Top of Form

Detailed Briefing: Effective Bet Sizing in Poker

This briefing document summarizes key principles and practical strategies for effective bet sizing in poker, drawing primarily from "You're Sizing Bets WRONG. Here's the Simple Fix." The core message revolves around understanding opponent tendencies (fast play, capping) and adjusting bet sizes for both value and bluffs to maximize expected value (EV).

I. Overarching Principles of Bet Sizing

The fundamental problem for most players is a lack of understanding regarding *why* they choose a particular bet size and *what it's supposed to do*. Many are "just trying to stay balanced but they don't even know what that means." The core approach advocated is to "reverse engineer the right size by asking just one or two simple questions."

The primary goal of bet sizing is not just balance, but exploiting opponent tendencies. This often means **value and bluff sizes should be different**, and sometimes **different sizes when they should be the same.**

II. Flop Sizing Strategies

The key to flop sizing is determining if your opponents are likely to "fast play" (raise their strong hands and call with their weak hands).

A. When Opponents Will Fast Play (Wet & Dynamic Boards)

* **Characteristics:** Boards that are "wet and dynamic" have "a lot of draws out there" and the "nuts are likely to change on the turn." This makes strong hands vulnerable, encouraging opponents to fast play.
* **Strategy:** "Choose the biggest size where opponents will raise the strong stuff and call it the weak stuff with both our value and our bluffs."
* **Value Hands:** You want to encourage opponents to put in more money with hands you dominate or that are drawing thinly/dead (e.g., "pocket sixes or ace highs"). You also want them to raise their strong hands to build the pot.
* **Bluff Hands:** By choosing a size that encourages them to raise their strong hands, you get clarity. If they just call, their range is "weak somewhat capped," making future bluffs more profitable.
* **Multi-way & 3-bet Pots:** The more players in the pot, the smaller the relative bet size needs to be to achieve the same goal.
* **Multi-way:** "The more multi-way it is the bigger the pot the smaller we're going to have to go to incentivize him to raise the strong stuff and call it the weak stuff." (e.g., half pot heads-up might become one-third pot or smaller multi-way).
* **3-bet Pots:** Similar to multi-way, the "absolute size of the pot is going to influence their decision a lot more than relative size." A default starting point for a 3-bet pot might be "my default usually about one/third pot."

B. When Opponents Won't Fast Play (Dry & Static Boards)

* **Characteristics:** Boards that are "dry and static" have "not a lot of draws out there" and the "nuts are unlikely to change on the turn." On these boards, opponents are "much more likely to trap."
* **Strategy:** "Start splitting with my value and my bluffs and doing something different." This creates "unbalanced" play, which is fine against human opponents.
* **Value Hands:** "Value wants to go big." The rule of thumb for "big" is to "choose the biggest size that the bottom 10% of the top of their range will call." This targets strong hands that won't fold, playing "for stacks against a hand like ace jack or ace 10."
* **Bluff Hands:** "Bluffs mostly want to check." This is because there's "no way for our bluffs to get our opponent to cap themselves" if they won't fast play. Checking back allows you to "start gaining some more information about our opponent's range."

III. Turn Sizing Strategies

Turn sizing builds upon the flop principles, with added considerations for capped ranges.

A. When Opponents Will Fast Play

* **Strategy:** "Choose the biggest size they raise the strong stuff call with the weak stuff just like on the flop."
* **Rationale:** Even with strong hands like flushes or straights, opponents may fast play a small bet to "not see a four flush run out" or "not want their hand to get counterfeit."
* **Bluffs:** This allows bluffs to "get away" easily if raised, or lead to profitable river bluffs against a "weak somewhat capped range" if called.

B. When Opponents Won't Fast Play AND Are Capped

* **Characteristics:** Opponent's range is "relatively capped" (e.g., strong pre-flop hands are unlikely to be present, or strong flop hands would have raised).
* **Strategy:** "Choose a big size with both our bluffs and our value."
* **Rule of Thumb:** Target "the bottom 10% of the top of their range," which means the biggest size a "weak 10x is going to call."
* **Rationale:** Since they are capped, they won't have many strong hands to raise with, and by going big, you extract maximum value from what they do have, while putting pressure on weaker holdings that will struggle to call on the river.

C. When Opponents Won't Fast Play AND Are Uncapped

* **Characteristics:** Opponents have strong hands they are unwilling to fast play (e.g., due to fear of being outdrawn by your assumed strong range, especially in 3-bet pots).
* **Strategy:** This is where "our value and bluffs split."
* **Value Hands:** "Value wants to go big." They are unlikely to fold strong hands regardless, so maximize extraction. The general guideline for "big" remains "bottom 10% at the top of the range."
* **Bluff Hands:** "Bluffs mostly want to check." Since opponents are uncapped and won't fast play, you can't easily cap them. Checking allows you to "gain a little bit more information before we empty the clip with the bluff." If they check the river, it's a "green light" to bluff.

IV. River Sizing Strategies (Four Scenarios)

River sizing is condensed into four main scenarios, covering "90% of the time."

A. Bluff Big, Value Small

* **Scenario:** Opponent's range is "relatively capped" due to previous small bets/calls that allowed them to raise strong hands earlier.
* **Bluff Strategy (e.g., 7-high on a flush board):** "Go big because we can get a lot of folds on this river." You get credit for the completed draw. Target a size that "get[s] Jack X to fold all of the time."
* **Value Strategy (e.g., Ace-Queen of Spades):** "Go relatively small." The goal is to "get called by a hand like ace jack king jack queen jack jack 10." Since their range is capped, you don't need to go massive to get calls.

B. Bluff Small, Value Big

* **Scenario:** Opponent's range contains many weak-to-medium strength hands that have been downgraded by later cards, and also strong hands that won't fold.
* **Bluff Strategy (e.g., 6-5s on K,A river):** "Just choose an efficient size here go small get hands like tens jacks queens 9x to fold." These hands "have all been downgraded again."
* **Value Strategy (e.g., Pocket Kings):** "This is the situation where we want to empty the clip." Opponents with strong two-pair or strong aces are "not going to fold no matter what" against such a board.

C. Value Medium, Bluff Small or Big (More Rare)

* **Scenario:** You have a strong value hand that you want to get called by top pair, but not so big that top pair folds.
* **Value Strategy (e.g., Pocket Kings targeting Ace-Jack):** "Choose kind of this in between size not the really small size not the all-in size." This targets profitable calls from strong but not nut hands.
* **Bluff Strategy (e.g., 7-6 on bricked draws):Small:** "Be efficient" and "get a print with a small size" by folding hands that are weak and lose to your high card (e.g., Queen-Ten, King-X of spades).
* **Big (All-in):** If you're confident the opponent can fold top pair under pressure, "jamming here can be very very good." This exploits the "medium" value bet size used by your strong hands.

D. Bluff Medium, Value Small or Big (More Rare)

* **Scenario:** Your bluff targets medium-strength pairs that have been downgraded, while strong hands will call any size.
* **Bluff Strategy (e.g., 7-6 bluffing King-Jack/Queen-Jack):** "Go maybe medium here... be efficient and not lose stacks when our opponent has a hand like ace jack on this river but we can still get the jack x to fold."
* **Value Strategy (e.g., Ace-5s or Pocket Deuces):Small:** When you want to get called by weak top pair/high cards (e.g., Queen-Jack, King-Jack, 10) that might call a small bet but fold to a medium or large one.
* **Big (All-in):** When your opponent "can have a lot of strong two pair in their range" (e.g., Ace-Jack, Ace-Four, Ace-Queen, Ace-Ten) and these hands are unlikely to fold regardless of size. This applies especially when you have bottom set against these strong two-pairs. The decision hinges on opponent tendencies and range composition.

V. The "Diminishing Returns" Concept (Deep Stack Play)

* **Observation:** When playing "super super deep" (e.g., 500 big blinds), sometimes "the best value size even if our opponent is relatively capped is really really huge."
* **Rationale:** Beyond a certain large bet size (e.g., 2.5x or 3x pot), the composition of what calls and what folds from the opponent's range doesn't change significantly, even with "egregious sizes" like 5x or 6x pot.
* **Application (Nuts/Second Nuts):** If the opponent's strong hands are calling regardless, "often times choosing this 6x pot-siz bet with value can start to be kind of a cool play." While seemingly excessive, if the call/fold frequencies don't change much, a bigger bet extracts more from the calls. This is particularly effective with "the nuts or the second nuts."
* **Example (Solver-backed):** A $500 bet with pocket deuces (value) was preferred over a $1000 or all-in, but with 6-3 (the nuts), a $2300 (5.5-6x pot) bet yielded significantly higher EV than smaller bets. This "coolering our opponent" for maximum value.

Conclusion

Effective bet sizing in live poker is less about perfect GTO balance and more about understanding and exploiting human tendencies. The core questions to ask are: "Will our opponents fast play?" and "Are they capped?" Based on the answers, you can determine whether to match value and bluff sizes, split them, and choose appropriate magnitudes (small, medium, big, or even extremely large when very deep-stacked with the nuts). This dynamic approach to sizing maximizes EV against human opponents who are driven by fear, absolute chip sizes, and range perceptions.

Bottom of Form