1. What is the fundamental mistake keeping poker players stuck at low stakes?

The primary mistake, as identified by coaching over 100 players, is asking the wrong questions. Players often focus too much on themselves and their own hand (e.g., "Do I have a range advantage?", "What is my minimum defense frequency?", "Am I balanced in this spot?") rather than concentrating on their opponents' actions, tendencies, and potential holdings. Shifting the focus from "I/me/my" to "they/their/them" is crucial for significant improvement.

2. How does focusing on the opponent change pre-flop calling strategy?

When in the big blind as a pre-flop caller, instead of asking self-centered questions like "Do I have a nut advantage?", a more effective approach is to consider how the opponent will react. For instance, after a flop bet, helpful questions include "Will they fold a lot if I check-raise?" This leads to further specific inquiries about their betting patterns (e.g., "Are they range betting for this size?", "Do they split their sizes for weaker hands?"). Understanding opponent tendencies helps determine if a check-raise is likely to generate folds or if a call is a better option, especially against players who are value-heavy with larger bet sizes.

3. What questions should be asked on the turn when facing a bet as a pre-flop caller?

On the turn, an unhelpful question would be "Where am I at in my range?" Instead, the focus should be on the opponent's betting behavior, specifically "Are they over or under double barreling?" To answer this, consider if they always choose this size with draws, or if they might slow down. Also, evaluate if they consistently bet the flop with this size when holding weaker hands. This line of questioning helps deduce if their turn bet is likely to be a value bet or a bluff, informing the decision to call or fold.

4. How does one determine whether to call or fold a bluff catcher on the river?

On the river, discard questions about "minimum defense frequency." The critical question is "Are they over or under bluffing?" To answer this, delve into specifics: "Could they be betting worse for value?", "Are they capable of bluffing in this line?", "Is this size significant?", and "Do they have non-showdown value hands that would naturally turn into bluffs?" By analyzing these factors, such as whether their value hands would typically check back or if they have enough natural bluffs given their betting line, a player can deduce if calling a bluff catcher is profitable. If the opponent is likely under-bluffing, folding bluff catchers becomes the more profitable play.

5. When should a player consider leading on the river after hitting the nuts?

If you hit the nuts on the river, an unhelpful question is "Am I unbalanced if I lead here?" Instead, ask "Will they bet thinly enough if I check?" and "Will they bluff enough if I check?" In live poker, many villains do not bet thinly enough with weaker value hands, nor do they bluff frequently, especially after aggressive lines on earlier streets. If you anticipate that checking will often lead to a check-back, making it less likely to extract value or induce bluffs, then leading out for a chunky size that opponent's weaker value hands (like top pair) would call becomes a more optimal strategy.

6. What's the key question to ask on the flop when opening with a strong hand (e.g., Pocket Kings)?

When opening with a strong hand and getting a call, then facing a check on the flop, avoid asking "Do I have a range advantage?" The more impactful question is "What is the biggest size we can bet where they will raise off their strong shit and still call with their weak shit?" To answer this, consider: "Are they going to play their value fast or slow on this board?", "Will they play their draws more aggressively if we bet smaller?", and "Will they float wider if I choose a smaller size?" This helps determine a bet size that maximizes value by encouraging calls from weaker hands while potentially inducing raises from strong but beatable hands.

7. How does the concept of being "capped" or "uncapped" influence turn betting strategy?

On the turn, discard questions about "What size do I need to bet to protect my hand?" The crucial question is "Are they capped, and if yes, bet big, and if no, bet small?" An opponent is "capped" if their range on the turn no longer contains hands stronger than yours, typically because they would have raised those strong hands on the flop. If they are capped, you can bet a very large size to extract maximum value from the top of their remaining range. If they are "uncapped" (e.g., because a flush draw completed on the turn, and they might have check-called with flushes on the flop), you might bet a smaller size to encourage calls from a wider range of weaker hands while still getting value from their strong hands.

8. What's a helpful mental exercise for determining river bet sizing with value hands?

On the river, instead of asking "What size can I bet to be balanced?", a more effective approach is "Are they going to call a lot or are they going to fold a lot?" To answer this, employ the "inverse" mental exercise: "What would I do here if I had a bluff?" By considering what you'd do if you were bluffing (e.g., small bet for folds vs. large bet for perceived strength), you can gain insight into how your opponent's range might react to different bet sizes. If you conclude that your bluff would be small to get folds, then your value bet should likely be large, as you believe your opponent will call with a wide range. Conversely, if your bluff would be large, your value bet might be smaller. This helps align your value betting strategy with what will maximize profitability based on opponent tendencies.