another thing that I found very interesting about this casino is they stay in their positions for approximately eighteen months to two years, and then they rotate to other positions. So a dealer will be a dealer for two years, then he might land up in surveillance, then surveillance might land up in the hotel department, the hotel department might land up in the chef's department in F&B being a waiter, and after F&B, they might land up somewhere else. So they do get an opportunity to work in all the departments, but I fear that a department like surveillance is very specific. You have to have a very large knowledge of all things, casinos, in order to be a successful surveillance agent. And they don't give them the opportunity of becoming successful. As soon as they're good, they get plucked away and taken to another department; so, I found it very challenging to make these guys understand that they need to maybe invest more time—you're not going to get a chef to go and work in the accounting department. A chef has very specific skills. He cuts food, he prepares food, and that's the end of it. So that was really my main goal from the time that I was there, to explain to them or make them understand how, if they've cultivated this successful group of people, they need to hold onto them and not change them out.

13

Changes in the Business

Since many of the interviewees had decades in the casino business, they were able to see numerous changes during their careers. In this chapter, interviewees reflect on just what has changed, both for good and bad. Interestingly, there was no real consensus on whether the old days were better than the new days, but it seems apparent that they were quite different.

ED WALTERS

So how did the Sands change in that twenty years, from '59 to '80—tell me about that.

When I came back in '76, '77 it was not the Sands anymore. You didn't have Frank, you didn't have Dean. See, in my day, these guys walked around the casino. The Sands now had what we call TV people, people who think, they want autographs, it's a fuckin'—we're now becoming what's now the adult Disneyland. In my day at the Sands, sixty percent of the players were gamblers. The other forty percent were well-known wealthy people. I come back in '76—they're all fuckin' tourists. We'd had a few name players, most of them didn't want to come back anymore. Here's why: Howard Hughes buys the place in '67. He institutes rules, like you have to sign a counter check, you have to sign your name at the—we never did it. So, we lost all the great New York players and, how could, well I'll give you a name—like Andy Granatelli, you know he is, STP?

No.

Well, look it up, you'll see, Andy Granatelli, president of STP. He's not gonna come out and sign his name on anything—the head of the New York, guy is gonna sign—they lost all that. So what do I got, I'm back with

TV people asking me questions, “Do you know where the men’s room is, and do you know”—it just was not the Sands anymore.

So why’d you call them TV people?

‘Cause they all were here to see the entertainers they saw on TV—Red Skelton, Dean Martin, including Sammy, because even when Frank leaves, Sammy stays, because now he’s a superstar by himself. But I call them TV because that’s their main mode of entertainment. Movies—TV and movies. So, if we have a movie star, which in the early days, they would—Cary Grant, I knew very well, Edward G. Robinson, E.G., I called him—we’re all friends. They’d sit at a twenty-one table waiting for Frank. Now, if they did come in, TV people would—we had that with Cary Grant. He actually came in to see me about getting something for Caesars, and he just comes around to talk to me, and the fuckin’ women go crazy and the people—before you know it, people are leaving our twenty-one games, because it doesn’t come to a stop.

Wow.

So it’s not the Sands anymore.

So you wouldn’t have seen that in ’59 or ’60?

No way. A gambler wouldn’t give a fuck if it’s Cary Grant. . .

It’s the change of Las Vegas. It was going under until Steve Wynn bravely built The Mirage and said, “Come with your families and stay here.” See, we didn’t want families, that’s not interesting to look at. We, in the mob, protected a family more than they do. You know we would never check, cash a worker’s check.

Really?

Never. We wouldn’t even allow a mother with her children to even sit in the lobby. Not only could they not go in the casino, they couldn’t sit in the lobby, ‘cause we didn’t want to hurt the family. Now these fuckin’ places have daycare centers while mom’s losing her money on the slot machines, so who’s better people?

So, what changes do you see in Vegas from back in '59 to, let's take it all the way up to today.?

Well, we're now an adult Disneyland, we're a place where people can come with their family, enjoy themselves. The casino is not the main moneymaker. If you check in there, you'll see, even at Wynn's place, other MGM—the dance places, the disco, what do you call them—the nightclubs.

They make more money per square foot, see. And that was very important. In Sands—we had what we call dead areas, meaning, we want slot machines or so—we don't want areas that are not—the nightclub makes more money per square foot than the entire casino. And I've been with some people I advise—I'm shocked to go in the MGM and he wanted to show me this nightclub, Lynx or some fuckin' place. We went in there and there's hundreds of people in there buying three hundred dollar—the casino had maybe twelve people, eighteen people—that's the future.

RON SACCAVINO

And then when Uncle Sam came in, in the eighties, I believe, what happened was Uncle Sam tried to get their fair share, and so the first thing that happened was, the dealers from Hilton and Caesars, they took out, every day, fifty or a hundred bucks a day, every day from both joints, and went to Oscar Goodman, and he represented them. And he was going to fight the IRS. So that postponed it for a while, and then the IRS came in and said, "Okay, well here's what we're going to do," and sort of like an honor system for the dealers, and that didn't work out.

And then what the IRS finally did is they went to the joints and they said, "Listen, the dealer, when he got money in his pocket, whether it's in the fucking boxes, and they're coming to the cage to cash it out into paper money, you got the count." The end of the day, they gotta change the chips up for paper. "You got the count, so either you give it to us, or what we're gonna do is we're gonna go back retro, and we're gonna charge you for never paying the fucking taxes on all these tips."

Gaughan fucking went berserk, they tried to fight it, it went nowhere, and that was the end of the story. So now it became a hundred percent. There still was a little slop in there, with some crap dealers, some baccarat dealers in different joints that were shift for shift, and poker dealers. So what they did in some cases like poker dealers, they did like they do the cocktail waitresses: They assigned an hourly rate, the closest they could. So until the very end—now poker dealers, they still do that today.

Really?

Well because you can't, they're getting cash, or chips. They could cash them in themselves anytime—they don't go as a box. And then the cage sits there and, or tabulates it—they don't give cash envelopes out anymore. So it's a hundred percent, but for a poker dealer, it's different. See, a poker dealer, he deals a fucking hand, and he gets a dollar, and another dollar, and by the end of the day, he's got a hundred dollars or something. Well, he don't necessarily have to go to the cage right now and cash out. He could come in tomorrow in his fucking jersey and—so, they couldn't control the poker dealers. So the poker dealers still are an assigned hourly to this day, and so were cocktail waitresses, for that reason. It's hard to assign. They actually, they separated, a pit cocktail waitress is different than a slot cocktail waitress, for example. So, that's how the IRS got involved with it, and what happened is, and that's why I started this newsletter, because the party was up. Prior to that, it was taboo. Nobody knew what they made over there—what they made over there, nobody knew, nobody was talking. But once the game was up, "The fuck's the problem?"

JOE FRIEDMAN

I've been here doing the same job twenty years. I just, I can't shake that. It's just not for me. I should've become a doctor. It's just, hey, it used to be a business where dealers were making money. The floormen were making good money. They're not making bad money, but dealers were making more than doctors and lawyers, I mean, and five thousand dollars bought you a new Cadillac. Five thousand dollars doesn't buy you a new Cadillac anymore. Those days are long gone. The only reason I think about 'em is 'cause there's still people at the MGM who know those days. It's just crazy,

just crazy, but it's—I don't know where it goes. I mean, it's, I hope it gets back to hiring the right people, really having an eye test of people that know.

It's, you know, I sat through the orientation for MGM, and they tell you ten, fifteen different ways that, well, casino doesn't matter anymore. We're in the entertainment business. But fifteen dollar hamburgers are just as ubiquitous as gaming, I mean, so why do fifteen dollar hamburgers count? You know why—it's all about a customer experience.

You know, Wynn has a, in their training, it's anticipating customers' needs and exceeding their expectations. You look at the Wynn, it's the attention to detail—an incredible attention to detail. Go to Venetian, you do not see that attention to detail, it's obvious for someone who looks that way. That's what it's about.

I don't know how you can keep saying the casino doesn't matter. Of course it matters, it matters just as much as your coffee shop. Just be-, and it doesn't become a self-fulfilling prophecy that you're not making the same money in the casino, 'cause you're charging fifteen dollars for a hamburger. If you charge eight, would you get that money? If you didn't charge seven dollars for a Heineken, would you not have people rolling in coolers full of beer into your hotel? And that's what, you know, it was after I left, when Encore opened and Andrew had the idea of lowering room rates, where there was a parade of people with coolers, and that was, you know, that was it. I mean, you're not gonna—Steve comes down and sees a parade of coolers—no way, not gonna happen. Because you're cheapening your brand.

You know, someone's paying three, you know four hundred dollars a night—they don't want to see that. Occupancy's great, but ADR and REVpar are a better indicator of what's going on, and that, that heads in beds and ADR is where it's at. I don't know, it's, I hope the pendulum swings back, but I see nothing to indicate that it will. I mean, it's, all I get at MGM is, "Why is there six-to-five?" you know, they just meant their main pit, six to five. And I tell people, "Cause you're playing."

Yeah.

As long as you keep playing, they'll keep doing it, and no one seems to stop. And, you know, I don't, at what point do you squeeze everything out? I mean, there's gotta be—people, "This is isn't right," well then don't play. There's higher limit, there's three-to-two games—you can go play those. "Well, but," then this is what, you know, this is what it is. I don't know, I mean it's easy to make numbers look good. What's it doing for your product, what's it doing for your brand experience?

HOWARD DREITZER

More, a lot more, especially because in Atlantic City, there's a lot more administration than Vegas. I mean, a case in point is, when I left the Nugget in Atlantic City and went to the Nugget in Las Vegas, the first thing I did was I wanted to go through the personnel files, and they just looked at me, because they didn't have any. I mean, they had slips of paper that say, you're hired, you're fired, but that was it. And when it came to credit, which, in Vegas, I was doing credit, I'd open a card, and there'd be like no information on it except that he was a personal friend of this person or that person, and I had to make a decision based on that. So it was difficult, but back in Atlantic City, there were prescribed measures for giving credit.

I mean, it's still loose, but still something there in terms of bank information and that sort of thing. And procedures for scheduling—maybe some say too many procedures, but lots of them, and so you had to, as an assistant casino manager, you had to know all of them. You had to make sure that they were being followed, you had to deal with the issues when they weren't being followed, and you had to look at trends, particularly around town.

Because Atlantic City published all their results, you had the advantage of being able to look at all the games by game type all over town to see what hold percentages were like, and whether yours were appropriate or not, and there were lots of factors to think about within the rules and level of

play and all that sort of stuff. But you had a lot of administration paperwork to do, you had training issues, you had to deal with a lot of the regulatory paperwork and requests. You tried to get on the floor as much as possible because it's easy to become a faceless name in that position; if you allow yourself to, the paperwork will suck you right into it, but you got to keep contact with your customers on the floor.

And you would deal with certain customer situations that elevate beyond the shift manager level—and credit situations.

It's sort of like you're a layer back. Each job in the casino is like a layer above or back from the next one, so you try not to do their job—the people that are underneath you—but you try to be aware of what you're doing, and then to just look a little bit further back and anticipate bigger problems—crowd control or things like that....

Well, I think on the plus side, they've become a lot more analytical and a lot less emotional about the decisions they make, and I think that's a plus.

On the negative side, they become a lot more analytical, and a lot less emotional. I think they may have crossed the line of balance in terms of the importance of analytics. I think they're very important, and I think they're a tool to use, but I think immature managers will use facts and statistics to make their decisions, and to defend those decisions, even if they're not logical and don't work out.

And I think in the end, management has to assume responsibility for the outcome whether they use analytics or just woke up one day from a dream and decided what to do. But I think it is a plus to have that extra tool, and I think there's a lot to be said for it, particularly when it comes to operational efficiencies, like head counts.

Something that probably saves the industry tens of millions of dollars over time is just simply tracking the efficient use of their tables, and also their slots in terms of denomination, and that's something that never happened before. It was always kind of the casino manager's domain to determine what the levels were, what games were run, what slots were ordered, what denominations, and there wasn't any analysis around it, and now there is,

and I think it's greatly improved. I think the amount of information we have on customers is really, it's incredible, the amount that we have on customers now. We know where they eat, what they like, how they play, when they play, what promotions drive them, what drives incremental business as opposed to reward business—all of that is really good.

Once again, on the negative side, though, I think you've got a lot of immature managers that either don't know how to deal with people or don't like people, and they're in the wrong business, but they looked good.

GARY SANOFF

So can we talk a little bit about dealers and the challenges of managing dealers today?

Again, I've been here [Bellagio] 17 years, and my biggest challenge is getting to motivate employees, and this is dealers. We have 550 full-time dealers, and 220 part-time dealers at Bellagio, and so maybe eighty percent of the full-time are very long in the tooth and have been in the business for well over 30 years, so motivating them to get into today's mentality is my biggest challenge. And that's true for supervisors or dealers.

And how do you motivate these people who are entitled, who were around when they gave you better food in the EDR, and they didn't tolerate—when I say they, we as a business—didn't tolerate a drunk, or we didn't tolerate somebody that was a ten-dollar player that complained about their ratings or didn't get the hello that they wanted, because that's what the company sells now. It's all about customer service. If you go up and down the Strip and Downtown, we all have blackjack games, and we all have crap games—they're all the same, they all pay the same, pretty much. A couple rules change here and there, couple bonus bets here and there, they pay the same. But the customer service is what makes the difference. Why do I want to come to Bellagio? Why, because they have a nice fountain? Yeah, that's nice at the beginning, but how you get treated is the most important thing.

How do you think, in the big picture, how do you think casinos have changed since 1979?

Wow, it's changed drastically. Let's talk money for a second. In 1979, I don't have the exact stat, but if I had to guess, I would say 65 percent of the revenue made by the company was made out of table games, maybe slots thrown in there, too, so the casino action. Right now in 2015, we're under fifty percent. Rooms were given away in 1979. It wasn't part of the equation. Food was given away, not part of the equation. There was no money to be made there. Drinks were given away, and cigarettes, cigars were given away because there was enough to overcome by gaming revenue.

As the business changed, first all, the price of liquor and food went over the top. The generation that was around in 1979 has either died off or stopped gambling, so when the Generation X, which is now doing it, or Generation Y or millennials, whatever it's going to be, their priorities have changed. So when they come to Vegas and they come with \$3,000 or \$1,000, the percentage of money that they are willing to play on table games has gotten less and less and less, because they're willing to spend \$300 for a bottle of vodka in a bar—and that's great revenue.

If I had to say which is a bigger margin, I know there's a bigger margin in booze than there is in table games. I mean our margins here are, at the end of the year because of marketing—and I'll talk a little bit about this—why the industry has changed, but the margins are way less than they are in restaurants. Rooms—rooms are great revenue. Even at the DI, a great room at the DI in 1980 might've been \$89. Now we're charging \$299, our ADR is in the \$270s here at the Bellagio. And there's revenue to made in other places, like retail. There was a store, there was a gift shop, there was that. Desert Inn had a couple nice suit places, but not like what we have here. You go to Aria, Bellagio, MGM, their revenue coming out of retail was huge. So that's a big, big way that the business has changed.

Also, people, as the economy has changed, their use of discretionary money has changed. Although we're supposed to be out of a recession, it's

just not around the way it was. The government has changed the business. First Reg 6A and now Title 31, where we used to be able to take as much cash as we want, now every cash transaction over \$10,000 is recorded. Now with the IRS and FinCEN involved in the business, and I'm just throwing out names, but these are all things that are changing the business away from table games. There's so many compliance groups out there, so all these things contribute to the downfall, and now they have a new chairman in China, so a significant part of Far East baccarat business is falling by the wayside.

So how do you handle that as table games director? Do you just say, when you're in n executive committee, "Hey guys, well we're out of luck?"

No, what you do is say, "We need to develop a new way of thinking." We need to think outside the box, we need to think differently than we thought in 1985, we need to think differently, actually, than we did in 2000. And what is the next level, where are we going to go with this?

Well, we start doing cost cutting. And that doesn't mean layoffs or firing people, it just means thinking differently. Maybe we don't need \$300,000 worth of flowers out there, that the Bellagio can still be iconic and not do \$300,000 worth of flowers. We could do \$200,000, and save \$100,000 here. Maybe we could put dealers and baccarat dealers, because the game has changed so much, not in tuxedos and we can put them in regular uniforms and save ourselves \$40,000 a year.

So you start thinking economically how to adjust, like you would any business. A casino is a business. And the old adage is, when I make decisions on limits with players, I'm not in the gambling business. The casinos are in the gaming business, and we do our revenues based on many, many, many thousands of hands.

It's not the one person that's going to beat you, because that happens, but at the end of the year, it's always, give or take, four percentage points. Our hold percentage is going to be about the same either way. People's knowledge of the game has changed what we do.

Blackjack is not a profitable game anymore. People have basic strategy cards. We used to sell them in the gift shop, we recently stopped, so they could sit on the game, play perfect, basic strategy and take the house advantage down to .24 percent. So what do you do? You put six to five blackjack, and you put side bets in. You change with the way the business has changed, but you have got to get away from the mentality, “It’s not the way, we never used to do that”—those are the bad employees.

ELLIOTT SCHECTER

Well, when online gaming and online poker were at its height, obviously casino poker was at its height. Because of all the ancillary and monetary benefits, the online companies were getting poker on television, they were sponsoring players, and giving out rebates and refunds left and right. They were sponsoring tournaments. They were funding our media, whether it was magazines or commercials or radio spots. They were giving us all the publicity they could handle, and they were attracting players to the game. They made it at least somewhat glamorous, if not incredibly glamorous. They made it something you wanted to be a part of. And when all that money dried up, of course, I’ve seen poker recede. There’s definitely been an entrenchment—the amount of tables in existence has gone way down, the amount of people employed in poker has certainly taken a nosedive.

DAVE TORRES

I believe that it’s a big reason why customer service suffers in the casino business, because if you were a bad dealer, the market took care of you. You couldn’t work, you couldn’t survive. You don’t eat long enough, you go do something else, you know what I mean?

Yeah.

So, there was an incentive—we had, on our crew, we had a guy, Billy. We’d take down the lid, we were in dead game. Billy was gonna go talk to people out on the Strip. He’s gonna go out of the door, and he’s gonna cut into you.

You wanna learn to play dice—nobody was taking a break until he came back with people to play. So the incentive was, the crew needed people to play, or we weren't making any money, we weren't eating. So we went and hustled up the game. And when he came back with it, break started, here we go. And we would work like that all night. So the casino had an incentive for us to go ask people to play. I'm sure you've walked through casinos now where the dealer won't even look you in the eye, or, you know, shuffle.

Oh, yeah.

Yeah, well, not us. "You wanna play, you wanna get in here, come on, I'll teach you, I'll teach you, I'll teach you," you know what I mean, so there was definitely a passion to it, and there was an ego to it. All dice dealers on the crew—and baccarat crews on a big game, 'cause there was four of them —think that they are the greatest, have very, you know, "I'm the best looking, I'm the best lover, I'm the best fighter, I'm the best golfer, I'm the best,"—it's, it's an ego thing.

Yeah.

I have the best hands, and you protect each other, and you can work together as crews for years. The danger with that, though, is that at that time when someone got fired off the crew, the crew got fired. So that was the downside. This guy's messing up, all of you, get lost.

Wow.

But you could also walk across the street and get a job that night without going through all of these interviews or—

When did that change?

That changed, okay, here's my thoughts on that. When Steve Wynn built The Mirage and started to go towards a publicly-traded company that mattered, and he needed to, you know, Michael Milken, finance, junk bonds—and he said they make a million dollars. At that time, that's when all departments needed to have a revenue stream for the stock reports, otherwise, nobody's, you know, these guys aren't gonna understand that the

casino made all the money and the restaurants lost, but it was all because comps—no. So that's when they started doing things like top ups, and, you know, shifting revenue from the casino books to the hotel books to the restaurants, so that everyone showed revenue. And at the same time, the only one who fought at that time when the IRS came down on everybody was Jack Binion. Jack snatched all the toke boxes and hid them from the IRS till they came up. Then they started putting pressure on the casinos like, you had guys making a hundred thousand dollars a year paying taxes on twenty thousand, okay. Driving Cadillacs, four-acre spreads, and I make twenty Gs here—right, the IRS caught on, and they wanted their cut. So they busted everybody, and they came up with a tip compliance agreement.

Okay.

Everybody got, like, for me, when I went through it, they gave me like an international telephone number, this is what you owe us. “Can’t pay that,” so we kept going back and forth, back and forth. So they got it down to about seven grand—hey, I can borrow that, you know what I mean, but before it was like, “Hey no gots, you can throw me in jail, throw everybody in jail,” so the IRS killed that, and then.

When did that happen?

That would have been '93, '94 maybe, maybe '92, somewhere around there, Dave, is, you'll see it, when the tip compliance came in. It had to be '92 because I remember doing my first one, yeah, '92, yeah, '92, maybe '93. And so then what happened is they started changing the dealing model. As it became not that important for the casino to make all the money, they started—and there was an expansion. Now everybody needed to compete with Steve Wynn, okay, and people started to come out here. People forgot that, before The Mirage, he changed Downtown with the Golden Nugget. That raised the bar. It went from being, you know, smelling like pee and smoke, to, the Golden Nugget was the classiest place Downtown.

So, Frank Sinatra was performing in the Cabaret Room Downtown. I saw Frank, Harry Belafonte—anyway, he changed it, and then he changed it

again—whole paradigm shifted when he built The Mirage, okay, so he was changing all that. And then they started going to personality—service, service, service.

Well, you got these guys with these business degrees, they start saying, “Well, we need to focus on people’s personality,” which is true, because a lot of the old-time dealers were very surly.

Yeah.

“Get out of here,” you know, you couldn’t let any customer walk out the door anymore, especially when we were investing marketing dollars behind it, right?

Yeah.

Okay, it’s too expensive. So, they say, “Well, we need people to keep them in there,” and that’s when it changed. It started going to personality, and the focus on dealing skills became less and less. And then you had the advent of MAP [Management Associates Program]programs. You have non-casino people in casino positions who don’t understand the need of certain things, like boxmen. They don’t want to pay boxmen, “Ah, it doesn’t need a boxman,” without realizing what a boxman actually does. He actually saves you money in the long run.

How so?

When they trained me as a boxman, or they told me my job was to catch a hundred and twenty—that was my first pay as a boxman, a hundred and twenty-five dollars a day—my job was to catch a hundred and twenty-five dollars a day in mistakes.

Okay.

If I didn’t catch that, I wasn’t doing my job. So you watched everything, and sure enough, there was at least a hundred and twenty-five dollars in mistakes every day. “Hey, you mispaid the eight,” “Oh hey, that hard eight fell,” or “Hey,” you know, there’s people out there, things happen, especially when the game gets jammed up. That’s actually a losing bet. “No, he didn’t have it, he didn’t press it,” and that’s what you looked for. And if you save a

big scam, you know, a dice slide, you can save three or four thousand bucks—okay, now I'm good.

Yeah.

You know what I mean, for the next thirty days. I've justified my pay. Nowadays, you see one floorman assigned six games. And I've had this talk. When Harrah's took over the Rio, I was there, okay, so it was Phil Satre, Gary Loveman, Greg Shay, and I've heard out of their mouths, "They can watch six games." They're not gonna watch six games. They may be in charge of six games, but they're not watching six games. And your customer service is gonna suffer because they're all full—that's thirty-six people. There's one guy trying to handle thirty-six people. I'm not watching thirty-six people play, especially in a quad section. It's not gonna happen. But, again, that goes back to that stock thing where they need to show certain reductions in labor for the stock price to go up, so we're no longer in the casino business, we're in the stock business. I'd say the last people who have a shot at, at an old time casino would be SLS because it's not a publicly-traded company, and maybe some of the casinos Downtown. And then that's about it....

And at that time, see, it shifted. Before twenty-four hour splits, everybody wanted to work swing shift. Now, because of twenty-four hour splits, everybody wants to work day shift, be normal, but that's not how it's supposed to be. Your best people are supposed to be on swing. It's through seniority, now you're on day shift. So you're front stacking day shift where there's no business. Anyway, the Stardust was just wildly insane. That was so much fun. This is was through the transition from the old group to the Boyds and all of that. It was just insane. They had eighteen dice tables, then it was sixteen, then fourteen, but when—in one pit, fourteen dice tables.

Wow.

Okay, you walk in most pits, a big pit now is six. There's no fourteen—and they're all going. So they had a lot of play, and a lot of, that's where I learned Baccarat, and they had the old Baccarat games with the high

chairs. So, they looked like lifeguard chairs. But that crew was so tight—and there were people working there when I worked there who opened the place, and so, what was that, '56?

'57.

Yeah, '56, '57. Yeah, this guy named Don—and they were cool. There was a guy there, his name was Dick—what was Dick's last name—and he would come in, and he's shaking, 'cause he was an alcoholic, and the casino manager would go, "There's a whole lotta shaking going on in that game." Pit boss would come over and go, "Dick go across the street and have a beer—one beer, not two, Dick, one." So Dick would be, "Thanks." He would go have a beer and he'd come back steady. So, they would take care of you. Like, at the El Cortez, there was a cocktail waitress who lost her husband. She had two kids. At the end of the night, she would come by, and the boss would throw a hundred onto her tray. So they're taking care of us—now she doesn't need public, she doesn't need anything, but that would be considered skimming now, you know what I mean?

Yeah.

And they would do things like that, they would take care of you. You know, "Give it to him, yeah, you need that." Guy's mom dies, he needs money—give him the two Gs for the airfare and the casket, just give it to him. They would do that kind of stuff. Things that, that don't happen now. So the guys at the Stardust, that was different. Now, that was the first time I felt that I was really on the Strip, like *the Strip*. I had gone to audition at the Hilton, the big Hilton, the International Hilton with five years' experience, and they told me, "We don't hire break-ins." So at that time, they still considered—You didn't have five or six years, you're a break-in to them. You weren't getting—Caesars Palace, you better have ten years, minimum. Now they're hiring people, six months' experience.

Wow.

What happened to the quality of service, what happened? So the Stardust was a different atmosphere where they focused mostly on true service.

That's when people would go ask people to play and cut into it. And a host would walk out and cut into a guy, "You wanna eat?" We also had the Lido, and if the Lido wasn't sold out, they'd bring tickets to the pit—"Go hand these out to people." Oh, there's some old ladies visiting from Iowa, "Here, you wanna see a show?" Oh, there's some dudes playing twenty-five bucks a hand, "You wanna see a show?" and that was it. That was almost the first time I heard somebody like M-F Wayne Newton because he goes too long in the showroom, you know what I mean? (Laughs)...

When I was dealing, they were always telling you, "Find a shooter, get a roll. What time is the next hand? Keep the cards in motion." So, that was part of your service. I wanted to deal and talk to you to where, they called it, meat in the seat, right?, or ass is in the seat, get money in the hole, in the drop box. That's all I needed. The longer you stay there, the math is gonna work out. I don't care if you're winning. The longer you stay there, the math is in my favor, so I need time, and then I need the decisions. When the cards were not in the air, we were not making money. If the dice were not rolling, we were not making money. And I think we've gotten away from that. They've put in so many procedures that are counterproductive to keeping the cards in the air. Shuffle machines were designed so that there was no time lost in between. But now, buy pre-shuffled cards, and then stick them in the shuffle machine. Number one, why do you incur the expense of pre-shuffled cards if you're gonna shuffle them, right?

Yeah.

And how much time does it say to you if on that cycle, that—what do they call those, the MD, MD2 shufflers—those MD2 shufflers, I think the cycle on that is like a minute twenty-eight. Okay, come to the school—we teach the dealers—a single deck, fifteen seconds. A double deck, thirty seconds. And a six-deck shoe, ninety seconds. That's the fastest it should take you to shuffle, right? But it really should be a minute for a six-deck shoe if you're any good. And you get to it.

So, you start adding time pieces. SLS is dealing a double deck out of a double deck shoe. So, now I have to take the cards out of the shuffler. I still put one shuffle on it. Now I'm ready to go. Now I have to load it. They say it's not that much time, so okay. So, let's say, let's say it's not that much time. Let's say it's just five seconds, but now let's put that over the sixty-eight tables you have. Okay, now how many seconds is that in one round? Now how many times do you shuffle a double-deck shoe? How many times do you shuffle a double-deck shoe? We're getting four hundred and fifty rounds in an hour. I can get twenty rounds out of it, thirty rounds out of a double-deck shoe. So, I'm doing that fifteen, twenty times. Okay, so now I'm losing a minute, a minute per hour, I'm losing a minute, okay. A minute per hour, twenty-four hours over seven days, I spun it out.

That's up, yeah.

I spun it—what I did at the end—we raised thirty-seven percent, we increased our business, right, without increasing the drop. What we did was go through time and motion—shuffle, shuffle, strip, shuffle, go. Dice, go. Roulette, go. Spin, go. And we went back to the old ways. And I think that the companies have lost sight of the front-line employees. Now, they're just FTEs, okay. I don't want to pay your insurance, so you're only getting three days from that. Well, you can't, you can't feed your family on that, so now you have to have two jobs. So, which one are you loyal to?

Yeah.

You're not loyal to anyone. "Do I care if this guy plays? I don't care, I haven't gotten enough sleep last night. I'm just gonna sit here. God, I hope this game doesn't go." You know what I mean?

Yeah.

That's it. You can't get any loyalty. I think that's where—now, I don't know the property. "Is there a good place to eat?" I don't really know the property. "Have you eaten at Cleo?" I haven't eaten there. "Have you eaten at the steakhouse?" I haven't eaten there. They used to send you, on your days off, when you're, you know, if you're a good employee, "Here, go eat at

Willy B's," "Here, go eat at the buffet." So you could talk to a guest, "How's the buffet?" "It's excellent," right? All the people from the SLS I know who had the opportunity, and Cleo will tell you the same thing, "Eat the Brussels sprouts." "Brussels sprouts, really?" "Yeah, the Brussels sprouts." Okay. The dealers haven't eaten there. Can't recommend it, right? The secrets. So, I really think there's just a focus on the bottom line so much that it's actually a detriment to the bottom line. And people don't know how to have that flow through. They know how to do top line stuff, but they don't know how to impact it.

CHRISTINA GENTILE

The changes I see, or the changes that stuck with me the most, is the changes in the dealers. We cater to the dealers now. Because of the HR presence in the casino industry, it has allowed for every little thing the dealer complains about—if you do not do something or act upon it, you're gonna turn around and be in jeopardy, your job, "But why didn't you protect this dealer, they don't need to be standing there and take abuse." Well, the abuse was somebody said an F word. HR, well, that's abuse. Well, you know, there's the aggravation of that, because if you upset the player, management is upset. It is hard to balance that.

CHRIS BIANCHI

Vegas is more of a place you come to vacation than you go to gamble anymore. Back in the Sixties everybody came out here just to gamble. And now it's a place where people come to vacation and not gamble as much. The hotels look to make money off all their amenities now, not just the casino. It's a lot more commercial than it ever has been.

BILL ZENDER

Some of it's for the good, and some of it's not for the good. And I think, what we're doing in a way is we're not giving the players enough bang for

their buck. And, it's kind of difficult when you have a lot of six-to-five blackjack payoff games. When offering six to five, if the basic house advantage of the game is half of one percent, now it's two percent when the casinos use the 6:5 rule. That's to the basic strategy player. I think at least offering side bets, it gives the players an alternative. They can bet it or not. Six to five actually cripples people.

In order to give the player a good gambling experience, you have to give them some playing time. You have to give them some kind of enjoyment, because what you have is—we're in the adult entertainment business, believe it or not, and the people that are playing on the tables have to get the entertainment value. What's the best way to give the table game player an entertainment value? Well, give them good customer service, and social interaction while on the table, right?

Yeah.

They've got to be able to play long enough to get their value out of it. If they play a short period of time, because we beat them quickly, and it's not really friendly situation. They have a bad experience, and either they're not gonna come back to that casino, or they might not come back and gamble. Right now, this town has gone from the gambling capital of the world to the entertainment capital. On the Las Vegas Strip, they're only holding percentage about, what, eleven-and-a-half percent? It's up from ten percent actually.

Yeah.

Almost all the twenty-one games on the Las Vegas Strip are six-to-fives. And the thing about it is why, why would the Strip holding eleven percent, when in a place like Wendover, Nevada tables holding almost twenty percent, you know, in their twenty-one games. The reason why is because people do not stay on a table and play very long anymore. If you look at their value of entertainment, it's to buy those big yard glasses and walk up and down the Strip and get drunk, or to go shopping, or to go see shows, or

hang out in lounges or, you know, whatever it is. And one of the big attractions right now is the party pits.

Mm-hmm.

That's the reason, well, how can you go into party pit—you got a six-deck shoe, they use the continuous shuffle machine, six-to-five has got twenty-five dollar minimum bet. Yeah, but you've got a bunch of guys sitting around that are between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-five, and they're looking at this girl who's dealing in a negligée and, while another girl in a skimpy bikini is swinging around a pole. When I grew up as a young adult in Las Vegas, you actually had to pay real life money to go into those clubs to see women dance half naked. Here, you can just walk in and see it. So, you know, people say, "Well how do you get the bang for your buck?" the gambling is not the main entertainment—the entertainment is the girls. And they're paying for that through the game. You can't take six-to-five blackjack games with a continuous shuffle machine and stick them someplace where you don't have a party pit. That's not going to make the tables any money.

So what do you think some of the positive changes are?

The positive change is we're understanding, now we have to have better levels of customer service. Also, I'm finding out more and more now that people are understanding that time and motion is important to make more money. Some guy said to me, he goes, "Bill, you want us to get out more hand decisions, but you don't want us to beat the players real fast?" Okay, it's a two-edged sword, but the thing is, is if you get more hands out, they get more bang for their buck at the same time. You're not beating 'em real quick. And you're maximizing your opportunity, but opportunity's not it—your win potential. So, that's the way the industry is going.

One thing about it is there's so much competition throughout the country right now in gaming than there used to be. Take Nevada: we opened up gaming so we could bring money in from the other states. Places like Pennsylvania opened up gaming so they could keep the money in

Pennsylvania. So does Ohio and the rest of them that've opened up, you know? Rhode Island's another perfect example. They want to keep the gambling dollar in Rhode Island.

Personally, I don't think Massachusetts should be allowed to have gambling. It's taking them fifteen years to get this far, and they still don't have a casino. I read today, the Gaming Control Board denied a lawsuit claiming that it shouldn't be able to license casinos in Massachusetts. And that's gonna be another battle. I mean, Jesus, these guys can't come up with the right combination, they need the "Yes, we're gonna do it, or no we're not." It's fifteen years now.

JIMMY WIKE

Yeah, just to regress momentarily, when I first broke into the business, your first priority was, can you protect the bank roll? Your second priority was—the second most important ability was, can you get around the layout? The third was, when the boss tells you to do something, do you do it? Fourth was like, no matter how drunk you were the night before, how sick you were—did you show up to work? And somewhere around sixth or seventh was customer service. That wasn't the main focus back then.

Fast forward thirty, forty years, it's customer service, customer service, customer service, and everything else is secondary. I had an epiphany later on in my career when I was in management that the customer really doesn't know who the best dealers are, but they know who the friendliest dealers are. And the friendliest dealer is the one that they consider the best dealer. So for all practical purposes and intent, the friendliest dealers are the best dealers, at least in the customer's eyes.

But at the MGM in those days, they were afraid that if you talked to a customer, you were too friendly, that you were gonna either hustle or you're gonna steal. It was pretty bad when I first went to work there. After about a year, things kinda started to die down. It got a little easier, and it became a very good job—ended up making a lot of money there. I

remember, I worked with this one guy—I can't remember his first name, but we called him Brother Jenkins, he was a black guy—and I remember, he says one time, he says, "Last year, I made more than the president." At that time, the president made fifty thousand a year in salary. And he said, "I made more than the president." And, you know, in relation to what things cost, we did make a lot of money, and it was pretty much tax-free. But anyway, that was a rough place, it was a rough crew. In those days, I had mentioned earlier, they would fire whole crews. So if you got on a crew with one or two people that they didn't like, it was just simpler to let the whole crew go.

So what was the action like?

It was great, it was unbelievable action. It was great action. It was—that and Caesars Palace had the best, the most action in town. It was, they used to have junkets come in every Wednesday and every Sunday, and they came in from all over—they came in from Houston, from Dallas, from Cleveland, from Pittsburgh, from all over. Junket trips, that was a big thing back in those days. And they used to load up the plane with customers. Back in those days, a five thousand dollar credit line was pretty big—that was a lot of money. And then on every junket, you'd have a couple of players with ten thousand credit lines. So, there was big play in dice and they had a baccarat pit, a real fancy baccarat pit, and it was the MGM. I mean, they had stars running around there, they had two showrooms. They always had first rate entertainment, great restaurants. And it was just, it was—even though it was a tough place for a dealer to work, there was still pride in working there, you know, you're an MGM dealer. It was considered pretty high up there in the ranks. It was a great job; I was very grateful for it....

Tell me a little bit about how it had changed since you were there when it was Bally's. So what were the differences you noticed when you came back in '87?

There was a huge Atlantic City influence. The management team—a lot of them were Atlantic City via Tahoe—there were people that broke in, in Reno, and Tahoe, they went back to Atlantic City. The people that went back to Atlantic City from Las Vegas—not all of them, but a lot of them, they either didn't have a good job, or there was something wrong. They weren't, their career wasn't going very well. For some of them, it was a good opportunity, but for others it was their only option as they'd burned themselves out in Vegas. I had actually thought about going back there. A couple of friends of mine went back in the late seventies and opened up all those casinos, but I just didn't want to, I didn't have any desire to go. So now, all of a sudden because Atlantic City had been so regulated that there's all these regulations at Bally's that the MGM had never had, and no casinos in Nevada had ever had. I mean there were always count procedures, there's this and that, but the documentation for everything that happens was nothing compared to what came out of Atlantic City.

Okay, can you think of any examples?

Documentation for employees. I mean, occasionally, people got a warning slip, but usually it was just, "You're fired," you know, you're gone. And all of a sudden, there's a written document trail, and there's all this kind of stuff. The Personnel Department became Human Resources. For the procedure for counting the pits, one great thing they did is get away from the imprest bank, which was good, so you could close the game within a matter of minutes instead of sometimes waiting an hour. The way they calculated hold percentage—the Hilton was the last major place in Las Vegas to do it, but they used to take the marker buybacks out of the hold percentage, and what that would do is that would make your hold percentage higher.

Casino managers used to get fired and hired based on hold percentages, and if the hold was down for too long, they would get fired. And the funny thing about that is, everything is cyclical, and especially in gaming. I would always tell people, "You need a thirty-month cycle." This monthly or annual thing doesn't accurately portray what a true gaming cycle is, so what would

happen is, you'd have a casino manager, and they'd go into a twelve-month or an eighteen-month slump, you know it just happens in math.

That's what math is. You go into a twelve or eighteen-month slump, that person would get fired; they'd bring somebody else in at the time the cycle was going the other way. So, now it goes up for twelve or eighteen months, and now this guy looks like a hero until it goes bad. And in my tenure as casino manager, the one thing I always tried to do was just ease people's fears that something was wrong when the hold percentage went bad, because I knew eventually it would come back. There are some things you can do to help the cycle in your favor but it's a little too technical for this. When I first went to work at Bally's, there was a guy named Bob Payton that had been from Reno and Atlantic City and was casino manager. There had never been anybody from Reno that was a casino manager in Las Vegas. That just didn't happen. They viewed people from northern Nevada as inadequate, they just did. So now, all of a sudden you have all these people from Tahoe and Reno that had gone to Atlantic City, and because Bally's was an east coast property, they send all these people out to run it. So, the first casino manager that I had when I went there was Bob Payton—he didn't last long. And then Alan Anderson—he ended up going to the Excalibur when it opened.

CHRIS TONEMAH

Well, when you would take your break back then, you could walk over to other casinos, and it was nothing to see your boss sitting at a bar having a drink during your shift. I mean, it was very relaxed back then. There were not all these restrictions. Everybody knew everybody. Even in your off hours, if you went to a local bar or something, you could leave your purse on the bar and go to the restroom and not worry about it because everybody knew everybody. Nobody was going to take anything from you. They were protective of people, especially because that's how bartenders in local bars and waitresses—that's how they earned their money is through

dealers stopping after work, and on their nights off and things like that. It was a small community. You kind of knew everybody, and if you were a Strip dealer, everybody knew you, because it was very—if you were at the DI or the Sands or Caesars, or the Stardust, people took notice because they all had the little gold pinky rings and the gold bracelets, and the long fake nails, when you could have them. We were never, I was never allowed to have them when I dealt.

Would that make dealing hard?

It makes cutting checks sloppy, if that nail gets in the way. As you notice, my nails are still short, it's a habit. It's almost forty years, it's a habit to keep them short. It was great times because you felt like family, and some of those people that I broke in with, I'm still in touch with now. Even though we're spread all over, within all this time, when I left my previous job to go where I am now, it was really kind of cool because now I'm working with people that I actually worked with at Bally's and the Four Queens and things like that—well, I call it MGM, not Bally's—but it's kind of neat to get back together, and it's like you haven't missed a beat, you just keep going. People change, but not that much.

You still have that closeness, those break-in things, the old way of doing things, which, in my opinion, is so much better than now, because you always took pride in your work, and if you were ever juiced into a job, which means if you had a connection that got you a job somewhere, you always did the best you could to make them look good, you never caused a problem. There was no calling in sick or going home halfway through a shift or anything like that. You stayed and you worked, and you were proud of what you did, and you took pride in your work, because it was a prestigious thing if you could deal a great single deck or double deck game, or if you were a great dice dealer, or could handle all kinds of action on the roulette game, you took pride in it. It wasn't just a factory line job, and unfortunately, in my opinion, when corporations came in, it became very factory-line.

How do you think that happened?

When corporations took over. I really believe that because, in 1992, there was no HR, there was no human resources. You went directly to your shift boss if you had a problem. There was no chain of authority. It was, if you had a problem, you spoke to your shift manager. If you had a problem with the floorman, you spoke to the floorman and your shift manager, and it was addressed that way....

And you got envelopes then; every day, you got an envelope. Like if you got an envelope the next morning you went in, the toke committee had cut up your tokes, and you got your envelope, and it was great because you didn't have to claim it all. And I did that from '83 until I went on the floor. After the IRS came in, it was Memorial Day weekend, I'm pretty sure it was Memorial Day weekend, maybe it was Labor Day weekend.

Of what year?

They came in in '91, I think, and they took our boxes out. I believe it was '91, it might've been, it had to have been '90 or '91. And every day, they came in and they sealed our boxes and they took them out. And they counted all the money up. They figured out, they had a list, they knew exactly how many dealers we cut, and they figured out, they figured kind of what you were making, and that's when they gave us all little white tablets that we had to write down every day, what we picked up, and of course, like everything else, we fudged on it, we were never totally honest. The toke committee would tell you what you were making, and that's what you made, and the people that cut tokes, not only did they get a full share for dealing that day, they would get half a share for cutting up tokes, doing all the paperwork and things like that. And that was time-consuming.

But then when the IRS came in and decided everything had to go through the cage, that's when they decided you needed to have like a bank account in the cage, and everything was going to go on paychecks. I believe it was a deal they made with the hotel because the hotel could be fined for not making us, back then, file correctly. Even though it was up to us

individually, I guess there was some type of, I'm not real positive about corporate law and all that, but I imagined there was some type of thing, because it's strange to have IRS agents come in and just take your boxes out with the police, and that's it, you see your money walk out the door, that's it. And then you go to your bank, and you can't put money in because you don't want to show more than—you were always careful about that. But they came up with a number of what they thought we were supposed to make, and that's what you claimed. There were audits, and they would go back as many years as they could go back.

And it was tough—some people, I know one woman who, they wanted \$90,000 from her, and she couldn't come up with that. I mean, we all lived good lives. We took vacations to Mexico, you took your whole family to California, you went to Hawaii, you went to Mexico, you went to the Caribbean, you went to Europe if you could—you did all those things. You didn't worry about the government coming after you, you didn't think that way. And after they came after dealers, they started going after cocktail waitresses, and that's when they came up with, every drink rang, they had to claim so much.

And I never asked people what their business was, all I know is you always heard the rumblings—the bartenders, the cocktail waitresses, the valet, they went after valet, the bellmen, to where, finally, you had to, you started claiming because that was it, everything went into your check. It all became a check. And that's when I decided I would be better off, I thought, moving up, even though I knew, going from dealing to the floor, I was going to lose \$10,000 a year, at least, and I did, it was more than \$10,000 I lost. But I knew that, but I figured in the long run, maybe I could make more because everything would be claimed....

Well, there's no professionalism as a dealer. People don't take pride in dealing. It's a paycheck. Many dealers do not know the fine art of a soft hustle of a toke, they do not interact on a personal level with the guest. Only dealers who have 15 to 30 years under their belt understand it because they learned by watching older dealers.

Can you break in at the Venetian?

Yes. You shouldn't be able to. When we started at the Venetian, the criteria was, you had to have at least five years' experience as a dealer in two games—blackjack or roulette, dice or blackjack. They wanted strong dealers. They needed good dealers in Pai Gow tiles and Pai Gow poker. And they went after people that had five years' experience. So when I first started there, it was a great place. All those dealers dealt great. We showed them the procedures, they dealt by it—it was great. When, at the Venetian it was great for the first—let's see, we opened in '99, the Palazzo's been open eight years, I believe—when they opened the Palazzo, the dealers' tokes at the Venetian dropped significantly. And going from making \$200 a day to making sometimes \$100 a day or less was quite a shock for the dealers, and so a lot of them wanted to leave to go to new, different properties.

Wynn was opening up, Wynn was a great place to work; Mandalay Bay; MGM started hiring again; Caesars took a few of them. Harrah's ran into this issue when they took over Caesars. They didn't realize how strong Caesars dealers were, and it was a joke on the Strip, "It's not Caesars Palace; it's Dealers Palace," and that's how it was referred to, because if a dealer said something, my God, that was law. And we knew our shit. We knew that this player had played a few tables, and we knew that he left that game with this amount when he arrived at the game, and I could tell my floorman what it was.

You learned as a dealer, a good dealer, to help your floormen, because if that floorman's watching five games, which back then was very rare, you only—when I started, you had four games, and as a floorman in dice, you had one game, four dice dealers, a boxman, and yourself. That's all you watched, but there was a lot of money on that layout. And only the boxman touched the money. Now, in the last eight years, they've done away with boxmen—there are no boxmen, which slows down the game because you have one floorman watching two dice games, and you have dealers running down the money and passing out the checks. That's a jackpot waiting to happen if you think old school ways, not new school.

They figure, “Oh, surveillance is going to see anything.” Trust me, they’re losing a lot of money in the hotel because, I don’t care who you are, there’s not a dealer that hasn’t worked in any casino that hasn’t known someone that has been caught for stealing. Many years ago if you were caught stealing from the dealers, nothing was done to you. If it came from the toke box, nothing was done to you. But if to you stole from the company, you were gone. And you could go across the street back then and get a job, like if you got fired at the Flamingo, you could go to the MGM and get a job, or the Dunes or whatever else there was back then. If you stole from the company, nowadays, where are you going to go?

And you didn’t have to sign a confidentiality agreement because you knew to keep your mouth shut. Nowadays, you have to sign a confidentiality agreement every year, and I have to remind dealers of this. Just a couple days ago, I had a dealer, “Oh yeah, so-and-so comes in here and plays,” and I said, “Stop, you can’t say that, you’re going to get in trouble.” And this was a quarterback. You don’t ever tell customers, “Oh yeah, he comes in here and gambles,” that’s crazy. We have actors and actresses, we have government people who come in and gamble—you don’t disclose those names, you don’t do that. As much as you might like to, you shouldn’t because you’re going to get yourself in a jackpot.

And it’s easy for some of these actors nowadays, they come in and they say, “I want this room, I only want these people in there because I don’t want it to get out.” And sure enough, two weeks later, you read so-and-so was over here gambling, or so-and-so was seen at this restaurant. There’s no real confidentiality, because sooner or later, a valet parker or another guest will tweet or take a picture of, and the cell phones and things are, there’s so much social media, there are no secrets like there used to be.

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Do You Gamble?

It might not be surprising that, surrounded by gambling in their daily work lives, most interviewees do not currently gamble. In many cases, changed life circumstances, like having children or moving up in the management hierarchy, led to a cessation of gambling.

GARY SANOFF

Do you ever gamble?

I never did, and no. Here's the thing, I can't stand to lose. And when I was table-for-table crap dealer, to me, that was gambling, because they would bet money for you on the line, and even as a blackjack dealer, when you're not going for yourself, and they put a bet up for me, you risk of winning or losing.

I never had the gambling bug ever in my career. I worked with many people that did. I can tell you a story from the DI when we make a \$4,000 score in craps, on the table for table night, and we go to the local bar called The Flame, which is off the Strip where we used hang out. The Desert Inn people went off the Strip, and the four members, we all go out. It's like a family, it's a nice crew mentality, and next thing you know, one of the guys on my crew, he's got half his \$4,000 in his slot machine, and the other half in contraband or something of that nature, and he's asking if he can borrow \$1,000, and I just, luckily I was never wired that way ever, but I worked with many people that were.

RON SACCAVINO

I don't gamble table games. I gamble poker, I'm gambling poker now.

Alright.

I'll go play poker once or twice a week—live poker, I don't play tournaments, there's a difference. I'm not into having my picture in a fucking magazine. And there's a difference in the playing of tournaments or cash. Tournaments, you know, everybody wants to be a hero. Everybody could push all in with junk, because they don't lose no money, there's no money here. Do it with your cash, see how brave you get.

DAVE TORRES

I used to gamble before I had children. I like to play poker, and if I shoot dice, I'll unleash a monster, so I don't shoot dice. But, for the most part, I, I'm at the point—I don't hate casinos, or anything like that, but like a sailor being at sea, I don't want to go on a cruise. I don't want to do it anymore. I want to see the new places, and I want to try the new restaurants, and I want to see some old friends, and I want to walk through. But I really don't want to spend any time, significant time in them, unless I'm working. It's different now. I'll give you an example—SLS. I walk through there, and I read reports about them being underperforming—under-, that's the new word, right?

Yeah.

They're underperforming. So, they're losing. And I see things that you could fix like that, and they don't do it. And I wonder why, and then I think, they must not have any casino guys on the rudder, right? You don't want me running your restaurants—I don't know anything about it, but you have a restaurant guy running a casino. But it's really sad, because the place is nice.

CHRISTINA GENTILE

No, I used to, though. I used to gamble a lot before I had my daughter.

Was it still fun to do even though you're dealing with that eight hours a day?

It was fun—I did not play table games. I played the machines.

Okay.

It was fun because it was an escape for me, and being around the gaming environment, you could see the excitement and see, you know, of somebody hitting that jackpot over on that machine over there, or hearing about it. “Oh, they’re over at the bar, this one hit this and that.” So being around that excitement every day, you wanted to go out and experience that excitement, too. And I think that environment breed gamblers.

CHRIS BIANCHI

Yeah, I will play video poker every now and then, I bet in the sportsbook. I probably play blackjack a couple times a year if that. Nothing crazy.

So if you’re playing blackjack, do you critique the dealer in your head, I mean, how do—is it hard to get out of that mindset of?

I’ll notice right away if the dealer is good or not, but I don’t ever say a word to them. I don’t even like to talk while I play.

Yeah (Laughs).

I don’t even like to show my ID unless they ask. If a boss or dealer sees I’m from Vegas then they’re always asking what I do for a living, where I work, etc. I just want to sit there and play and try to win a little money and tip the dealer if I catch a good run of cards. I don’t want to talk about my job.

CHRIS VAN BUUREN

I did, yes. My family in South Africa grew up in the horse racing industry, so I guess horses will always be in my blood. I love them more than I love anything on this planet. I love the industry, the horse racing industry. My stepfather used to be in charge of the Totalisator Agency Board, which is the gambling side of horses in South Africa. He was the general manager for them for 28 years, so my gambling started at a very young age. Our involvement in horses has been run perpendicularly with my young age. I can’t even remember when I wasn’t involved in horseracing.

When I was on the cruise ships, I would gamble, not excessively, but maybe when I go to the casino, \$50 to \$100. When I came to Las Vegas first, I did gamble maybe a little more than I should, but about three years ago, just before I went to Korea, I stopped cold turkey. I haven't touched a table game ever since. But horses, I still play South African horseracing, strangely enough, not really the American stuff as much because I don't know as much about it as what I do in South Africa. So I still do dabble in that, maybe \$50, \$100 a month, but that's about it.

BILL ZENDER

No. I know too much about the games, and it's not fun anymore. Another thing is I can't go out and really play because it's not right to work both sides of the game. One thing about it is I've always, my heart's always been on the casino side. I've acted as a player in several occasions, you know I was a card counter, a hole card player, a location player, and I was on the cutting edge of the shuffle tracking. I choose to be on the casino side of the table.

I just don't like it being on the other side. When you have played for a living, it's really difficult to go out and play for enjoyment. I lived with a girl for a while, and she said to me once, you know, "My family's in town, you gotta go Downtown," for some reason her father liked to go to the Horseshoe Club. "Why don't you come with us and play blackjack?" So as you walk in the door, I look for table conditions, I look at deck penetration. I look at how much money I have for a bank roll, what kind of bet spread can I use? It's no longer fun.

You know, it was a business for so long, it's, I just can't do that anymore. I mean, I don't even like to play poker, so there you have it.

15

General Thoughts

In the course of the interviews, interviewees gave very specific responses to a number of questions. In the course of the conversations, often the discussion shifted to areas that, while important to an understanding of the evolution of table games management, did not fit into any of the previous chapters. This chapter includes some of the insights shared during that process.

ED WALTERS

So, as a floorman, how much of your job is the game itself and how much is dealing with the players?

Depends where you work. See at the Sands, the paramount thing was to take care of the players—paramount. That's why a guy could cheat and might get away with it, 'cause we're not—now other places—Stardust, DI—they were tough. DI watched their fucking dealers like hawks. We didn't, 'cause they were mainly people juiced in, or we knew, and as long as the players are happy, and we made money, we didn't think like, we didn't look at the dealers as the enemy, but DI did. It was the Stardust then that started putting guys in the eye in the sky—you ever heard of that?

Yes.

Do you know we had that setup—never, never sent anybody up there. We didn't think like that.

Yeah.

But you gotta know why; because a dealer knew that if he does his job, we treat him properly. If he doesn't do his job, we treat him rough. He steals from us, it will never happen again. So, it was a different code of conduct.

RUSSELL TERBEEK

It's been a really good industry to me. I love the business and love what I do. I work for a good group of people and have been really blessed in so many ways. Plus I thank the good Lord that I had the support of my wife and kids through all the ups and downs. For working in the gambling business, I've been a really lucky guy.

RON SACCAVINO

And did you keep your own tokes or did you split them?

No, you never—I'll try to get into that—but in the early goings, very rare, a blackjack dealer hardly ever kept their own. There have been exceptions. I can list which exceptions there were, but there had been exceptions. But it generally never works out for a variety of reasons.

Why is that?

Well, for starters, you know they try and keep it fair, but you can't get it fair, because let's just say you got ten tables here, okay? And one's a five-dollar table, and one's a two-dollar table, and one's a one-dollar table, and split up that way. Well, and don't forget, you have main games that are seated, situated in the right section, and they get all the play. And then maybe they'll open up another pit or something like that, and then you got games, especially when you get carnival games that nobody's toking. So what do you do, and you got dealers coming in and you say, "Okay, you take the shit game, and you take the good game."

And then you say, "Well, you can make it fair—next go around, they go like that." Well it don't work quite that simple. You might close that game, you might open another game, this customer might follow the dealer over there. It's never fair, so what happens is, then you get favoritism. The guy with the pencil, the rubber band, he's saying, "Okay, honey, you get on that table," see, "And you, prick, you get on that fucking Big Six."

So, it never quite works out. And that's probably the main reason why it doesn't work out. The secondary reason why it doesn't work out is, when you go table for table, you get a lot of hustling. And it's hard to control, it's really difficult. I remember the Showboat being, probably, the last of the table for table twenty-one dealers.

Now, there's differences—crap tables were the last bastion of table for table. Twenty-ones in the eighties became twenty-four hours. First it became shift for shift, then it became twenty-four hours, and the crap tables were hang-arounders, and it took a long time—I think the Desert Inn was probably the last table for table crap table.

Now you did have Harrah's on graveyard shift, was one table, primarily table for table. I think the Showboat was the last one that tried to have dealers go table for table in the twenty-one pit. But what happened was, the fucking dealers were making all the fucking money, and the pit was not making any money. All the money was going in the fucking dealers' pockets—they were schmoozing the players, and you know what I mean, and hustling the players, and before you know it, the fucking dealers at the end of the shift, if their drop was \$10,000, the fucking dealers would be locking up \$5,000, and the fucking house would be locking up \$5,000. So that's why it went by the wayside.

JOE FRIEDMAN

What kind of stuff would happen on grave shift, what would you see?

People, a lot of drunks sleeping, a lot of that. People not happy about food at Mr. Lucky's. Especially on graveyard, there wasn't a restaurant man, I mean, there's a manager, but they want, "Who runs this place?" and inevitably, your phone would ring. So, "My eggs weren't right," or "My room, the shower's dirty"—whatever it was, it was. Especially there, it's not like working at Wynn where 24/7, there's someone on that property in charge of that department. On graveyard, a lot of time, you're it, so.

Tell me what that feels like. So, how old are you at this point?

I was thirty, thirty-two.

And you're in charge of the entire thing, what did that feel like?

You just hope it doesn't burn down. I mean, it was fun. It's fun to have the responsibility, it's fun 'cause you learn things. And you can engage because it's always changing. I mean, you never know what the night's gonna bring. Whether it's, there's always the dealing with customers that are pissed off 'cause they're losing money. It's always that, and then throw in drunk

and/or otherwise impaired to that mix. You know, you've got a fun combo. But it's, it makes, it makes it nice. And it was always nice when Starbucks would open up at six in the morning, and you could go get coffee. On swing, it made the night go fast. On days, you're cleaning up a lotta, you know, a little bit more help. And on grave, it's just keep it all together. But it's a lot of fun.

GARY SANOFF

Is the industry better now today, or was it better back in '79 or '80—what do you think?

I think it's different, and it sounds redundant, I know, but it is different. It was good back then to the point of where you got to see more exciting things. You got to see the governor that came from Louisiana, and I dealt to him many times. He'd come with a suitcase full of cash, and it was exciting, and you got to work for bosses that, when you were dealing, came by and said, to the player for you, "Take a hundred dollar chip and put it on the line for the dealer." It happened at the DI all the time. Or Burton would get up, when we had a blackjack tournament and say, "Don't forget to tip the dealers because they're the best, and your cocktail waitress in here." Because the money, whether it was mob money, part of it, as long as they got theirs, you got yours.

When you get into the business now, it's so regulated. Is it worse? If you're an old timer who's not willing to change? Yeah, it's worse. But there's much more job security than there used to be. You used to be able to get fired at random, and although we're an at-will state, now we can never fire people at random. I have legal on my case all the time saying, "No, you can't." It's very difficult to do that now because we have HR departments. We didn't have HR departments back then. So it's way different. Whether it's better, worse—what did I enjoy more? I've been able to reap the best of both worlds. I feel very fortunate that I started my career when I did, and I did get to work for all these guys and see the business, how it was run back

then, and I feel very fortunate now that I've returned to the place that, as I wrap up my business, I'm learning a whole new type of business, which keeps me on my toes, because it's easy to get burnt out after 36 years no matter what you do. So that keeps me on my toes. So, I hope that didn't skirt the issue.

ELLIOTT SCHECTER

What's the biggest difference between working for tribal government, working for a cruise ship, and for a land-based casino, what do you see the differences as?

Well, I found that every tribal casino is different, whereas most corporate casinos like to be different, but I don't necessarily think they are behind the scenes. Their production and what they roll out to the public might be very different, and usually should be depending on their success. But behind the scenes, it's all still very, very homogenous, very much the same.

Working for tribal, and this is my third tribal gig, and each of the three have been incredibly different, and it's all based on tribal involvement. How much, how much they want to actually be involved in running the operation, and what their actual focus is.

The Seminoles, the focus was to obviously make a buck, but to get as many of their tribal members prepared for operation in the business world, as possible. And here, it's a much different focus. Obviously, they still are very tribally focused, so they don't really meddle much at all in the operation of the casino. It's like having absentee ownership almost, which is weird, but that's almost the way it is, because at the last place, the place in Oklahoma, it was almost a hybrid. They took a very active, very active role in operating the casino—the entertainment authority there. There were meetings on the property on a continual basis, and I was interacting with them weekly, if not monthly, and had to make actual formal presentations to them every couple of months. So, it's been three very different tribal experiences for me. I like when people are engaged, so, I mean, I don't

mind when people want to operate the things they own, but I certainly don't like micromanagers, so it's a tough one.

Poker management, there's a few guiding principles. It's almost like being back in school and *in loco parentis* applies more so than the players would ever admit. What the players want and what they need are two very different things, and a successful poker manager will find a good balance and actually have the nerve to say no once in a while. Because saying yes can mean short-term gains and long-term failure.

What are some examples of that?

Okay, let's take Pot-Limit Omaha, a pretty popular game. It certainly accounts for multiple events at the World Series, and when you look at the largest poker rooms in the world and in the country, usually the game with the biggest pots and generally the biggest players will typically be a Pot-Limit Omaha game. But, if a small room, even, say, ten tables, or certainly five tables, spreads a Pot-Limit Omaha game, it can be destructive, because while the typical no-limit game would be one and two or one and three blinds, or even two and five blinds, a Pot-Limit Omaha game of the exact same blinds is about three times larger than the equivalent No-Limit game. So, the burn rate in a Pot Limit Omaha game is ridiculous.

No-Limit Hold 'em chews up and spits out players at a pretty good rate—Pot-Limit Omaha does it much faster. So, of course these players who aren't that good see a game with the same blinds and much larger pots, they get attracted to it immediately, and pretty soon, you burn through a whole bunch of your players, and you have no games left. So, biting the bullet, and telling these people, no, they can't have that particular game, is not easy to do, but at least there's a mathematical and business justification for it.

So you want to see players around longer or burn through their money quicker?

I remain in my job because I manage to keep my players here next week, next month, and next year. And, if I'm only worried about today, then there probably isn't much tomorrow for me.

Interesting. All right, anything else you think, any other last words about poker management that people would be interested to hear?

Yes, I enjoy my relationship with the players very much. Remember, poker players are playing each other and not the house, so my relationship with our players is much, much different than that of any other gaming department, whether it's slots or tables or even sports for that matter. I enjoy a very friendly and non-adversarial relationship. I made it a point to get to know a lot of the players in every room I've worked, and cultivated at least a good acquaintanceship if not an actual friendship, and get to know what they like and who they are, simply because we're not taking their money—we're getting a small piece of any pot they play in, but that's it. Otherwise, it's my job to make sure they've always got games to play in. So, I'm their friend and nothing less.

DAVE TORRES

The positive aspects of being a pit boss. Okay, it's gonna depend on the store, and what I mean by that is, if you're in a local joint, you might see some guy who's blowing the rent money, and you know it. "You okay?" "Yeah." "Okay," and, alright, I had wives come in and ask me, like, "Don't give this guy the paycheck, 'cause he's gonna blow it." I have to legally give him the paycheck, so locals, a little different.

When you're in a true resort setting, or higher end setting, the advantages of it is that you play games for a living. It's an exciting time. All the things they market, everything about Vegas—you're in it. And there are some things you might, it's like working at Disneyland. Yeah, you might see behind the scenes, and some of the magic might be gone, but you're still at Disneyland, you know, and it's the same thing here.

And you get all these great stories. So you had to see things you wouldn't see anywhere else. I can't tell you how many money showers I saw—guys throw like twenty thousand, especially at Cosmo, like, off the Marquee thing. They just threw out twenty Gs, you know what I mean, and people

scramble for it, or you're talking to people you would never, you know—my family, we were in L.A., and they caught a glimpse of Kristen Stewart.

"Wow, she was there, she was a block away, and we saw her." And it's just like, "Wow, I'm very lucky, I have gotten to meet a lot of celebrities who know my name."

Yeah.

I'm not saying we're friends, but when they come in the hotel, they ask for me.

So what are they like, what are most celebrities like? Do you like to have them or do you not like to have them?

I love to have them.

Okay.

I love to have them in the right casino because what I think what they're really looking for is normalcy, and if you can give them any semblance of treating them like people, where they don't have to put on a performance. That's why I like private gaming. Like, at the Rio, we had private gaming. Cosmo has private gaming. Private gaming, where you're away from the media—these guys actually become real people. Like Bruce Willis, what a prince. Nobody was like him; what a prince, what a nice guy—joke with people, liar poker for a dollar, you know what I mean. What you would think he's like, he was really like.

And for me personally, I'll give you an example—Floyd Mayweather. For me personally, Floyd has always been a really, really nice guy to me and my dealers, except when his entourage is around, and he has to have a persona. So I like the celebrities when they don't have to have the persona. One of the good things about the Rio is we had shutters, so, like, when Oscar would come in, he'd say, "Close the shutters," and then he could relax and just be a guy from L.A. And that was really nice to get to talk to people like that. It's interesting to talk to people during the last election. I talked to a lot of different people who would say, "Oh, yeah, I had a fundraiser for Barack Obama at my house." "Oh, wow, the president was at your house?"

"I had a fundraiser for Mitt Romney at my business." Well, Mitt Romney, like you know true players. Or, "I'm on Air Force One with the president," I don't—you're the only person I know who's ever been on that plane.

(Laughs) Yeah.

Like, can you get me a coaster from there or something. So it's just interesting—I think that being a pit boss, being in the casino business allows a normal person to get a taste of that A-list celebrity life without being a part of it, without all the nonsense that goes with it. But you get a taste of it. And that is the beauty of it. And you can impact lives.

CHRISTINA GENTILE

So what's the toughest thing about being a pit boss?

Just keeping a balance of fun and enjoyment and knowing when it's crossed that line, and knowing when to pull back and not stop the player, but knowing when that line is being crossed where, okay, this is no longer fun, the player is serious and upset, and now they're chasing their money. You're seeing people at their worst and their best, you know, one minute everything's good, and the next minute everybody's a POS because they've lost a couple hundred thousand, and now it's not fun.

So what do you do in a case like that?

You keep your mouth shut as a dealer. As a floor, you try to express some sympathy, or empathy, you know.

Mm-hmm.

And after that, you keep your mouth closed. You don't want to ignite any further anger with that player, and it'll either end in the player calming down, the game turning around, he wins a little bit, everything's okay, or it ends with the room completely silent, the player upset, and cursing us all out and leaving....

And what was it like being a Wynn employee, how was that different from working for Station Casinos?

I really do not see much of a difference. The closeness, the tight-knit family is a Stations brand, is a Stations creation. But I didn't see that it lacked that at Wynn. There really was not too much difference. It all depends on how you want to fit yourself into that category, that group.

So what was the best thing about being a pit boss? What was the best part of that job, what made that job worth going in for?

I believe it was just meeting all the different people. The difference with dealing and pit boss, too, is that you do have the chance to meet a variety of people, and you're watching, say like at Wynn, you're watching four games, you can move back and forth between all these players, you know, there's a big difference with dealing. When you're dealing, you have to stay on your game, and the people choose you. On the floor, you choose the people, to some extent, and meeting a variety, a diversity of people at Wynn was really nice.

So what kind of people are Wynn?

They come from everywhere. My goodness, all over the world. The Canadians were really fun. There was some gentleman from Taiwan, one Chinese New Year's—we're playing Baccarat inside the High Limit room, and they taught me so much about their culture.

Really?

Yeah. And it was really nice talking to them.

CHRIS BIANCHI

So what do you think the hardest part about being a pit boss is? What's the toughest thing to do on a daily basis?

The toughest thing is probably trying to accommodate a customer the way they feel they should be accommodated.

Okay. Any, any examples without naming names, just for kinda general purposes?

Oh, you might have a customer who comes up to you and says, "I want two comps to the steakhouse."

Okay.

And they're just not gambling enough money to receive that sort of comp so you try to offer them something but you're not always going to get a happy customer. They may feel that they are worth a more expensive comp than you are able to give them. It's not easy to accommodate the customers the way they want to be accommodated by.

Another tough part of the job is keeping the workforce motivated in their job duties. Whether it's dealers being frustrated with the game that they are on or a floor supervisor having a rough go at it with the customers, it's difficult sometimes to find the right words of encouragement to motivate them past their obstacles.

So, how do you motivate dealers? It's a job where it's not necessarily pleasant all the time, you're dealing, people smoking and stuff like that—how do you keep them motivated?

Just try to make light of a situation more than anything. I like to have fun in my pit while still maintaining professionalism. At the South Point the majority of our customers are locals. I pretty much know everyone who's sitting on my tables. After I build a rapport with them where I can joke around a lot, the dealers can get involved in the conversation. I think that if you can calm down your dealer to have fun on the game, there's less mistakes. They're more relaxed, they're more open to talk to the customer. It's just trying to find common ground where they both can enjoy themselves.

CHRIS VAN BUUREN

What they've done recently is they've tried to get rid of the pit manager position in the casinos, so they've now got these floorman hybrid positions, they try and give you a little more leeway in order so that you can, I guess, basically cut out the pit boss position and run not only the pit that you're in, but basically that side of the floor that you're in as well.

So you get to work, I worked the graveyard shift, I get to work at about 3:30 in the morning, we start 3:45. We get the leftovers from all the clubs and the parties when we get to work. You got to get in there, clean up your pit, make sure everything's good to go, check the racks, check the dealers that they've all arrived for work. If anything is wrong, you've got to fix it up. If anybody didn't arrive, you got to let somebody know. Then, basically, just making sure procedures are followed.

We're big on guest service at SLS. We don't have much else, unfortunately, so we are very big on guest service, which is something that I enjoyed doing. I enjoy chatting to people, I enjoy getting to know them. And dealers—make sure the dealers are good, make sure procedures are followed.

I do cards and dice as well, and I run the pit as well, so there's some other ancillary things that're part of your job, but mainly you worry yourself with the money, you worry yourself with the guests, their happiness, and the dealers, that's basically it.

JIMMY WIKE

Can you tell me a little bit about being a casino manager, and what your day is like—when do you get in when you're a casino manager?

I used to get there between eight and nine in the morning, and then I would stay there till seven, eight o'clock at night. Then on the weekends, I would stay later, obviously. On Saturday, I used to go in, in the early afternoon and stay till two, three o'clock. Now, it depends—you know, that changed somewhat.

When I worked at Bally's, I took Mondays off when I could, but a lot of times I worked seven days. When I worked at the Hilton, I took Sunday off, which was kind of bad because I would, I usually wouldn't leave till about two o'clock in the morning.

So, my day off—I didn't want to blow the day off sleeping, so I'd get up early after a few hours sleep. But I was in constant contact, phone contact and I was one of those people—I was actually somewhat of a micro manager for most of the my career, that I wanted to know everything, because I didn't want to hear it from my boss.

When I first became casino manager at Bally's, Dean Herold, who was my boss, called me at six o'clock one morning, and he says, "What happened with so-and-so?"—a customer that had left mad at one o'clock in the morning. And I said, "I don't know." And he says, "You don't know? He's one of our biggest players, he left mad at one o'clock." I says, "Dean, I'm sorry, I don't know."

And I called the shift manager, and I says, “What happened?” He says, “Oh, you know, blah, blah, blah,” and I says, “Why didn’t you call me?,” and he says, “I figured you were sleeping, and I didn’t want to wake you up.” I tell him, “Is it better for my boss to wake me up and tell me what’s going on in the casino than you?” I said, “There’s nothing too small that you can call me with,” and I’m lucky, I can go right back to sleep.

So, I probably am for fifteen years, I’m probably on average getting woke up twice a night, but that was okay. Once again, I would rather know, than not. So anyway if I’m off Sunday, my basic day is I go in around eight, nine, till seven. I always wanted to see at least the management on all three shifts. I was a very visible guy, I was always very comfortable on the floor, I’m comfortable talking to the employees, the customers, etc.

So, typically, if I get there at eight or nine, I see the graveyard boss, talk to him, “What’s going on?” get what’s going for the last few hours. Then, day shift comes in, they usually come in around ten, somewhere around there, ten, ten thirty.

And I would talk to them, “What’s going on?” and then swing shift, they don’t come in till six thirty, seven, but I would always stay to talk to them, you know, just, I wanted to know everything that was going on. I didn’t want to not see it, especially the key members of my team, I didn’t want to ever get blindsided by not having enough contact, that I missed something.

So, like I said, so Monday through Thursday—basically, eight, nine in the morning till seven, seven thirty at night. On Friday, usually stayed till ten, eleven.

And where are you, are you in the office or are you out on the floor?

Well, out on the floor. I mean, during daytime, there’s meetings, you know, you have a lot of meetings. But once five o’clock, everybody’s gone. So, now you’re out on the floor.

16

Advice for Those Starting Out

Each interview ended with the same question: “What advice would you give to a young person starting in the industry today?”

With plenty of experience (in most cases, decades) as casino managers, the interviewees are uniquely situated to offer career advice to those starting out. Given the diverse career paths taken by the interviewees, it is perhaps not surprising that there was not much uniformity about the advice dispensed. A few advised prospective table games managers from entering the field at all; others suggested beefing up their skills in related areas rather than concentrating strictly on table games. The one constant was that, since many of the interviewees broke in, the industry has changed a great deal.

HOWARD DREITZER

I believe what's important is learning a lot about the business. I think spending time working at every level of the business, albeit not as much as used to be required, but it wouldn't be a bad idea to, to use myself as an example, to deal for a while and to supervise for a while, and to try to work as many different positions as you can in the business. Then across the business, if you're interested in a broader management, then work in slots, work in marketing, work in HR, work in IT, or be involved with them.

And to just study; I mean, obviously, nowadays you need a degree just to get the interview, at a minimum, and a lot times in senior positions, they want an MBA or some sort of graduate degree as well. I managed to kind of slip through the knots on that, but I think it's important. If you want to do it now, it'd be extremely difficult without it, and to continue your education as you go along in terms of week and two-week-long management courses at good institutions, and make sure your management

skills are constantly being updated, and technically, to get involved in every level of your business, but particularly in this business is to, one, decide if it's really a business you like.

I mean, not to look at it as a paycheck or a position or power, but do you know the casino business, and is that a business that you want to be in because you like dealing with the atmosphere, with the customers, with the staff that are involved; because if you don't, it'll be a lot more challenging. You'll be challenged by the people underneath you that, you're not really committed, you know, you're just there because you have a degree and you can do accounting, and now—I see a lot of people in senior management now that really have no empathy with our customers or business or desire. They'd be just as happy working at an insurance company the next week. So I think it's a unique business in the sense of, it's like entertainment—it is entertainment. And so you just can't, I don't think you'll be successful, truly successful or happy if you're not engaged with it, you don't like the business itself.

CHRIS BIANCHI

You're going to have to sacrifice a lot of holidays. Those doors are open twenty-four hours, seven days a week. So, me coming from a big family back home and always being able to spend time with them on the holidays, I don't get that anymore. Your days off are not a typical weekend. You may have a Monday/Tuesday or Wednesday/Thursday. If holidays don't fall on those days off, you're working them. And I think that's something future casino workers don't realize, unless they grew up in Vegas. It's not a normal job where you're just off Saturday/Sunday, and you get holidays. Of course we get holiday pay, but we're not off. And going back to what we said earlier, expect the unexpected with a customer.

One of the best experiences I had at UNLV was when one professor asked everybody in the class who had a job in hospitality. He made everyone who didn't have a job sit in the back. And the purpose for this was when we

started talking about concepts in class, he wanted those who were in the industry already to talk about their experiences so everyone who wasn't could get a feel about what they're about to get into and how these concepts in class pertain to the real world. It was a great teaching tool to the younger students.

GARY SANOFF

What advice would you give a young person today who's looking to get into the industry?

Now when we say the industry, do we mean the entire industry or just table games?

Let's say table games.

So I would say if you wanted to go into table games, you'd be making the wrong decision.

Why is that?

Because I believe table games is going to get smaller. We have dropped—we are at 146 table games at Bellagio right now. When we opened Bellagio in 1998, we were close to 200, we were 198 tables games. So as you can see, that's an almost 30 percent drop in table games. That's going to shrink smaller and smaller. The virtual gaming is going to be a thing in the very near future. Fifteen year olds, six years from now, are going to be 21, and be at gambling age. What do they want, what do we look at when we go to conferences and when we look at what they want? Let's go to the pool, give them a tablet. When they check into the hotel, put on a deposit their money, load it into their computer, let them gamble it at the clubs, let them gamble at the pool, let them gamble wherever they want. So table games, itself, going to a live table game is going to shrink. It's never going to go away, by the way, I don't believe it will. I just think it'll get smaller and smaller. So when you say, what would be my advice, I wouldn't get into it. There are huge opportunities still in the industry, but table games is not the way to go.

Where do you think the opportunities are?

I think marketing is a good opportunity, and believe it or not, I think analytics is even the biggest way to go. Being in this for 36 years, I had to learn, we never used Excel spreadsheets, we never used PowerPoint presentations—had to learn all that. These people coming out of college know how to do this backwards and forwards. My street smarts growing up in New York helped me a lot in a business when it was run by individual owners. Now that it's run by big corporations, not so much. So, analytics is a huge part of it, and analytics fall into different categories. There's casino analytics and there's finance analytics, and that would be a good opportunity for a lot of people. A finance degree would go a long way.

ELLIOTT SCHECTER

Well, the advice I'd have is, at this point, I don't know if I could recommend it. I'm almost positive that live dealing will eventually be phased out.

Really?

Yeah. The electronic tables are getting really good. Certainly amongst the high-end players, if there's a universal complaint about the game of poker, it's the fact that they have to have dealers dealing it.

Okay.

They insist on having dealers, but they treat them with disdain and very little income. They get very little tips nowadays. Deriving an income from poker as a dealer would basically have you in a spot like here, where our dealers make very good money. The further you are away from Las Vegas, and, the better off and better chance you will at actually generating an income dealing the game.

Poker dealing in Las Vegas is certainly not the way to go. I would certainly recommend California and Florida, Washington, even Ohio, Maryland—all the new, and newer gaming markets, so to speak, a much better chance. There's many—I mean, Philadelphia, I mean all these places have large

poker rooms, and obviously California has a ton of small poker rooms. These are states where labor laws are much different—obviously, Nevada is not a particularly pro-labor state, and the current gaming model, especially for poker in Nevada, is for almost entirely all part-time staff.

So if you're looking to actually generate a decent income, and at least have a chance at benefits and a decent lifestyle, you're probably better off not in Nevada.

CHRIS VAN BUUREN

To be honest with you, I would tell them to find a different vocation, try to find something that they really could probably make more of a career out of, because the gaming industry is a very fickle industry in that if you—let's start from the beginning—if you don't know anybody in this industry, it's very hard to find a job, period. If I didn't know Greg McCurdy, who was able to give my resume to the right table games people, I probably wouldn't have my job today.

I know for a fact that if I didn't have a friend who worked in surveillance at Mandalay Bay, that I wouldn't have gotten that job either. When I spoke to the vice president of security/surveillance over there, and said to him, “Why do you do that, why do you have nepotism in this industry?” He said to me, “Because that's how we've always done it.” I said, “But if you didn't have my friend here, you would've missed out on a great employee like me, and I promise you I'm a great employee,” and he said, “Well, that's just how it is.” So first of all, it can be very difficult to find jobs in this industry. Secondly, it's going to be very hard to keep those jobs because there's more casinos coming and I'm not sure Las Vegas can handle more casinos. I don't think with all the other casinos around the country, we don't have the influx of people that we used to. So I think at some point in time, the casino bubble has to burst in the U.S. I feel like there's going to be a lot of closures or even more closures of casinos than there have been already. So I don't think casinos as an industry can last in the shape and form that it is right

now for a very long time. I think there's going to be some downsizing eventually.

If you do feel like the casino industry is *it* for you, I feel like you should get some good hands-on experience right from the very beginning. Start dealing. Don't be a MAPer. In my opinion, the MAP program is great, but it doesn't give them hands-on experience of what the gaming side of the casino is. And I think it's a very big part of it.

That's the Management Associates Program?

Yeah, the one that they started at MGM—I think Steve Wynn actually started it many years ago, but the MGM have really taken over, and they've got a lot of young leaders in there that've done amazingly well.

If I could give one suggestion or one little bit of advice is, get in on the ground floor, go and deal for a little while. I'm not saying make your career out of dealing, because it's a tough career to do, but you need to get some hands-on experience about how things work on the gaming floor. Go and be a slot host, and find out how things work in the slot department. Maybe go be a cage cashier for a while. If there was a program that had done that, that had taken some UNLV graduates or hotel management graduates, or gaming school graduates, and said, okay, we're going to put you in a unit, and we're going to give you six months in every department. We're going to train you how to be a dealer for six months, then we're going to train how to be a dealer for six months, then we're going to train how to be a slot attendant for six months, and get some really great fundamental knowledge about how a casino really operates. I think that would help this town a whole lot more, because I don't feel like having people who go straight from a graduate program into a management program at one of these casinos really gives them the grounding that they would require to be a successful, let's say, casino manager at some point in time, or even a general manager who is going to basically have to run the casino as well.

So stay away or get your hands dirty, I guess. That's very important for me, because, really, that's what I did. I've enjoyed my time in casinos. I studied

law when I was in South Africa, and I am a qualified lawyer. I graduated in South Africa, but I never took the bar, and I haven't practiced a day in my life. So, and that was really, the thing that I wanted to do all my life was be a lawyer, and it didn't work out. I decided to go into gaming, and I've not regretted one single day that I've been in gaming. So it's an awesome career, but there's a lot more downs than what there are ups, unfortunately.

CHRISTINA GENTILE

Just think of that position as a learning process on your way up. Don't stay in that position. Get your degree. It's a fine job, but it's not a forever job. Standing on your feet all those hours, every day, it takes a toll on your body. Having that pressure of taking care of your games, taking care of your dealers, and pleasing your boss, and all the pressures from up and pressures from below, you know, that pit boss is a middle ground for pressures. Another thing is, when you're in that spot, your friends, your coworkers—you have to look at them also as someone you have to be aware if they're stealing, and that's a hard perspective to have.

Really?

To go in, and here's your friend dealing on her game, and you're her boss for the night, you know, you're watching her game. To look at her and think, "How is she stealing?" You know, it's a hard position to be in.

JOE FRIEDMAN

I'd tell them it's a people business. It's, you have to be able to relate to people at their worst. What served me real well is that I treat, I've treated customers, big and small, understanding their point of view, and understanding where they're coming from, and it's a people business. You know, the gaming, the math, all that stuff is, I don't want to say secondary, but secondary. I mean, you can learn how to deal any game, it's not rocket science. But you have to be able to relate to people, and you have to realize that that's your, that's your customer, and providing that experience, that's

gonna make ‘em come back. Many moons ago, I was at UNR in their casino management thing when it was just starting, when I worked in Tahoe. There’s not much more personal than people reaching into their pocket for that other hundred and bringing it out on the table. And that’s how casinos make money. It’s keeping ‘em in that chair longer, win or lose. It’s keeping in them in that chair longer, and keeping ‘em coming back. You have to, like the guy, like Cavalero said to me, “Are you gonna be nice to people?” I said, “Yeah.” You just gotta be nice to people. I mean, even in, I’ve been called a lot of names in a lot of different languages, and it rolls off your back.

Kids, you know, it’s a customer service business. You see a lotta kids in there. They’re gonna get into the analytics, they’re going to do all this—I’m meeting tomorrow with a former colleague who’s over at MGM corporate now. He was an analyst at Wynn, and with, would always let me know that, as they were throwing me out of meetings, I was right. So, well, they’re gonna be meeting about double deck, you know, the volatility. And, “Hey, double deck’s volatile,” and you know, you’re gonna talk analytics. But, this is a long run. You know, you cannot manage day to day or week to week. It’s, at the end of the year, talk to me, and even that might not be long enough. I kinda said something like that and was asked to leave. So, but he came up, and “Hey, Joe, you know, you were right.” I’m like, “Yeah, I know I’m right.” So, anyway, he’s corporate MGM now, so I’m gonna meet with him tomorrow, but he was a kid who started with analytics. It’s a gaming side that’s—you can learn the gaming side, and you never have seen everything, but it’s a people business. You gotta understand what—gamblers want to be in action. You know, where it’s high limit at, they want to be in action, and they’re gonna be pissed when they lose. And they might swear, and that’s okay, you know, that happens, that’s fine. And you can empathize with ‘em. Like I always tell people, I don’t get to keep this money at the end of the day. I don’t really c-, you can win it all, I’ll order more from the cage. You know, it doesn’t bother me. Don’t sweat the money. It’s like, Mark, Mark Kelly didn’t sweat money. You know, unfortunately the barometer of success and management in the casinos is

too often linked to win/loss, which is outrageous, which is ridiculous, but it is. Peter didn't sweat money. Peter, "How'd we do yesterday?" I know you talked to him, so that's how he talks.

I just—yeah, the money side's good. Is six-to-five blackjack great? I'm sure there's analysts that tell you it's fantastic. What's the eye test, what's it doing to your brand? If people are gonna do it and don't complain, okay. I mean, I'm skeptical. Is one floorman watching eight games a great idea? Maybe—I'm skeptical. I mean, but you walk through casinos with floormen doing nothing or talking to a dead game dealer, well, you've just blown up that whole theory. And that was what I said of Wynn. If you're not gonna do anything, then I could have one person watch twenty games—what's the difference?

No, it's, be nice to everybody. And even when you're in my position—I just, the reason I got a job at MGM is because I was nice, I've been nice to people all these years, and they know, 'cause it's a small business. I'm travelling internationally, you know, nationally and internationally for Gaming Partners, it was crazy. You're about two degrees of separation from every single person in the business, which was nuts. Salesmen couldn't believe, in Europe and in Macau. I mean, I'd be in Macau—within five, you know, the sales guy'd be like, "Jesus, you guys just met, and in five minutes, you guys have been lifelong friends." I go, "Cause we're all from the same place."

Yeah.

We've all worked for the same people, have the same, you know—I was in France in a casino at, Casino d'Uriage up in the French Alps. They didn't even speak English, and we knew each other.

(Laughs)

It's crazy, but it all comes back to, I need a job at MGM. And people are like, "Oh, yeah, Joe's a good guy." And, 'cause you never know who's gonna be your boss today, and who's gonna be working for you tomorrow, because there's the guys running two, three of the MGM casinos—all worked as

dealers at the Hard Rock for me. It helps, you know, you never know who you're gonna meet, on what side, going up or going down. But it's, I hope the business opens up to be more talent-based.

RUSSELL TERBEEK

You know what, you got to learn every game. I mean, I dealt every game, including Pai Gow tiles, which a lot of time and work to deal. But learn every game.

There are also game protection seminars now for people who want to learn. There are guys like Mike Joseph and Bill Zender that hold seminars. Dennis Conrad, from Raving Consulting, and George Joseph. I've been at seminars from all those guys at one time or another. Get to where you're proficient at the game. Get to where you know how people cheat the game. Make sure you're protecting the game, go to these seminars, that'll open your eyes.

We send some of our supervisors to Mike Joseph's classes. Mike holds them at the Stratosphere, which is our property, and we send our surveillance people, or our new supervisors, that sort of thing. It's a full-week course. It's eight hours a day for five consecutive days. They come out of there and they are just amazed. All the stuff that Mike demonstrates—it's amazing. Mike does a faro shuffle, do you know what that is?

No.

He actually controls every card in the deck. He will deal poker hands to where you've got a full house, you got four of a kind here, you got a higher four of a kind there, then a Royal Flush over there on another hand. Collect all of the cards, shuffle them, and spread them out, and they're all in perfect beginning order again. I mean, Mike is that good, and he does it on a surface like a desk top, not on a felt. So he controls every card. Mike is an incredible guy if you get a chance to get to know him. But I send our supervisors to those type seminars where they can get exposed to a wide variety of things to learn.

And there's also the management side to the business. You got to start thinking like management, as far as what games to open depending on business levels. And there are different management and supervisor manuals. Vic Taucer wrote some manuals and there are others. So there are different ways of getting knowledge. There is so much stuff that is in print and on the web now. I just happened to come across a dozen people that helped me in my career that were key people in the industry. I just ran into one after the other, after the other and I was like, wow, God put them in my path for a reason. I believe that. So just get as much knowledge that you can, and dig in, learn craps, learn everything you can. Ask questions. If you don't get good answers, ask someone else. You can even Google it now.

And my philosophy is that God blessed me with good friends that brought me up in the business and now I try to do the same for others who want to learn.

In retrospect, I have to say that I grew up in the gambling business in the late seventies and into the eighties. What was interesting is that we all read the headlines in the newspapers and we all saw the stories on the TV about the mob and bodies that were found in the desert. We even went to the Stardust to see Frank Rosenthal's sports show once in a while. So you had all this stuff happening around you in Vegas. But it wasn't until the movie *Casino* came out that I was able to put it all together. Wow! What a time it was way back then. I have to tell you, *Casino* is one of my favorite movies of all time. I was there.

BILL ZENDER

Well, I tell them that they should go into marketing. I think that getting a background in marketing would be a good thing. The business in general—I started out by getting my Hotel Administration degree at UNLV, but nobody had a college degree when I started in gaming. Most people didn't even have a high school diploma. I remember when I worked at the Maxim on the floor, when I first started out, it was, "Hey, college boy, come here." I

had a four-year degree in Hotel, but I would suggest a Communications major as another idea. The reason why Communications is because casino employees need to deal with the public. Eventually, we're going to get down to totally digital games, so you're going to be hiring people not because they can get around the layout through their dealing technique, but because they're going to be standing on a game pushing buttons, and market to the customers. I think that's the directions table games are going. I'm surprised that the digital table games have not caught on yet, because I figured that by the year 2010, the majority of games would be digital, and they're not. It's a good thing, I think. I still have my own beliefs, I'd really like to see the old days where you deal the handheld games. I did a seminar today for the MGM properties, and I found out that they don't have pitch blackjack anymore. The double decks that they have, they're dealing them from a shoe, which defeats the purpose. Blackjack players view it as a shoe game whether it's eight decks, six decks, or two decks, it's still a shoe game—the cards are dealt face up. Where, a pitch game, the players can pick the cards up and hold them. So I think some gaming properties are really missing the opportunity, they're losing a niche. I do believe that somewhere here, probably about the time I retire, is that we'll see all digital games. There'll be all digital, you won't have to have a hole card peeking device, you won't have to have playing card inventory, you won't have to have a dealing shoe, you won't have to have a shuffle machine, you won't have to have an intelligent shoe—everything will be right there on the table, and you'll have instantaneous player tracking, which is what all the casinos really wants, and you can put a human being on the table to communicate and market to the table game players.

RON SACCINO

I wouldn't do it.

Okay, why not?

I wouldn't send my son—now, my son, for example—now, I was a guy that you would call, I had juice, I *was* juice. I got my son when he turned 21, or something like that, I just picked up the phone and got him, I sent him to a dealing school, I didn't want to train him, sent him to dealing school, learned dice, sent him Downtown, got hired at the Union Plaza, and then from the Plaza, I went to a friend of mine, Cheryl at Silverton, and said, "He's got no action, could you?" She hired him at Silverton, and then Jimmy said, "Ron," I said, "Jimmy, I don't want no job at Caesars, I'm not asking you for no job, I would never do that, but my son." He said, "I don't care, Ron, if I'm going out the door; if I find out I'm going out the door tomorrow, you send him to me today," he says, "I'll put him in here." So, he said, "But he's gotta learn how to deal." So he went Downtown, he went to Silverton, dealt about a year, maybe, or so, and then Jimmy hired him. He was at Caesars three years, could never get full time. Now, is that number one negative? They don't want to pay benefits anytime. I defy somebody to get a job dealing—a good job, I'm not talking about a Stratosphere shithole, I'm talking about top five jobs in town or something. I defy somebody to get a top five job and get five days a week, I defy them. It don't happen. They got people working five days a week, those are the first hires. Anybody new, it's extra board. And what they did to offset that years ago, they wouldn't allow you to work two different jobs—conflict of interest, they'd call it, whatever stupidity that is, but today, no problem. You want to work here and there, three days here, two days here—fine, it's up to you, no problem, because they all do it. They don't want to pay the benefits. Where does that take a young person, you know what I mean?

Mm-hmm.

It's not about skills, like it used to be in the old days. You know, if you were a good dice dealer, if you got fired or quit or whatever, you'd be hired in a week or so, if you were good, if you can deal. And you had all these private owners. Now, you get hired at an MGM property and get fired, well, there goes ten, fifteen joints. Same thing with Harrah's or whatever.

So, it's not what it used to be, it's not a good job anymore. You're one step above a porter. The tips are taxed. There's only a few good jobs here, and there's stress—you might not think so, there's stress, because everybody is on thin ice, including CMs. In the old days, if you were a CM, you didn't report to anybody, you made a decision. I didn't care if it was a comp over there or hiring this one over here, or doing this one over here—you did it, you ran the show, you know what I mean? Whether it was a customer you're giving credit for—you ran the show. Today, it's not that way. People complain about you, all the way up until GM. You're on thin ice.

JIMMY WIKE

If they really have aspirations, they really need to understand math. If you don't understand math—you know, the people that used to, every time the house would have a bad day, a week, a month, or a cycle, the ones that got the most excited were the ones that didn't understand math. And that's, that's what it is. Listen, if you flip a coin ten times, you might get six hits. But if you flip a coin a hundred times, you're not gonna get sixty hits. And if you flip it a thousand times, you're not gonna get six hundred hits. And math always trues up. So, you have to understand that, and you'll be able to sleep at night if you do. Obviously, when you understand math, you also have to know that you also have to do your due diligence, if somebody wins, you have to make sure, is everything on the up and up, because you don't want to look stupid if somebody's taking advantage of you some other way.

But, and I would recommend everybody deal every game before they consider going into management, because it gives you a level of comfort. I was fortunate in that I got to deal the four main games. This was pre-Caribbean Stud Poker, Let it Ride, and Three-Card Poker. I was fortunate that I got to deal all those games insomuch as that I always had a level of confidence when I was watching action. And I was always the student of the game, you know, whatever game I was dealing, I always wanted to

know everything about it and how you cheated, and how this, and how that. So, it just gave me a comfort level that I didn't have to depend on somebody else to tell me or explain to me what was going on when somebody's winning a million dollars. You know, I didn't have to say, "What are they doing?" I knew what they were doing.

So, learn as much as you can about math, learn as much about the games as you can, and, unfortunately in this day in age, be as HR fluent as you can because the job has migrated to the legal aspects of employee interactions. The last couple years that I worked, I just spent an inordinate amount of time with the finance boys and human resources. You know, the finance, everything's numbers, and especially for the big corporations, everything's numbers. So, you spend an awful lot of time with finance and human resources. I just happened to be one of those guys that liked being on the floor.

You may have noticed I've been talking steady for two hours here, so—you know, I enjoyed that aspect of it, but then there's human resources. People get in so many jackpots by saying the wrong thing. Everybody is so sensitive, and especially if they're under duress of any kind. You say the wrong thing, they're in human resources, and so, the more you know about human resources, the more you can keep yourself out of trouble. That's as a supervisor, a pit manager, a shift manager, casino manager, VP—you know, whatever you want to call it.

People put you in spots, and you don't even know you're getting in a spot. If you're a relief supervisor, and a dealer tells you, a female dealer tells you that the regular floorman, "He kinda brushed up against me," you know. "I don't want anything to happen, but I just want to tell you that," or "He patted my ass," or, "He said something inappropriate," or something like that—"I don't want him to get in trouble, but I just want to let you know." And you go, "Oh, okay, alright, okay." Next week, the guy does the same thing, next thing you know, she's up in human resources, and the HR person says "Has this ever happened before?" "Well, yeah, I told Dave," you know, "I told Dave." And now they bring you in there, and they say, "Did

she tell you that this other supervisor did that?" And you say, "Well, yeah." "And you didn't notify us?" Now, you're in trouble.

Yeah.

Big time, I mean big time, especially with any kind of harassment, sexual harassment—any kind of a harassment. There's a lot of traps out there for people, and what they think are offhand comments, remarks, can often turn into things more than that. And that can derail a career quicker than anything. Also, for the men, there's, obviously, there's more women now in the business. For men, I would advise, get married and stay married. More guys get into trouble once they become supervisors over girls. They just do. Get married, stay married and if you have to get divorced, stay away from your co-workers. I understand it's easy to say and hard to do, but they're employees, they're just employees, and you're an employee, too. I was always an employee. I know I had some pretty good positions, but I was an employee. That would be my sage advice, along with, casino first, customer second, employees last. And it's not to denigrate the employees—you just don't want to put the employees ahead of the customer or the casino's best interest.

DAVE TORRES

I would say it is critical to know all positions.

Okay.

You cannot be an effective manager if you don't know a position. So, go deal all the games. I'm not saying you have to deal five years, or twenty years. Go deal all the games and get a feel for what it's like to be on that game with someone blowing smoke in your face—when you're trapped, or they're M-Fing you and telling you about your family, and blah blah, and the boss doesn't have your back. Remember what it's like to be that dealer, and if you can remember what it's like to be that front-line employee, and you really love this business, you love gamblers, right? And I'm talking junkies, pimps, prostitutes, players, gamblers, movie stars—you love these

people, 'cause that's all you're gonna see. Learn that, and then get into it, and then master the math. Most people will not know the mathematics behind the game. They can't tell you the mathematical formula behind theoretical, or the averages, or what hitting soft seventeen, or standing on soft seventeen—how that changes the percentage. Six to five blackjack shouldn't even legally be called blackjack.

Yeah.

It shouldn't. But nobody realizes how much the percentage changes. We're not even playing the same game now. And so you really need to understand the math. And, if I had my way, I'd have every single one of my bosses lose a paycheck or two—the whole paycheck, gambling, to get a feeling for what a gambler goes through.

That makes sense.

The old—take a look at all the successful people. Benny Binion, Jackie Gaughan, Mike Gaughan, Steve Wynn—these guys were really gamblers. Bob Stupak, they were real gamblers, okay. Gary Loveman is not a gambler. He's not, right? Gary Loveman is not a gambler. I don't even know if Jim Murren is a gambler, you know what I mean? But I know Steve does, and I know these guys understand. Anthony Marnell is not a gambler, but Tony was a gambler. Not now, but he understands that rush, that feel, what they want. Make me feel important, right?

So, to a new boss, I would say, make sure you understand what it's like to be a dealer. Number two, read some biographies of Walt Disney—Walt Disney, key among them.

Okay.

And when he was going broke with Disneyland, how he still refused to compromise on, and understand, what excellence gets for you. And then read any part of Bill Zender, and understand time and motion, right? And know two principles: management by walking around, and making me feel important. If you can make your guests and your employees feel important—right to the top, right to the top. But you gotta listen. You gotta listen, so.

CHRIS TONEMAH

Whoa. Go to college and become a statistical analyst. (Laughs)

(Laughs)

I mean, seriously, because there's not that pride in dealing anymore. Even other properties—Wynn, MGM, Harrah's, all those other properties—there's not that camaraderie, there's not that pride. I would direct them into marketing, statistics analysis, credit. If you're going to get into this business, it's best that you know all the games. When I say all the games, I mean roulette, dice, baccarat, blackjack—anything else you can learn, learn it, inside and out, because the day of the professional dealer, it's not there anymore. A floorman—more and more responsibilities are going to be attached to your position, and it's very hard to have game protection. It's very hard to instill integrity of games to people that can't communicate to you—that's my property....

I know no one is happy in the gaming industry anymore, really happy as a dealer. And that's sad, it's really sad, there's no camaraderie like there used to be, no family.

That's too bad.

Yeah it is, it really is. But I love my job because I like the people I work with—my floormen, I love them. Some dealers I'm very close to because I broke in with them, and some of them are still dealing and loving it; some of them were dealers with me and now they're floormen. And it's a beautiful part of the community, it's a small community still, but it's very cliquey now, which is sad.

CLIFF CONEDY

Well, they should know their job, and take it seriously. At one time, dealers were professionals at what they did and knew how to deal the game and service the customers. They became dealers when anybody could go to school and come out, and had no clue of how to deal whatever game, be it blackjack, roulette, craps, or whatever, and they had just the basics. They

get out of school and they happen to land a job, but they didn't take the profession seriously until maybe they lost a few jobs or they just never got it, but like you said, talk about sweating money—never sweat the money, 'cause it's not your money. They put pressure—that was one thing I liked about the MGM Grand, their philosophy was never sweat the money, never let 'em see you sweat. Keep 'em in the seats and we'll get the money.

Mm-hmm.

'Cause, you know, customer service was their focus, and that's what I liked about working. The Imperial Palace was different. Ralph, he'd look at the numbers, and they call you on the phone, "Don't come in on days, come in on grave." They'd shake up the pit managers, shift managers as if we have something to do with the money being lost. And it's, they found out through study and time that if you just keep the customer happy, keep 'em playing, keep 'em in the seats, that nine times out of ten, they're gonna win the money or win it back. I've seen 'em get on a plane and go to the airport —miss the plane, come back, and lose it all. And sometimes, by design, or sometimes it was just by happenstance.

Contributors

CHRIS BIANCHI

Chris Bianchi, originally from Peru, Illinois, earned his degree in hotel management with a specialty in casino management from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas in 2002. While still at UNLV, he started at the Barbary Coast as a dealer and worked his way up to floor supervisor. He opened the South Coast (now the South Point) as a pit manager in 2006, and has been with the South Point ever since. He has also earned a master's degree in hospitality management from UNLV.

CHRISTIAAN VAN BUUREN

Christiaan van Buuren is a casino professional with over 19 years' experience in several international casino markets including South Africa, Europe, Asia and America. Christiaan originally hails from Johannesburg, South Africa where he cut his teeth in accounting, development and the operations of several large casinos. His travels have taken him as far afield as South Korea where he was employed as a casino consultant for a premier Asian casino and across Europe where he was involved in the setup and installation of several gaming operations for Casinos Austria International GmbH. He now makes his home in Las Vegas, Nevada where he is still very much involved in the casino industry as well as the owner of Triumph Gaming LV, a casino table game development company.

CLIFFORD CONEDY

Clifford Conedy came to Las Vegas in 1973 on a UNLV football scholarship. After two years as a student athlete and a brief professional football career, he returned to Las Vegas in 1976 and started working in hotel security for the Argent Corporation. In 1979, he enrolled at the Jackie Gaughan School of Dealing. He worked various dealing jobs downtown,

and in 1981 He landed his first Strip job working for Ed Torres at the El Rancho Hotel and Casino. Over his 30 plus year career in the gaming industry he worked as a dealer, boxticker, floor supervisor, pit manager, shift manager and casino host. He retired from the gaming industry in 2008. In 2010, he started a residential home inspection business. Today he spends the majority of his time as a Volunteer Ambassador for the Nevada Donor Network, promoting awareness about organ and tissue donations.

HOWARD DREITZER

Howard Dreitzer is a native of Miami Beach, Florida. Since then he and his wife Alana have lived all over the world and now spend their time between Australia and various locations in the U.S. Howard started his casino career in 1975 in Las Vegas as a craps dealer. He then went to Atlantic City in 1980 and held various management roles up to Chief Operating Officer. He then went to New Orleans as COO with Harrahs and then to Australia as SVP Australia for Hilton. His next post was in Florida as COO for the Seminole Tribes gaming operations. He is now consulting for various companies involved with gaming.

JOE FRIEDMAN

Joe Friedman has been very fortunate to be involved with some of the most iconic and successful operators and brands in gaming during his career, and is proud to have traveled the globe on behalf of his employers and maintained leadership roles in both the casino and the vendor side of the gaming industry. His passion is creating and executing the ultimate customer experience by anticipating customers' needs and delivering an experience that exceeds their expectations.

CHRISTINA GENTILE

Christina Gentile grew up in California and started working in the gaming industry in Ely, Nevada's Hotel Nevada. She initially worked in the casino

cage before transferring to table games. After dealing for two years at the Hotel Nevada, she moved to Las Vegas, where she worked at the King 8 (now Wild Wild West), where she was promoted to floorman. After six years at that property, she moved to Boulder Station, where she rose to the rank of pit manager, and later Red Rock. Following her stint at Red Rock, she worked at Wynn Las Vegas.

RON SACCAVINO

Ron Saccavino arrived in Las Vegas around 1971, when the Las Vegas Club was offering to train crap dealers if they signed a contract to stay employed with them for one year. He went on to deal at the Landmark, Hacienda and Riviera before going into management at places like Lady Luck, Paddlewheel, Royal and Flamingo. Saccavino then opened a dealer school and started promoting blackjack tournaments on cruise ships and casinos. (He originated mini-blackjack tournaments.) Saccavino then started The Dealers Employment Agency and a temp service for dealers, another industry first. He published *The Dealers News*, a newsletter for the dealers that listed tip levels for Las Vegas casinos. He is now retired from the gaming industry.

GARY SANOFF

Gary Sanoff is the Vice President of Table Games at Aria. Sanoff is responsible for providing overall strategic leadership and direction for the Table Games division, including the poker room and race & sportsbook. He also serves as a member of our Operating Committee. Sanoff is a well-established veteran of the casino industry, possessing more than 30 years of experience in table games. He began his career in 1984 as a table games dealer at the Desert Inn. In 1998 Sanoff joined Bellagio's opening team as a table games floor supervisor. He served in numerous management positions, and in 2013 Sanoff earned a promotion to director of table games, where he was responsible for the management of Bellagio's table

games operations. He spends much of his free time giving back to the community by volunteering at Three Square Food Bank and other local non-profit charities.

ELLIOTT SCHECTER

Elliott Schecter has worked in the gaming industry since 1993 and has spent almost all of that time in poker. After working as dealer and supervisor on a coastal casino cruise ship, he moved to Nevada in 2003 to become a poker shift manager at the Reno Hilton and then the Palms Casino Resort in Las Vegas. In the summer of 2008, Mr. Schecter was named poker room manager as part of the opening team at Downstream Casino Resort in Quapaw, OK. This was his first position in tribal gaming. In 2011, he was named Poker Room Manager at Snoqualmie Casino just outside Seattle, WA. He currently is the poker room manager at Hollywood Casino Toledo in northwest Ohio. Also, he currently writes a monthly column for *Ante Up Magazine* titled “Call the Floor,” which answers players’ questions regarding rules and procedures

RUSSELL TERBEEK

Russell Terbeek graduated from Gannon University and moved to Las Vegas in 1978. He transferred down to Laughlin seven years later to work at the Edgewater and later open up the Colorado Belle Hotel & Casino. He worked his way up from a three-game dealer all the way up to Table Games Shift Manager during his 15 continuous years with Circus Circus. After that, Russ was employed in management positions at different properties on the Las Vegas Strip, several properties in Laughlin and a few California Indian casinos. He currently is employed at Arizona Charlie’s Casino and Hotel on Boulder Highway in Las Vegas as Director of Casino Operations.

CHRIS TONEMAH

Chris Tonemah was born and raised in Arizona. Route 66 was the road that ran through her small town. The road she chose took her to Flagstaff, where she majored in Early Childhood Education. She then moved to North Carolina where her husband served in the United States Marine Corps. When his tour of duty was up, they both moved to Nevada. A friend who had worked in Reno and became a dealer and talked Tonemah into trying it. She began her career in gaming at the Four Queens in Downtown Las Vegas as a dice shill, before becoming a full-time dealer. She then moved on to MGM Grand before the November 1981 fire. From there, she moved to Caesars Palace, where she worked as a dealer and a floorperson. Her latest career move was to The Venetian/Palazzo, where she is currently a pit boss.

DAVID TORRES

With over 25 years of experience in gaming, David Torres worked his way up from dice dealer to director of table games. From the El Cortez to The Cosmopolitan, David has enjoyed working for a variety of properties that give him remarkable insight into the nuances of table games. He is an accomplished gaming executive with a strong track record of growing and improving the profitability, performance, and value of companies within the gaming and resort industry. He possesses extensive experience in strategic partnerships, high impact team building, and business development. Enjoys leading under-performing or new properties to peak efficiency and profitability by providing strategic, operational, and executive leadership for all areas of operations. He is highly proficient in game protection, time and motion theory, advantage play, budget preparation, analysis, staffing, casino floor layout, recruiting, Mobile/Forbes Standards and behavior training, priming, player tracking, Title 31 compliance, and succession planning.

ED WALTERS

Ed Walters came to Las Vegas from New York City in 1959 at the behest of a few “special people.” Walters worked at the Sands Hotel and Casino for many, many years. For the first few months he also worked at the Fremont Casino with legendary casino manager Bobby Ayoub to get to know the casino procedures used in Las Vegas. In 1968 he joined Dean Martin in moving down to the Riviera Casino to help protect his points. Walters worked a short time on special projects at Caesars Palace and the Tropicana before returning to the Sands in 1980 as assistant casino manager for a short time. Walters retired from the hotel/casino industry in 1982. In addition to his casino work, he has been a consultant and advisor to some special people.

JIMMY WIKE

Jimmy Wike is practically a Las Vegas native, having lived in Southern Nevada since 1958. He has been a witness to and part of the evolution of gaming from the mob heyday to its present incarnation. He has worked in numerous capacities in a number of casinos culminating in serving as vice president/casino manager at Bally’s, Paris, the Las Vegas Hilton, and Caesars Palace. He also served as president of the board of directors for the Nevada Pari-Mutuel Association from 2001-2010. He’s been involved with casino design, having designed the floor layout for Paris Las Vegas and implemented the Million Dollar Blackjack tournament at the LV Hilton, and was instrumental in developing the Pussycat Dolls Pit at Caesars. While at Caesars he instituted the highest “off the street” betting limits for blackjack, craps, and roulette in the world. He has been retired since 2010.

BILL ZENDER

As former Nevada Gaming Control Agent, casino operator, professional card counter, and present gaming consultant, Zender has been involved in various areas of gaming and hospitality since 1976. As a member of JMJ, Inc., Zender was an owner and operator of the Aladdin Hotel/Casino, and

has additional operational experience in card room casinos in California and is considered an expert in Asian gaming. Besides his practical gaming experience, Zender holds a Bachelors degree in Hotel Administration and a Masters in Business. Zender has penned a number books including *Pai Gow Without Tears* , *Card Counting for the Casino Executive* , *How to Detect Casino Cheating at Blackjack* , *Advantage Play for the Casino Executive* , *Casino-ology 1 & 2* , and is a monthly contributor to *Casino Enterprise Management* magazine. In 2014, Zender was presented the Life Time Achievement award at the World Game Protection Conference. Presently Bill Zender is the owner of Bill Zender and Associates.

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