

Book Review

Indian Casino, E. G. Schaeffer
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The author uses a pseudonym, E.G. Schaeffer, to allow for a more candid dialogue with her readers. The book reveals how prejudices between different cultures create challenges for the manager of a remote Native American casino establishment. A casino, which she describes as resembling those in Nevada during the 1950's, when policies and procedures were established situationally. She is not politically correct, nor does she attempt to be. Rather, she exposes organizational values and operational styles that one would expect to find in a third world Central American dictatorship.

Schaeffer has considerable experience as a floor supervisor in Las Vegas casinos. Additionally, she received a Master's degree in Business from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. While in Las Vegas, she ran into difficult and challenging situations as a result of a casino labor dispute (ala the Frontier). She sought casino opportunities elsewhere, applying for an opening as a casino manager in a Native American casino. Her book describes her story, and is worth the read.

The book is somewhat ragged around the edges, as it does not quite develop as a novel would, with a set of well-defined characters with plot lines leading toward some dramatic conclusion. An established publisher could have assisted the writer in many ways, however an editor could not replicate the personal experience gained by the author. The timeline of the incidences seems to be the best guide through the work, but to the author's credit, she makes the journey through the pages an easy one.

For those who wish to learn more about Indian casinos and want to know more than just about the sins of Columbus and how casinos are the great White Buffalo, there is a need for first hand accounts such as this. Here the author is an outsider but does not try to discern truth from a distance. She is not an insider who has a flag to wave or a desire to harp about past wrongs and sovereignty. However, she is an insider as she was placed in the midst of power structure of a tribe because the tribe needed help with its casino. The tribe was operating at the margins of the law (technically outside of the law), as they did not have a required contract to operate gambling (specifically slot machine gambling) under the rules of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act. The federal government had the power to close them down, however federal agents were reluctant to do so after "raids on illegal domains" had proved somewhat vexing for the U.S. Attorney General outside Waco, Texas. As an alternative, the federal agents would observe traffic from a distance heading toward the casino, and on occasion would intercept trucks carrying slot machines or other gambling equipment onto the reservation.

Schaeffer was formally empowered to run the casino, but not given tribal support to do her job. She had to develop an informal power base on her own, supported solely by her personal expertise. The tribe would make promises regarding her salary as well as securing a job for her husband, a mechanic and slot machine technician. She waited months for the tribe to deliver. In the meantime she was required to hire employees who must be tribal members. Additionally, she disciplined and terminated employees (who were tribal members and often related to tribal board members) for *little* things like drug use on the job, cheating customers, stealing from the till, and failure to appear for work.

Each episode involved a major confrontation in which she thought she might be the one removed from employment. The council did not remove her from her position; however, their treatment of her was basically offensive.

Over the course of almost a year through silent acquiescence, the board condoned what a fraternity would call "overt hazing" of Schaeffer. Personal insults would be direct and not at all subtle. Her personnel controversies led to both verbal and physical threats. Although they never manifested in violence, there were some close calls. To make matters worse, as the closest off-reservation town was 46 miles away, she could only find very Spartan living arrangements on the reservation near the casino.

The story is one of tolerance, job focus, and the author's ability to be effective through controversy. She slowly gained respect although on several occasions she had to threaten resignation and reach the point of packing up all of her (and her husband's) belongings and hitching up the trailer before the tribal board would agree that her performance was what they desired. She hung in there for two years, and left the facility with some sense of accomplishment. The book is an eye-opener and offers a perspective not anti-Native American, but skeptical of tribal leadership. It is not an endorsement for seeking positions in remote Native American casinos. Schaeffer is currently employed as a casino manager in Las Vegas.

Editor's note: *Indian Casino* is about one manager's experience with one Native American Casino. The author was also female which further heightened the cultural differences. The book is certainly not meant to be representative of all Native American casinos, but it does illustrate the problems of working cross-culturally. The book also provides some insights into how to create common ground between a manager and employees despite cultural differences.