Poker Betting Strategy: Eliminating the Medium Bet Size for Increased Profit

This briefing document summarizes key insights from the provided source, "STOP Making This Poker Mistake (Fix This and PROFIT!)" by Maron, focusing on optimizing poker betting strategies, particularly in cash games, by largely eliminating the "medium" bet size. The core premise is that the most profitable bet sizes are either "very large or very small," with only specific exceptions for the medium range.

1. The Core Mistake: The Pervasiveness of Medium Bet Sizes

Maron, a seven-figure cash game player, asserts that using a bet size "somewhere between 1/2 pot to pot" is a significant "leak" in most poker players' games, including professionals. He claims that "over 80% of the time in live poker the most profitable size is either going to be very large or very small." This "middling size" should be "mostly eliminated" from one's game.

2. Strategic Bet Sizing: Maximizing Value and Fold Equity

The primary goal of bet sizing is to either extract maximum value from an opponent's range or generate fold equity when bluffing. The effectiveness of a bet size depends heavily on the board texture, opponent's perceived range, and whether the opponent is "capped" (i.e., unlikely to hold very strong hands).

2.1. Flop Strategy

**A. Small Bet (30-40% Pot): "Entice Raises & Calls"**

* **Purpose:** To encourage opponents to *raise* with their strong hands and *call* with their weak hands. This maximizes the amount of money put into the pot from their entire range.
* **Example (Jack-Nine-Deuce flop, Hero has Pocket Nines):** Betting small allows strong hands (e.g., Jack-Nine, Pocket Deuces) to raise, building a larger pot, while weak hands (e.g., Pocket Eights with a spade, Pocket Sixes with a spade) are enticed to float and continue. If a large bet is made, strong hands might just call, and weak hands might fold, reducing overall value.
* **Context:** Particularly effective in three-bet pots. In single-raised pots, a slightly larger "small" bet (e.g., $20 in a $2/5 game) can still achieve this effect, as it's the "absolute size of the BET than the relative size" that matters.

**B. Large Bet (Overbet, 1.5x+ Pot) or Check: "Dry/Static Boards"**

* **Purpose:** On boards where opponents are unlikely to fold strong hands (e.g., top pair) regardless of bet size, and unlikely to call with weak hands (due to lack of draws or floatability), a large bet (or check) can be optimal.
* **Example (Ace-High board with no draws, Hero has Middle Set):**A small bet won't induce raises from strong hands (they'll just call) and won't get calls from weak hands (they'll fold).
* A medium bet is similarly ineffective.
* A very large bet (overbet) targets strong hands (e.g., Ace-X) that "are not folding even if we overbet here." This extracts maximum value from the limited range of hands that will continue. Checking back is also an option.

2.2. Turn Strategy

**A. Very Large Overbet: "Opponent is Capped"**

* **Purpose:** When the opponent's range is "capped" (meaning they don't have very strong hands, as those would have likely raised on the flop), a very large bet is highly effective for both value and bluffs.
* **Example (Jack-Nine-Deuce flop, Turn is a blank; Hero bet small on flop):** Opponent's strongest hands are now likely single pairs (e.g., Ace-Jack).
* **Value Betting (e.g., Pocket Nines):** A large bet extracts more money from hands like Ace-Jack or Ace-Five of Spades, which are unlikely to fold.
* **Bluffing (e.g., Seven-Six of Diamonds):** A large bet on the turn sets up an "overbet" bluff on the river, forcing many hands that called the turn (e.g., Ace-Three, Queen-Jack) to fold.

**B. Small Bet: "Opponent is Not Capped"**

* **Purpose:** When the opponent's range is *not* capped (e.g., they can have flushes or strong draws that didn't raise on the flop), a small bet again aims to "raise off their strong stuff and call with their weak stuff."
* **Example (Jack-Nine-Deuce flop, Turn is Four of Spades, opponent can have flushes):**A large bet gets flushes to call/raise but folds almost everything else.
* A medium bet is poor as it neither induces raises nor maximizes value.
* A small bet encourages strong hands (flushes) to raise and weak hands (e.g., Queen-Ten of Clubs, Ace-High flush draws) to continue, providing more opportunities for value or bluffing later.

2.3. River Strategy

**A. Large Overbet Bluff: "Opponent's Range is Weakened"**

* **Purpose:** When previous small bets have "raised off" the opponent's strong hands on earlier streets, the river becomes an ideal spot for a massive bluff, as their remaining range is weaker.
* **Example (Small flop bet, small turn bet when opponent not capped, then flush comes on river):** Opponent's strongest hand is likely top pair (e.g., Ace-Jack, King-Jack). A large "big boy Hammer" (e.g., $300-350) bluff is highly effective to get these hands to fold because their sets or flushes would have raised earlier.

**B. Varying Sizes for Value vs. Bluffs (River Balancing, or Lack Thereof)**

* **"No Reason to be Balanced Against People Who Can't Even Spell Balanced":** Maron advises against strict balancing if it's not profitable.
* **Bluffs: Very Large (e.g., 2x Pot or $300):** To get top pair (e.g., Ace-Jack) to fold.
* **Value: Relatively Small (e.g., Pot, $120-150):** With a strong hand (e.g., Ace-Six of Spades hitting an Ace), you want your opponent's top pair (Ace-Jack) to call. A smaller "pot" size can be greedier, leaving less value on the table compared to a very small bet.
* **Inverse Scenario (Value Very Big, Bluffs Very Small):Value (e.g., Set of Kings on Ace River, opponent has two-pair):** Go "very very big 2x pot all in" as two-pair is unlikely to fold.
* **Bluffs (e.g., Missed Gutshot 5-6 Suited on Ace River):** Go "very very small maybe quarter pot or 20% pot" to get weaker hands (Pocket Tens, Ace-Five) to fold, minimizing losses when up against stronger hands.

3. Exceptions: When the Medium Bet Size is Acceptable

Maron identifies two "rare exceptions" where a medium bet size can be strategically beneficial:

**Exception 1: Value Wants Huge/Very Small, Bluffs Go Medium**

* **Scenario:** On the river, when value hands want to go all-in (e.g., Pocket Nines targeting opponent's two-pair on an Ace river) or very small (e.g., Ace-Six of Spades targeting calls from King-Jack), a medium bluff size (e.g., $250-300) can be effective.
* **Purpose:** The medium bluff aims to get hands like Queen-Jack, King-Jack, or Jack-Ten to fold, which might not call a larger bet but would call a smaller one.

**Exception 2: Bluffs Want Huge/Small, Value Goes Medium**

* **Scenario:** On the river, when bluffs have a clear large (overbet bazooka) or very small (quarter pot) option, a medium value bet can be optimal.
* **Purpose:** With a strong value hand (e.g., Pocket Kings on a blank river), the medium size is chosen to target specific hands (e.g., Ace-Jack, King-Jack, Queen-Jack) that are "not folding for 400 450 maybe even $500." This "medium" might still be an overbet but is relative to the bluff sizes, chosen to get specific calls.

Conclusion

Maron's central thesis is that abandoning the common "medium" bet size in poker cash games and instead focusing on either very small or very large bets will significantly increase win rates. This strategy is driven by the desire to either "entice raises off strong stuff and call with weak stuff" with small bets, or to "pile in as much money as possible" from specific ranges with large bets. The medium size is generally suboptimal because it neither achieves the full value extraction/fold equity of large bets nor the range-manipulation benefits of small bets, often leaving money on the table or failing to achieve the desired outcome. Only in specific river scenarios, when balancing between extreme bluff sizes or targeting specific calling ranges with value, does the medium bet find its place.