Poker Briefing: The Power of Small Bets

This briefing document summarizes key strategies for utilizing small bet sizes in poker, drawing insights from "The Bet Sizing Mistake That’s Costing You BIG." The central theme is that counter-intuitively, smaller bets can often lead to significantly higher winnings than larger bets in specific scenarios. The author, a seven-figure cash game earner, emphasizes that "sometimes the biggest edges come from betting tiny."

I. Strategic Small Bet Scenarios:

1. Small 3-Bet Pre-Flop to Isolate a Fish (with Rags Behind)

When playing against a "fish" (an inexperienced player) who opens the pot, and you have "rags" (tight/predictable players) or "pros" (skilled players) behind you, a small 3-bet can be highly effective.

* **Goal:** To isolate the fish and play a heads-up pot in position.
* **Rationale:** "Rags generally play a four-bet or fold strategy; they're not going to do a lot of cold calls." A small 3-bet "shuts out the rags behind us, get to play a pot heads up in position against the fish which is where we win the most amount of money."
* **Exploitation Counter-Strategy:** To prevent "rags" from exploiting this by knowing your small size is weak, include strong hands (e.g., Aces, Kings, Ace-King suited) in your small 3-bet range. This balances your range, making it harder for opponents to predict your hand strength.
* **Exception:** If there are multiple "fish" behind you, a large 3-bet is preferred with strong hands like Aces, as "fish are generally going to be inelastic" and won't exploit your sizing.

2. Tiny C-Bet on an Ace-High Board in a 4-Bet Pot

When you've 4-bet pre-flop and the flop comes Ace-high, a very small continuation bet (10-12% of the pot) can be highly profitable.

* **Goal:** To extract a street of value from weaker, but still strong, hands like Kings, Queens, or Jacks, and to maximize value against top pair.
* **Rationale:** "If our opponent does have a hand like kings or queens or Jacks we don't let those hands off the hook those hands are kind of going to be forced to call one time for this very very tiny size."
* **Turn Strategy:** After the tiny flop c-bet and an opponent call, the preferred strategy is to check your entire range on the turn.
* **Against Aces:** If the opponent has an Ace, they will likely bet, allowing you to stack them. If they check back with Kings/Queens/Jacks, you can then bet small on the river to get additional value.
* **As a Bluff:** If you have a weaker hand (e.g., King-high), checking the turn allows you to fold if they bet (indicating they likely have an Ace). If they check back, you can bluff on the river, as their range is now capped and weak.

3. Small C-Bet in a 3-Bet Pot (as Pre-Flop Raiser)

When you've 3-bet pre-flop and are the pre-flop raiser, using a small continuation bet (30-35% of the pot) on the flop is often optimal.

* **Goal:** To encourage opponents to raise with their strong hands and call with their weak hands.
* **Rationale:** "The bigger the absolute size of the pot the smaller our bet actually has to be to accomplish that goal of getting our opponent to raise the strong shit and call with the weak shit." This size incentivizes opponents to check-raise with strong hands (e.g., sets) and float with weak hands that are drawing thin or dead (e.g., pocket sevens against your set).
* **Bluffing Implication:** This also benefits bluffs, as it keeps the opponent's range wide and weak for future streets, making subsequent bluffs more profitable.

4. Tiny Bet on the Turn When Your Opponent is "Uncapped"

When your opponent's range is "uncapped" (meaning they can still have the strongest hands), a small turn bet is advantageous. While the term "uncapped" is used somewhat loosely here, it refers to situations where the opponent's strongest holdings (e.g., trips on a paired board) are unlikely to have raised on previous streets.

* **Goal:** To extract value from strong but vulnerable hands, and to get weaker hands/draws to continue.
* **Rationale:** "If our opponent does have a hand like Ace 10 King 10 Queen 10 they will often put in more money for us the board is wet our opponents don't like to slow play all the way to the river when they have strong but vulnerable hands here." Betting small also keeps draws and very thin value hands in the pot.
* **Check-Raise Response:** If the opponent check-raises your small turn bet, they "just have trip 10s" (in the given example) and are unlikely to fold, so you should commit to stacking off. For bluffs, you can profitably call with draws.

5. Small Bet on the Turn When Your Opponent Has an Elastic Range

An "elastic" range means your opponent is price-sensitive and will fold easily to large bets.

* **Goal:** To entice your opponent to continue with weaker, price-sensitive hands.
* **Rationale:** "When our opponent has an elastic range we generally want to choose a small size to entice our opponent to continue with those hands that we have drawing thin or dead."
* **Bluffing Implication:** This strategy "allows us to get more value with our Bluff on the turn because our opponent doesn't fold now and number two allows us to have a more profitable Bluff on the river because our opponent just has a bunch of weak shit which cannot withstand heat on the river." Betting big would fold out too many hands, making river bluffs less effective.

6. Small River Bluff

Small river bluffs are highly effective in specific situations, contrary to the common misconception that bluffs should always be large.

* **Scenario A: Opponent has many draws in their range.** When an opponent's range on the river is heavily weighted towards missed draws (due to previous inelastic calls), a small bluff can be very efficient. "We don't think we need to go egregiously large to get our opponent to fold their ace high King high or 3x of diamonds here." Live poker tendencies (calling too wide pre-flop, fast-playing strong hands, calling draws for big sizes) lead to opponents having "too many draws in their range that just are going to be instant check fold without even thinking."
* **Scenario B: Opponent is elastic on the river.** If you've carried an opponent with a wide, elastic range to the river (e.g., by betting small on the turn with a bluff), a small river bluff is ideal. "Often times the best Bluff size is just very very small to fold out the elastic crap and then we just save money when we run into the top of our opponent's range."

7. Small River Value Bet (Against Aggressive Opponents or in Single-Raised Pots)

While a large value bet is often appropriate against passive opponents on the river, small value bets are powerful in specific contexts.

* **Against Aggressive Players:** A small river value bet against an aggressive player can "get them to spaz a certain percentage of the time when they have a hand like a bricked open in straight draw." It looks like thin value, inviting them to bluff-raise.
* **In Single-Raised Pots:** When you "Bink the nut flush" on the river in a single-raised pot, a very small bet can entice even somewhat passive players to call with weaker flushes or top pairs. "I think even somewhat passive players on this River in a single race pot if we go small here are going to put in more money for us when they have a king High Queen High even a 108 High flush or whatever and if our opponent does have a hand like Jack X we're going to get value from that as well."

II. Key Principles and Concepts:

* **"Biggest edges come from betting tiny":** This core principle challenges conventional thinking about large bet sizing.
* **Isolating the "Fish":** A recurring theme is the desire to get heads-up in position against weaker players.
* **Opponent Exploitation:** Understanding how opponents (rags, pros, fish) react to different bet sizes is crucial.
* **Range Dynamics (Capped vs. Uncapped):Capped Range:** When an opponent's strongest hands would have already raised on previous streets, their range is "capped." This often makes bluffs more effective.
* **Uncapped Range:** When an opponent can still hold the strongest hands (e.g., trips on a paired board where they wouldn't have raised earlier), their range is "uncapped."
* **Elastic vs. Inelastic Ranges:Elastic (Price-Sensitive):** Opponents with elastic ranges will fold to large bets easily. Small bets are preferred to keep them in the pot.
* **Inelastic (Not Price-Sensitive):** Opponents with inelastic ranges will call regardless of size (e.g., fish pre-flop, or strong hands that aren't folding). Large bets can be used to extract maximum value.
* **Absolute vs. Relative Pot Size:** The author notes that "absolute Size Matters more than relative size in the pot." This implies that as the pot grows, the *proportion* of the bet relative to the pot might shrink to achieve the same effect of eliciting calls or raises.
* **"Get our opponent to raise their strong shit and call with their weak shit":** This is a consistent objective for many small bet scenarios, both for value and for identifying bluffing opportunities.
* **Balance:** While the strategy promotes small bets, the author emphasizes the importance of balancing ranges (e.g., putting strong hands into small 3-bet ranges) to prevent exploitation by savvy opponents.

In essence, successful poker strategy involves carefully selecting bet sizes based on opponent tendencies, hand strength, board texture, and pot dynamics, often leveraging the power of small bets to achieve specific strategic goals.