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Perfecting the Table Games Dealer: Improving Initial Table Games Dealer Training Curriculum to Create More Versatile Gaming Employees

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Perfecting the Table Games Dealer:
Improving Initial Table Games Dealer Training Curriculum
to Create More Versatile Gaming Employees

By

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Perfecting the Table Games Dealer: Improving Initial Table Games Dealer Training Curriculum to Create More Versatile Gaming Employees

PART ONE

Introduction

Casinos are hospitality operations in which a gaming experience is offered to guests in addition to general hospitality services. To create stable, high-quality guest services while generating satisfactory guest experiences, casinos rely significantly on the skills of their front-line employees. The initial training before employees begin to work in a live-gaming casino environment is crucial. It gives them the basic knowledge to be able to perform their tasks proficiently and deliver the required guest-service standards to all patrons during live gaming sessions. Table games dealers are the primary front-line employees in a table game operation, they receive majority of their training before becoming employed by any casino. Table games dealer (TGD) training schools curricula mostly focus on the game rules and procedures and on a general understanding of the table games operation from the dealer's perspective. During their training period, TGDs learn the rules and procedures of each table game, e.g., black jack, craps, roulette—they will deal later. They also have the opportunity to develop their manual skills, computation techniques, and shortcuts and learn the procedures related to table game protection.

TGD training curricula can be improved by implementing new elements, thus producing a better trained and more professional staff. When TGD are provided with more complex training with an emphasis on additional job performance elements such as enhanced guest service standards, better communication techniques, controlled game speed, and the full understanding of the game security procedures and policies, casino operations will gain significant advantages. By educating TGDs to understand these crucial elements of their job,

casinos will create a more professional, welcoming, and entertaining table-games experience for their patrons.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to pinpoint and explore three major missing key elements of the current initial TGD training curricula and to make constructive recommendations on how to improve future TGD training programs with the use of these components to produce a more adaptable and versatile TGD.

Statement of Objective

With the use of the available academic and trade literature and with personal communication conducted with senior industry professionals, this paper will draw a picture of the basic elements of a TGD training program. Also, it will introduce three identified job functions that are missing from most of the current TGD training programs. The three new elements—guest service, controlled game speed, and the full understanding of the reasons behind game security procedures and policies—will be analyzed in detail and their importance to the table games operation will be discussed. Once these strategically important ingredients are explained and examined, the author will make recommendations how to incorporate them into future TGD training programs to make them more effective. By using the findings of this study, casinos and independent TGD training schools will be able to improve and revise their teaching programs and create much more effective educational plans for their new TGDs.

Justification

According to Martinez (1995), formal, table-games dealer training, conducted by a gaming company, was first implemented in 1980 by Resorts International. Until then, casinos for some reason had not found it important to purposefully train and develop their table game

dealers to their specified needs. The majority of dealer training occurred “on the job” (OJT). OJT, when combined with mentoring and close supervision can be very successful and it is essential, because in this profession significant experience is required to be able to perform satisfactorily. Break-in dealers with just very basic game knowledge need to face many difficult scenarios during their work and deal with often stressful and intense problems at the gaming table. However, often, fellow TGDs with bad behavioral and job habits will unintentionally teach things the wrong way.

Although, in most cases OJT is very helpful, it is not sufficient. It is necessary to provide a comprehensive schooling program to TGDs before they enter a live-game environment. By developing a standardized, well-thought-out, and comprehensive schooling curriculum, novice dealers will have a head start and will more likely avoid learning bad work routines and behaviors from their senior coworkers. By creating a more advanced preparation program for TGDs, all involved parties will win. Gaming operations will benefit from the enhanced business generated by the better-suited, better-performing frontline employees. Employees will have increased job satisfaction, feel more secure in problematic situations, and have more pride and self-esteem. Patrons, in turn, will experience a much more professional, more personalized and guest-service-focused gaming experience, which will strengthen their loyalty and ensure their future visits.

Constraints

This paper will use personal communications from industry professionals, executives, and gaming employees and secondary sources during the information collection process.

Related to the TGD training, the hospitality and service industry literature is fairly limited given

the subject's specific nature. During the examination of existing TGD training schools, it became clear that most schools have no written comprehensive curriculum; they often base their instruction on hands-on practices and personal communication accompanied with close supervision. Therefore, the author had limited access to published TGD training instruction manuals during the research.

Glossary of Terms

Break-in dealers - Casino employee with little experience (Kilby, Fox, & Lucas, 2005, p. 280).

Checks - Player's currency changed into casino gaming chips. In the casino environment these chips called checks. Check is a transferable monetary instrument in the casino where it is issued. Checks are for gaming purposes only and can be changed into cash at the casino's cashier's cage (Taucer, 1994, p. 28).

Chunking - Method of cleaning the loser roulette chips from the layout, by taking down (chunking) the loser stacks of same color before sweeping the remaining chips off at once (Taucer, 1994, p. 44).

Coloring-up - Transaction when the player exchanges gaming checks for equivalent amount of a higher denomination of checks (Kilby, Fox, & Lucas, p.381)

Mucking - A style in which the dealer picks up and sorts by color the collected loser roulette chips and stores them into 20 pieces stacks (Taucer, 1994, p. 44).

Sweeping - The loser roulette gaming chips are brought down, "swept" into the dealer's protected work area (Taucer, 1994, p. 44).

Table game protection - Game protection is an all inclusive term that is used to identify the measures that must be taken to protect the games from cheating and stealing (Martinez, 1995, p. 147).

Tokes - Term used to describe tips given to casino personnel by players (Kilby, Fox, & Lucas, 2005, p. 390).

PART TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Casinos are hospitality operations offering a wide array of table games to players. The “games of chance” as entertainment are offered to patrons as the main product of an operation. Although the main product is different than those offered in other hospitality businesses where guest are being served, entertained, transported, or catered to, casinos are hospitality operations in which legal gaming activities presented with the help of complex guest services. To be continuously successful, casinos must develop close guest relations and deliver personalized memorable service experiences consistently. Only by building loyalty through guest satisfaction will a casino ensure future business success. The literature review will examine guest services and its main elements and provide information how to successfully deliver quality services in live gaming environment. The importance of front-line employees (FLE) and how table games (TG) employees (dealers in particular) contribute to the business success of a casino operation will be examined. The phenomenon of service failure (SF) and the corrective measure, service recovery (SR), will also be discussed.

When procedures and policies are not followed, TG operations are particularly vulnerable to theft, cheating, and other illegal activities. While rendering large cash transactions and handling massive amounts of value checks as part of the everyday business, casinos must have well developed and clearly communicated game protection policies and procedures in place. Asset protection is one of the primary concerns in the TG department. TGDs must follow many gaming procedures and policies while performing their daily tasks. These procedures are designed to protect company assets, help conduct TG play in the most practical manner, create uniformity on the floor, and allow TG supervisors and surveillance staff can observe ongoing

games with less effort. The second part of the literary review section will discuss the basics and the importance of the TG protection and gaming procedures and policies. This section will introduce the surveillance department and its relation to the TGs department and also addresses the importance of intradepartmental communication.

The final part of the literature review unit will introduce the foundations of an efficiently run and well managed TGs department. It will address the basic terms and functions of TG operations while explaining how the department generates profit with the help of numerous variables (game speed, average bet, time played, etc.). This segment will also address the possible ways of increasing TG revenue. Accelerated game speed, shortened procedures, game pace auditing (GPA) conducted regularly and combined with a better trained gaming staff can greatly increase TGs revenue and profit.

Creating Guest Experiences

Service Failure and Service Recovery

Because of the nature of hospitality and gaming service encounters, frontline employees are involved in constant ongoing interactions with guests. During TG play there are plenty opportunities for TG dealers' performance to fall short while interacting with players. There are often situations, even at the best-performing and most guest-service-centric hospitality operation, when employees fail during their service encounters. Given the continuity and the enormous volume of the service encounters happening in a gaming environment, it is impossible to perform impeccably at all times. Casinos, as many other hospitality operations, are offering their products ceaselessly, around the clock to a fluctuating demand. Also because of inseparability—one of the main characteristics of services (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Berry, 1985)—when the delivery and consumption of services materialize concurrently, there will be service failures from

time to time. Service failures are caused however by not just the provider; it can originate from the guests as well. Often, players are already more sensitive and irritated because of gambling losses. So they also have some level of responsibility for successful service outcomes; they also need to be able to actively cooperate and participate to some extent during these situations. SR can be the solution to many situations when failure takes place. SRs, when executed properly, can enhance customer satisfaction and build future customer relationship while preventing customer defection (Fornell & Wernerfelt, 1987). SR involves all the steps an organization takes in response to the SF (Gronroos, 1988). It is essential to train employees to the various SR techniques and empower them by providing the necessary level of authority. TGDs should be able to initiate and implement the SR steps on their own and attempt to resolve these situations promptly.

If entry level TGDs getting insufficient guest-service training during their initial dealer training period they will be more likely cause service failures. SR in the TG setting is a joint effort and often other frontline employees such as supervisors and casino management needs to be involved. When successfully using the basic recovery attributes often mentioned in business discussions (e.g., Hart, Heskett, & Sasser, 1990), casinos can resolve the majority of their SFs and can retain most of their disappointed customers. The four main service recovery attributes—compensation, speed of response, apology, and initiation—can have the desired effects on customers, and customer satisfaction can be still achieved after an SF.

Initial hospitality training for dealers provides a solid foundation of their fundamental job tasks and procedures and develops their required technical and manual skills. Employees, however, especially those in the frontline position, require much more than just detailed job knowledge, manual skills, or a procedure and policy list. Frontline employees (FLE), while

facing many challenging situations on a daily basis, need additional guest-service-related knowledge beside the job specific ones they receive during their formal initial training. The basic understanding of SF and SR should be the organic part of the skills every FLE.

Providing Quality Services

Service-based operations such as casinos must be able to deliver quality services to create customer satisfaction. Today, when there is increased competition among gaming operations, service is often viewed as the leading cause of competitive advantage (Kandampully & Duddy, 2001). The perception of quality service is the direct result of several criteria. The six main criteria according to Gronroos (1988) are skills and professionalism, attitudes and behavior, accessibility and flexibility, reliability and trustworthiness, reputation and credibility and recovery.

Quality service is achieved when guests recognize that during their encounter the provider dealt with them with a great level of knowledge, professionalism, and proven skills. A well trained TG dealer can easily convey these attributes while performing his job. By properly following game procedures, with some experience and with the right mindset, a professional TG dealer can present professionalism and skills to the observing customers. The appropriate behavior and attitude of TG dealer can be very influential. When players feel a sincere and genuine interest from TG dealers and they believe their communication is based on a friendly and spontaneous process, they will more likely be satisfied and value the quality of the services received more. If patrons know they can rely on the service providers' promises, that they will be given what was agreed on, then they will perceive such trustworthiness and reliability as part of the excellence of the services. Accessibility means the level of difficulty in gaining access to services while flexibility shows how willing the casino is to modify its services according to the

demands of the customer. For example, gaming operations have to provide adequate open TGs with sufficient staff if demand requires it. TG operations should be flexible enough to respond to player requests (e.g., opening new games) promptly. When an overall positive image is conveyed to customers about the service provider and they prove to be reputable and credible, customers will perceive it as one of the key criterion of good service quality. This element is related to company image and closely linked to how the organization's marketing, branding, or public relations are strategically designed. By having a well-defined clear image, backed up by frequent performance measures, a good reputation can make a gaming operation stand out from its competition. To achieve and maintain this attribute, constant employee participation is necessary. Finally when the promised services are not delivered or something unforeseen happens that causes dissatisfaction, casino employees should take corrective measures promptly to remediate the situation. By presenting the guests with prompt recovery response to their concerns, the perceived quality service will be more easily maintained.

Guest Service

In contrast with casinos in the past, when only the game of luck was the main product, casinos today offer complex services to their patrons. The traditional approach greatly evolved and with the new era of full-service destination casino resorts (Doyle & Eadington, 2009) or so called integrated resorts, there are advanced services offered to guests. The casino department is not the sole or primary department anymore where company profit realized. Driven by fierce competition and by growing customer demand, the gaming industry has become a multifaceted service provider whose guests can enjoy wide variety of hospitality, gaming, and leisure services. Although these complex casino resorts may offer seemingly diverse products through their various departments, they all must produce high-quality guest services to remain competitive.

Hotel operations, spa services, luxury retail stores, entertainment facilities (clubs, bars, movies), wellness and sport amenities, and signature dining venues run by celebrity chefs all have one thing in common: to be successful they all must rely on their frontline employees (FLE).

Today's casino dealers, instead of just dealing competently at their assigned TGs and conducting their game-specific tasks and duties, must also possess many guest-service-related skills and abilities. TGDs, as the FLEs in the casino, are primarily responsible to illustrate the company-established service standards from the very first encounter to the departure of the patrons.

A modern and competent casino management team will select, train, and retrain its gaming staff according to its clearly specified service standards. It is essential to establish, communicate, and train according these principles consistently while controlling the training through frequent measure and evaluation. Once employees have been communicated the department's set service standards, they need to be evaluated regularly. There are some very basic universal service standards (Browne, 2004) such as greeting guests, smiling, introductions and learning a customer's name, listening to requests and complaints, acting and responding in a positive manner, asking and finding out about the needs and concerns of the customer, wishing good luck, and saying farewell when customer leaves. These are just the simplest behavioral service standards and they provide the preliminary foundation of all service efforts.

TGDs' required skills are based on advanced communication techniques. Because the product delivered to players is not tangible, it is more similar to an experience; therefore, employees have to be able to handle people on the most satisfactory level (Taucer, 1994). Engagement through the entire guest contact period is required and can be achieved with the use of various skills. Verbal and non-verbal communication such as body language, posture, eye contact, and plenty of smiles will create a closer relation and will result a pleasing guest

experience. Anticipating guest needs and constantly seeking out their expectations with the help of proactive measures, the service provider can take these experiences to a superior level.

Situations such as when the FLE has an overall understanding of how their communication is effected by friendliness, approachability, or attentiveness will most likely produce a desired outcome. Empathy and sincere interest should also be part of the qualities a professional TGD possess.

Clearly defined service standards are regularly measured against the level of customer service provided. The employee evaluation should also be based on these standards. Most TG employees are required to deliver these standards at a minimum of 90% proficiency level at all times (Taucer & Easley, 2003). Evaluations are made usually by managers and based on daily observations; they are graded on a scale that evaluates how the standards were met. Outsourced shopper services are also used at many casinos when evaluating employee performances. These outside companies tend to be less biased than in-house evaluators.

Training

In table games departments, as significant contributors to the company's performance, the importance of employee training should not be overlooked. The lack of a proper training program will most likely increase costs because of the extended learning period and because employees may not learn to perform these duties in the most effective way (Taucer & Easley, 2003). Training also increases employees' flexibility, allowing them to adjust faster to the frequent changes within the department. In the casino departments changes in procedures and policies are quite frequent. Furthermore, the level of required supervision can be decreased when well-trained employees are in place. Training will positively affect employee morale and overall satisfaction. TG dealers, when trained professionally, will have pride to their skills and

knowledge. Being a professional TG dealer should be looked at as a trade one can be rightfully proud of. There are great ways to promote and elevate the pride of TG dealers such as the yearly conducted European Dealer Championship organized by the European Casino Association. By increasing the reputation of the TGD profession, by promoting it, employers will have a larger pool of applicants to choose from.

As Conrad (2010) mentioned, there has been very little done to improve TGDs' personal efficacy. Conrad found three major areas of enhancement: service skills, procedural skills, and sales skills. These ingredients when developed and consciously controlled and monitored can boost departmental profitability. He specifically pointed out of the importance of right game speed (decision/hour). Conrad introduced the concept of the "certified dealer" (CD) who has the right training in the aforementioned areas and will be able to deliver an elevated service with the use of effective sales and procedural skills. These certified dealers will perform all the trained service standards identically as the casino management defines to them. By describing the certified behaviors, which will clearly tell TGDs what they need to do during every guest encounter, the actions of every employee will be consistently the same. This will also serve as a comparison and measurement tool and can be used as the basis for evaluating individual TGDs' performances.

Hiring the Right People

Great guest service, however, can be attained only by hiring competent individuals with the right skill sets and positive attitudes. As Browne (2004) explained, the right candidate to a casino service position should have the "*ability to work well with others*" (Browne, 2004, p. 50), which means they are team players and not a recluse type of personality. The successful gaming employee should also have the "*desire to serve others*" (Browne, 2004, p. 51). This can be easily

checked by reviewing employee history or evidence can be found in past personal achievements. It is pivotal to have the ability to accept constructive criticism(Browne, 2004, p. 51), when working in a team environment. It is also important to have some level of self-criticism, which can be used to further improve and enhance service skills and knowledge. Other vital personal traits include being an outgoing personality(Browne, 2004, p. 51), which includes self-assurance and good basic communication techniques. Smiling and eye contact are the minimal techniques they need to use. Good casino FLEs have a certain degree of technical ability(Browne, 2004, p. 51) or have the interest and be suitable for possible training. Finally, when selecting the right employees, they should have a great level of desire to participate (Browne, 2004, p. 51). During guest interaction, service providers need to have the desire to resolve, learn, and improve guests' positions.

The right hiring practices can determine how successful a TG operation will be in the future. Marquart (2012) asked an important question: What is the primary reason players will stay at the gaming table? As he pointed out, aside from the players' luck (winning), the dealers' personality will be able to keep players in a game longer. Therefore, the main job of a TGD is to deliver some sort of entertainment to patrons by utilizing strong interpersonal and verbal communicational tools. Marquart (2012) recommended that the hiring process should be based more on such service-related questions that can uncover candidates' true abilities to create memorable guest experiences. He believes that the service-related questions currently used when hiring TGDs are often too general and they don't require candidates to explain their thoughts about the subject. There is a great deal of difference between asking the prospective employees if they believe that friendly approach to players is necessary, or asking them to present their guest service routines used during interactions, instead. By taking the effort to

develop job description and service oriented interview questions, Marquart (2012) stated that casinos will be able to select candidates with the right skill set, TGDs with the right personality who are able to entertain players on a sincere and natural way. Experience should not be the highest valued criterion when hiring. Having natural outgoing characteristics with good communication skills and the desire to interact with players should weigh more than experience alone.

Gaming Procedures and Game Protection

Gaming Procedures

Proper gaming procedures are crucial to every TG department. They provide a certain level of game protection while guarding company assets against cheaters or theft; but their main advantage is to create uniform consistency throughout the department and openness to all parties involved (Forte, 2004). Procedures define the most practical way to deal the games and make dealers' job easier, while helping surveillance and supervisors to observe the games with less effort. It also ensures consistent open and honest gaming experience for players and protects and helps them during game play. Patrons have more trust when games are dealt by the same procedures at all times. Some casinos have complex procedure manuals in place to define every aspect of TGs, how the job should be performed, and what steps should be followed. Other casinos have less comprehensive gaming procedure manuals and assuming that an experienced gaming staff is hired, employees should already know the necessary general security measures (Martinez, 1995). The majority of TGs procedures are fairly similar among various casino operations in the industry, however, exclusively set standards to conduct all procedures in the same manner industry wide are still not in place. TGDs often develop their own style while altering the described procedures to some degree. Martinez (1995) discussed how personal

dealing styles distort gaming procedures and have negative consequences. These modifications can compromise game security and make games vulnerable to cheating or theft. Also, supervisors have to make extra efforts while observing altered procedures. However, some exemptions to following procedures and bending or altering them temporary can be made in agreement with the management and the surveillance department. There are situations when, to accommodate a high-valued customer's special request, procedures are not followed. These changes, however, should never seriously compromise and endanger game security. These exceptions should be always carefully monitored and should be in place only temporarily.

Procedures in the Table Games Dealer Training Curriculum

Most TGs' training courses focus on proper procedural knowledge as one of the primary and core elements of the curriculum. By understanding, practicing, and memorizing the necessary procedures, TG dealers are able to perform their job as it is required by the industry. However, just the knowledge of the required procedures is not always enough to deliver constant high-level performance. While most TGDs' training manuals have acceptable information on how, when, and what kind of procedures need to be followed, the researcher has not found significant information source where the reason behind the procedures would have been thoroughly explained. Many of the existing training manuals are more like a collection of the required gaming procedures (e.g., Russell, 1993; Taucer, 1994), while they are devoid of the complex explanations of why these procedures are necessary or how they contribute and what benefits they bring to the table? By examining various dealer schools in Las Vegas, the author found no written training material that included significant explanations of why the training procedures are necessary and what their main purpose is. Many of the dealer schools have written instruction material only about the game-specific rules and procedures. These training

manuals are often written poorly, relying on practice and repetition and teaching everything in the training room. However, if more complex written material would exist, it could be used for home studies and for future references as well.

Game Protection

Casino operations are handling large amounts of currency and all kinds of gaming value checks on a regular daily basis. To minimize theft, cheating, and various scams, strict game protection policies and procedures need to be in place. These costly cheating schemes, scams, thefts, and unintentional employee mistakes can result in significant pecuniary losses to any TG department. Game protection refers to the various procedures, policies, techniques, and practices in place in a casino to protect TGs from potential losses. These measures should protect the game's integrity and deter losses or lower their possibility.

Casino Surveillance

To successfully protect company assets in the casino environment requires a joint effort from the part of multiple departments. In addition to the table-game, protective procedures and policies, the strict game rules, and the contribution of various employees (dealers and supervisors), another department is actively participating to safeguard many aspects of the gaming operation. The casino surveillance department (“the eye-in-the-sky”)—with the use of the most current modern video surveillance technology—monitors and protects live gaming operations continuously. With advanced interdepartmental communication between TGs and surveillance staff, the casino can enhance its protection. Modern casino surveillance is in place not just to catch unwanted acts in progress; it is also there to prevent these occurrences (Boss & Zajic, 2011). Everyone who understands the roles and capabilities of a competent surveillance department will be well aware that they are constantly monitored, audited, and recorded

throughout the entire property. Just the well-known fact that casino surveillance monitors every move in the casino serves as a great deterrent.

Efficient Table Games Management and Control

Table Games Management

TG management is a complex task that requires the understanding of many underlying and interconnecting factors that can affect the overall performance of the department. The department is managed by industry professionals who should possess a great understanding of the complexity of TG management. TG departments are offering various TGs to casino players. Although these games might seem very different in appearance at first, the basic underlying concept is quite similar. Casinos are offering gaming products to players at a higher price than their total costs. Players can "buy bets" (wagers), which upon winning will pay less than the mathematical probability of the outcome. Casino profit is generated with the help of the "house advantage." The house advantage or house edge according to a comprehensive gaming website (Wizard of Odds) is the expected loss of the player related to the amount of his initial bet. The games are designed in a way that the payouts on the bets offered to patrons are lower than the true calculated odds of their outcome. The expected performance (theoretical win/loss) of any TGs can be calculated with the help of a simple computation. By knowing the average bets, the number of hands played (number of decisions occurred per hour), and the given game's house advantage by simple multiplication anyone can calculate the theoretical win. TGs dealers from this perspective can affect only the number of hands played by the players. By maximizing and extending the time a player spends on the game the casino will increase its revenue on the long run. Guest service and personalized interaction as the paper discussed earlier, it can keep players in the games longer. For example a TGD with an affable and captivating personality can hold

players potentially longer in play. Accelerated game speed, a faster pace, can also increase the number of hands played per hour. When various game procedural shortcuts, advanced techniques, and routines introduced, skillful and knowledgeable dealers can increase game pace hence increase the performance of the TG. By introducing new elements to TG dealer training that can increase overall game speed will rally the department's profit-generating capabilities.

Game Pace Auditing

Knowing the average game pace performed by dealers on any TG can help the marketing department better track player activities and ascertain their true worth to the casino. By putting game pace audit (GPA) in place (Zender, 2008), TG management establishes clear benchmarks. This show how the average TG dealer performs in the casino. This can later also be used to observe and audit individual employee's performance on the given TG. Dealers significantly performing bellow expected level then can be advised, trained or disciplined. This GPA is often done with the help of the surveillance department; however, it can put unnecessary burden on their shoulders and tie down important resources. GPA should be conducted by TG management personnel rather than casino surveillance.

Finding the Right Game Pace

The detrimental consequences of accelerated game pace must be also discussed. By enhancing speed, the decision/hour and the theoretical profitability of the game will increase; but the guests' overall gaming experience should be also considered. Overrunning players and rushing them can have negative effects on their experience. It is essential to judge each situation on its own and game pace should be adjusted according to the players' comfort levels. There should be a fine line between providing a personalized guest experience—having conversations and connecting with guests—and still keeping the game going at a desired tempo.

Conclusion

By reviewing the available literature on the hospitality and gaming industry, it is evident that the main concerns: guest services, game protection procedures and policies, and control of a healthy game speed—will all contribute to the better performance of a TG department. TG dealers as key FLEs need to have the right skill sets during the delivery of services; personal traits and communicational skills are essential to deliver excellent guest services. By managing game pace TGDs can positively affect the bottom-line of the casino. By understanding the game protection procedures, they will more likely to follow them. The author examined the current TG training curricula (training manuals, books, and online resources) and believes that these key issues are not addressed enough or implemented into the training materials. In the next section, this paper will study these issues, and based on the research conducted will make recommendations how to integrate and include them into future TG dealer training courses more efficiently.

PART THREE

Casinos and table games operations in particular are very labor-intensive and require a significant number of employees to function. The industry is famous for high employee turnover and needs a constant flow of hiring. Many casinos have to train their prospective TGDs from scratch when hiring them. Casinos opening in regions in which gaming is rare or new phenomenon have trouble finding an adequate number of trained gaming staff readily available. Providing their own training that is designed for their actual needs can prevent numerous unnecessary problems. However, when training managed by schools not directly related to the casino, the quality and the make-up of the entire training is often unknown and not always satisfactory. The lack of standardized training programs in the industry among training schools thus creates significant variances in quality. Casinos frequently hire TGDs trained by independent dealer schools, and they then get employees with inadequate job knowledge, who require further training to match the casino's requirements. When casinos manage their own training programs, they have a much better preliminary view of their prospective TGDs even before hiring them. During these training periods casinos have the chance to get to know their future employees' capabilities and personalities. Another advantage of training provided by the casino is the assurance that the course curriculum presents the right policies and procedures the given operation has in place.

In the United States, gaming operations are often located in territories where multiple casinos are present (e.g., Atlantic City, Las Vegas, or Reno) the demand for freshly trained gaming employees is much higher. In these locations, privately owned, independent, TGD-training schools are much more common. However, as previously mentioned they provide very diverse modes and quality of training due to the lack of industry standards in the curriculums.

Many of these TGD-training facilities are managed by industry professionals with diverse knowledge and experience. These schools can be freely opened by any individual who believes he has enough experience and no uniform training curriculum has to be in place, so the outcome and the value of these trainings is highly questionable. Albeit, in spite of the serious inconsistency of the training schools, most of these training programs manage to produce TGDs who have at the least a very basic knowledge of the table games. The mechanics and fundamental rules of major table games, the basic technical skills and computation techniques can be taught fairly simply. The key is to have adequate time spent with practice, so the main rules and techniques can be learned and memorized.

However, every training school examined by the author was lacking the three major important components this paper identified. This section will discuss how the currently operating TGD schools and their programs of study can be further improved, by implementing three key items. Concentrating on excelling in guest service performances, better-explained and taught game protection procedures and policies, and methods designed to accelerate overall game speed, the entry level TGDs will receive a more hands-on, effective training. These new components can greatly advance and improve the quality and the success of future TGD training programs and will create a more educated and job-ready TG workforce. Relying on comprehensive personal interviews of senior industry professionals, casino executives, surveillance managers and experienced TGDs, this segment will deliver findings and recommendations significant to the subject. The author will also utilize the hospitality and gaming literature sources previously discussed and integrate their main findings into the proposed changes needed in the TGD study material. By applying the fundamentals

recommended in this paper, the quality and the performance of any TG department can be significantly improved.

Basic Guest Service Skills Trained From the Beginning

Because casinos understand the value and contribution of great FLE guest service to their overall success, they more often provide complex training for their employees. These on-the-job, training programs are usually up-to-date and they are effective in maintaining and improving existing guest service performance, however TGDs during their initial training period should be also introduced and be familiar with the basics of guest services. The training materials should concentrate on training and practicing all of the key service standards an FLE should know.

Learning the Minimal Services Skills

The following basic elements should be included in every TGD training program. All of the following elements could be discussed more in-depth given their true complexity, however, this paper intends to use them as brief examples of the major guest service standards in a casino setting:

- Greeting and farewell is the most elementary technique that every FLE must understand. This very basic but crucial gesture must be exercised during every guest encounter. Guests have to be always recognized; their presence must be acknowledged and warmly appreciated. TGDs should use appropriate greeting and farewell according to the player's age, gender, and such, as proper etiquette requires. Guest will remember these encounters and will be attached through positive personal experiences.
- An introduction in any situation helps to put the scenario into a more personalized setting. Further interaction will be also much easier for all participants once an introduction has occurred. Knowing provides the opportunity to connect more personally

at future encounters. Finding out where the other person is from is often a great opportunity to find common interests and topics for continued conversation.

- Smiling and making eye contact are crucial to encourage guests to approach games or during conversations. TGDs are required to “sell” their games (especially during standing dead games) to guests by showing attention, using inviting body language, and even by verbal invitation and communication. When TGDs utilize nonverbal communicational tools (positive body language, directed attention, and sincere interest) and emphasize approachability through posture and awareness, players are more likely to be willing to join the game.
- When a TGD initiates verbal communication, uses appropriate humor, and maintains an upbeat, outgoing attitude, guests will be captivated and most likely stay longer if interested. Players, when connected to their service providers (TGDs), will enjoy their experience and have a more memorable experience at the table. These experiences, seemingly insignificant but highly personalized encounters, can create positive memories for the guest.

These very basic service-related skills and tools -earlier discussed (Browne, 2004) - can be used in any hospitality or service settings.

Guest Service Challenges in the Casino Environment

The casino atmosphere—given its nature in which money and high stakes are involved—is a high-stress and often sensitive environment. Upset, intoxicated, aggravated patrons can cause disturbances, so employees must be able to handle these delicate situations properly. It is necessary to resolve these common situations as quickly and peacefully as possible. Handling problem guests, often in heated situations, requires a good deal of knowledge about human

psychology. It is crucial to approach upset or angry guests at the right manner to avoid further escalate an already tense situation. Through practicing how to correctly respond and by exploring the underlying motivations for these situations, TGDs will better understand and be able to handle them.

Players, who hail from a wide array of countries and cultures, frequently require different communicational approaches. Always using proper gender, age, and cultural awareness when engaging patrons is a part of a skilled TGD's job. Discussions about how people from different countries, cultures, genders, and age groups need to be handled have to be part of an advanced TGD training course. There are major differences specifically in regard to Asian players, their various cultures and their relation to gambling should be an issue that is thoroughly analyzed.

New players often require additional attention. Many people are intimidated at first in the casino setting. They need guidance and help to learn the game basics and casino etiquette. When meeting inexperienced casino guests, TGDs should give them plenty attention and help them to get comfortable with the new challenging environment. Explaining game rules from the very basics in a simple and easily understandable manner is something any TGD should be able to do. Also, TGDs should understand that people new to the casino setting often feel overwhelmed and confused by the wealth of stimuli. Great patience and extra attention is often necessary in dealing with these players.

TGDs should clearly understand the importance of superior guest services, which creates more business and also more tips in the long run. It also ensures continuity of work opportunity. Other issues not directly related to TGs but related guest service duties should be introduced to trainees. Presenting a clean and neat physical environment to players at all times is also a basic requirement. During dead games, dealers should regularly brush off their tables, move empty

glasses and dirty ashtrays a side, and make cocktail waitresses or pit supervisors aware if they require assistance to create a tidy, uncluttered and welcoming environment to players.

Taking Charge to Deliver Success

Every FLE, including TGDs, should fully own guest situations from beginning to end. Immediately passing over guests to other employees because the issue is not necessarily directly related to the person's job or to their department, is not the right approach. By finding out guest concerns first, FLEs should try to talk it through with guests before the solution is offered. It is much more personal when guests are guided by the same employee while the issue is resolved instead of just being passed from one employee to another. For example, when TGDs are walking through the casino floor they should know they are on the "stage," therefore helping guests (with directions, finding ATMs, restrooms, restaurants, slot attendants, check-in, cabs, etc.) is their primary responsibility. By personally walking a lost guest to an ATM or an elevator, instead of just pointing in the right direction, is a new opportunity to create a personalized experience to them.

All of the previously discussed, guest-service ingredients can be found in most OTJ conducted periodically by the casinos; however, these subjects should be introduced to and discussed with break-in TGDs during their initial training period as well.

Training schools should use highly interactive and participation-required, role-play-based teaching methods. Prospective TGDs should be exposed to the most commonly occurring player situations and should learn to resolve them satisfactorily. By challenging students with realistic situations, forcing them to resolve them, they will have the opportunity to understand the complexity of these scenarios. During these courses, personally facing the most common guest

service encounters and sensitive situations, students will later relate easier and will learn much more effectively.

According to Zender (personal communication, November 03, 2012), guest service basics, as a completely stand-alone course, should be one of the foundational parts of the teaching regimen. This type of course should be introduced at the end of the teaching program, when the basic technical skills, procedures, and the general casino rules and procedures are already acquired. The guest-service class should be looked at as the final puzzle to the training and should be a required course regardless what type of table games the TGD is learning. It is imperative to emphasize the guest-service aspects as much as any other traditional elements (game rules, technical skills, etc.) of the training program. The goal is to clarify and make every TGD understand how directly guest service is related to his or her success. Also dealer tip and its aspects should be discussed as a potential motivational instrument.

Motivation

On the other hand, regardless how diligently the management communicates these guest-service standards and teaches their fundamentals, they are almost useless without adequate employee motivation. Torres (D. Torres, personal communication, November 15, 2012) emphasized the importance of TGDs receiving the right explanation in regard to how the previously discussed service attributes and their newly acquired knowledge will help them and how they will gain advantage through them. TGD compensation in the United States is unique. Most casinos pay an hourly wage little above the minimum wage. TGDs' compensation mainly comes from the tip (tokens) they receive from players. Therefore, the motivation is there for TGDs to use the guest-service knowledge and expertise they have constantly. By explaining and highlighting to TGDs the direct correlation between a satisfied guest experience and increased

tips, TGDs will keep guest-services high in their priorities knowing that it is contributory to their compensation. It is necessary to explain TGDs their own stake in providing superior guest services and what they can expect in return of their constant efforts. Employees with no motivation will not keep up constant, first-rate performance; they will lose interest fairly quickly. Monetary compensation and employee recognition are the two major motivational tools a TG department can use. As Torres, vice president of table-games operations at a major Las Vegas casino, elucidated (D. Torres, personal communication, November 15, 2012) the key is to change the mindset of TGDs. Since most casinos have eliminated the “table-for-table” token distributing method (dealers were able to keep the tips they personally received on the assigned table game) and implemented a 24/7-share among TGDs through the entire casino, the behavior of many TGDs significantly changed. Many dealers rather stand on dead games and purposely avoid promoting their game to players passing by. They feel there is no point in putting in the extra effort to work harder, because when sharing tokens, their individual contribution doesn't have significant effect on the outcome of daily token share. However, Torres believes that explaining the mathematics of how tips are generated can help to better stimulate TGDs. Also there is a certain degree of peer pressure among TGDs to put equal efforts into generating tokens. Beside the monetary incentives, management needs to acknowledge TGDs' efforts and their performances. Also he believes that a clear career path, from TGD position to management, made evident to employees who want to advance, is very inspiring. Career development examples and a well-presented succession model should be communicated to interested employees. Another, more hands-on opportunity to motivate TGDs includes the scheduling of table games throughout the casino floor. TGDs are well aware that “better games” (games in high-limit areas, rarity games) are assigned to dealers with proven performance standards. As

the manager of surveillance of a prominent Las Vegas strip resort, Joseph (W. Joseph, personal communication, October 29, 2012) pointed out, when fair scheduling is conducted in the TG department, rewarding employee skills, knowledge and true efforts can be used as incentive.

However, motivation is just one element of a successful TG department. When TGD training is not defined and standardized by the industry and anyone who believes they have enough knowledge and expertise, regardless of their true understanding, can train TGDs, the quality and the proficiency of break-in TGDs will be very diverse.

Operating Training Schools

It is baffling how it is possible that in a large and complex industry such as the gaming industry, the initial training of key employees is not regulated or at least monitored to some level by the casinos. There is no set-training curriculum, no minimal requirements of any kind, and no clearly established regimens. Training schools are developing their own training materials and instruct TGDs based on their own perceptions. Trainers are often lacking the necessary industry experience themselves. Certificates issued by the various training schools have no real meaning and their graduates will vary greatly in quality. The industry should develop and communicate a core, TGD study curriculum that should include every important aspect of the TGD job.

Promoting this profession as a valuable trade or craftsmanship will help to attract more motivated candidates, and when further career advancement opportunities are promoted and clearly presented, the prestige of the profession will also grow. Furthermore, promoting the profession as a better known trade might attract even more customers.

Game Procedures and Game Protection in Training

To further improve the quality of TGD training, game procedures and policies and game protection must be also discussed. Game protection, in general, is in place to protect company

assets and it is vital to any TG department. The gaming policies and procedures are all designed primarily to help surveillance and supervisors who observe and monitor live games and transactions. They ensure that surveillance has the best perspective and unobstructed angle at all times to overlook the transactions in progress. Well-written procedures clearly circumscribe every phase of the transaction and provide a high degree of protection to participants involved. When procedures are not exercised they signal as red flags and can give ground for suspicion. For example when simple procedures such as "clear-hand" (showing both empty palms and forehands) not followed, surveillance or other observers can have valid concerns. Every game protection procedure has specific importance; therefore, all procedures should be exercised and enforced at all times. Beside protecting game integrity and providing set standards for various transactions, procedures also help TGDs. When procedures are accurately followed, gaming employees are more protected and cannot be held responsible in the case that any scams or illegal activities succeed in their game. It is in the interest of any honest employee to exercise these procedures and use them as protective measures. Most training schools or gaming operations are presenting all of the necessary procedures to TGDs, but they fail to explain them in-depth. It is difficult to expect TGDs to enact all the often seemingly unnecessary procedures, when they are not fully aware of their exact purpose. Joseph (personal communication, October 29, 2012) agreed on the importance of explaining the true reasons for all procedures introduced to TGDs during their initial training. Once a procedure is explained in detail, employees will more likely follow it if they are aware of its purpose. Any training curriculum should contain the list of minimal game protection procedures related to all table games and procedures related to general transactions. Also they should be thoroughly explained, why are they necessary and what their main objectives are.

When procedures and policies are listed as related to every game and to game protection, they need to be explained, practiced, and memorized. Students entering the casino environment need to learn a multitude of procedures and policies. These procedures are not always identical in every casino. Different casinos might have different procedures in place but their main concepts are usually very similar. When students comprehend the rationale of general procedures they will be able to adapt much quicker and be able to pick up any variation of the particular procedure. They also be able to recognize questionable situations (spot cheating themselves), and help overall game protection in the department. Procedures are the main foundations to every table game transaction. There are apparently countless procedures to learn and memorize during training. The author believes that providing an in-depth for these procedures will also help students memorize them. Game protection procedures will also be much more interesting to students when accompanied with their purposes. Showing common scams and cheating techniques directly related to the procedure will help to learn what would otherwise seem like a too-dry procedure on its own. During game-protection training, showing the vulnerable situations related to the discussed procedures, can raise the game-protection awareness of TGDs. This subject is an ever interesting topic of the casino department and fascinates many people.

Accelerating Game Pace

As explained earlier in the literature review, a healthy game speed is essential to enhance and maximize game revenue. TGD schools should implement elements in their study programs that can help accelerate overall game pace. There are many well-discussed methods already used in the industry to achieve this goal. However, the key is to make TGDs understand the importance of this subject first. Similarly to guest services, the game-pace issue should be

“sold” to TGDs through positive motivation. Increased game pace will generate more hands per hour, while more decisions per hour will result in a higher number of positive decisions (winner hands) to the players. Dealer tokens are most commonly given when winner decisions are achieved during game play. There is an easily proved relation between token-generating and game pace. The more decisions are made per hour, the more opportunities dealers will have for receiving tips. Once this is explained to TGDs, the direct monetary motivation will be in place. Other possible motivations, as Joseph (personal communication, October 29, 2012) suggested, could be based on the dealer audits conducted regularly by most surveillance departments. To regularly evaluate TGD performance, most casinos are auditing their dealers. By measuring the average game speed (hands dealt or number of spins per hour) and timing shuffling, dealers can be assessed. Individual TGD performance evaluations should be affected by the outcome of these measurements and positive recognition or punitive measures should be used as motivational tools. Promotions, pay raise, extra gifts can be awarded to the best performing employees, while coaching, warnings, write-ups can be used to the ones not performing satisfactorily. During TGD training, the study material could be improved by introducing shortcuts, advanced dealing techniques, computational keys, practicing multitasking and explaining the most commonly occurring situations in which time could be saved.

Numerous successful efforts have been made in the industry to improve and keep up average game speeds in the casino. The most common areas of table games transactions in which speed is a factor have already been targeted. The following list is a brief collection of the procedures already looked into at most operations in which speed is a concern.

Shortening procedures related to shuffling, card changing

- Shuffle procedures on card games were reassessed and shortened. Many house shuffles were unnecessarily complicated, repetitive, and lengthy. Working with the surveillance department, casino management can redesign its shuffle procedures to a minimal but still safe level. Pre-shuffled cards (cards brought to the game already shuffled) on baccarat games can also save significant time.
- Handing over unfinished decks on “double deck” (variation of a handheld Black Jack game that uses two decks) to the relieving dealer instead of spreading the cards and reshuffling them after a dealer change.
- Baccarat cards are shuffled, used once only, and changed to new ones when the shoe is over. Baccarat cards once used and discarded during play, can be collected and sealed in one movement when special sealable plastic bags are used. These bags are used to safely store cards after taken off the game. The discarded cards can be dumped into the plastic bag from the discard bucket at one quick move. The classic method when dealers arrange the used cards in a deck formation and tie them together with rubber bands was much more time consuming.
- “Cutting off” lesser number of cards from the end of the shuffled shoe on BJ games, will also result in less frequent shuffles.

All of these examples are implemented through procedural changes and can save significant time in the long run. However, speed and efficiency could be further improved by training dealers to better understand optimal game pace and by being able to deal their assigned games more efficiently. On the other hand, it is crucial not to overrun customers by rushing the game speed too much. Players should be able to make their bets and their decisions in a

comfortable tempo, without feeling hurried or pressured. The guests' gaming experience can be ruined if the dealer forces a much higher tempo than the given player would enjoy.

Relying on the dealer

It is the job of the TGD to find out what the optimal pace of the game given the patrons at their table. A friendly, conversing group with more interest in interaction than the game itself will require a slower game pace, while with a player group in which everyone concentrates on the game, a much faster game needs to be dealt. Dealers during their initial training period should be introduced to all the common scenarios in which their actions can significantly alter game pace. With the help of a senior dealer (D. Barnabas, personal communication, October 20, 2012) the author identified the following areas in which speed should be consciously managed:

- Anticipating players' actions
 - While “making change” or “coloring up” (changing currency to gaming checks or changing chips to different denomination), dealers should anticipate the possible needs of the player or ask ahead what denomination the guest would like. Giving the right denomination into payouts, at first, will avoid or at least lessen additional time consuming change requests. TGDs, when they understand this concept, will be able to judge player's check denomination needs by monitoring their betting patterns.
 - Taking repeating bets down for players ahead on roulette while making payouts is keeping a step ahead. Aside from this being a time saver action, it also serves as a great guest-service and communicational opportunity. By giving a little more than expected, a dealer can create a more personalized environment, speeding up the game at the same time.

- Managing game pace on roulette
 - TGDs can make the right decision—based on the busyness of the roulette game—either to “sweeping” the layout or “chunking”/picking it. When many of the same-color chips are stacked on the layout, it is often much faster to collect these partial but clean stacks before sweeping down the remaining loser chips. When the layout is swept, the chips have to be sorted by their colors ("mucking"). On a busy roulette game this can be one of the most time consuming duties of the dealer.
 - Managing roulette spin frequency can be also be a time-saver. Dealer should not wait until every bet is placed, by spinning the ball, the players will be forced to complete their remaining bets faster, before the dealer waives off the game.
 - Choosing the right length of roulette spins is also an option to save time. In case of one or just a few bets on the table, there is no need for long forceful spins, short or slow ball spins will help to increase the number of spins per hour.
- Waiting for the relief
 - Dealers waiting for the incoming relief often hesitate to start a shuffle and attempt to procrastinate while the relieving dealer arrives, so the shuffling won't cut into their break time. This issue should be addressed during training and the importance of continuous game pace should be explained. Players often experience this hesitation and it interrupts their play; it is also inappropriate to halt game to save an extra minute for a break. Dealers should not interrupt their work up until their relief is ready to take their place.

- Dealing an extra hand, one more round, even when the relief is close by. This moment is a great opportunity to tell guests the name of the incoming dealer and let players know about the oncoming dealer change. Unfortunately it is very common to see dealers stop for 10 to 20 seconds in anticipation of the relief dealer. Instead of stopping or even worse, turning around to search for the relief, they should just deal one more hand to players.
- Advanced technical skills to speed the game
 - Working the chip tray in the most efficient manner is a great time saver. Dealers on a BJ shoe game should use both sides of the chip tray (picking checks for payout from both sides) and use both hands in succession instead of working with one hand from one side.
 - Proving payouts (opening or splashing payouts in order to be easily readable from the surveillance's and the supervisor's viewpoint) in front of the chip tray or making changes or "coloring up" can be done more efficiently when the training course material teaches the most advanced ways to do it. There are certain techniques can be learned to assemble multidenominational changes or payouts, at the most effective and time saving manner. By proactively monitoring the layout for future payouts, similar technical shortcuts can be utilized and once a TGD becomes comfortable with this method, the effectiveness of his performance will increase.

As the examples showed, dealer participation is crucial to maximize game pace.

Although trainee dealers have many other things to memorize, practice and acquire, it is imperative to teach them the most efficient way to deal. Saving moves will save time and

contribute to the bottom line. As TGDs begin to understand the positive effects of a faster game pace on their token intake, they most likely will be interested in deliberately maximizing game speed.

Conclusion

TGD training curriculums are not being monitored or regulated by the gaming industry. The study material presented to students is very inconsistent, often made up by various individuals with questionable knowledge or experience. Although most of the examined study material offers sufficient information about the basic mechanics of table games and about the general procedures occurring on the casino floor, they are not addressed fully and in-depth. Training conducted on the job is a possible solution to develop superior guest services, to improve game protection and procedural understanding, and to accelerate game speed. However, if these elements are introduced at an earlier phase, such as during the initial training period, break-in TGDs will enter the live-game environment with more confidence and with a wider understanding of their overall functions. Yet, while casinos are willing to hire new dealers without the complex understanding of their tasks, the approach of training schools will not change a bit.

Recommendations

TGD training curriculums traditionally consist of only the basic elements of the table game rules, procedures, and the manual and computation techniques. To further improve the quality of training courses the following recommendations should be implemented:

- The industry itself must come to an agreement and produce a standardized framework as the basic requirement to teach.

- New training elements must be integrated to able to produce more capable and effective TGDs.
- Accredited dealer courses could create certified TGDs who acquire all the necessary aspects of initial training in a standard manner.
- Casino operators should communicate their exact needs and requirement to independent dealer schools.
- By giving preference in hiring to certified TGDs who have the above-mentioned training improvements, schools would be forced to revise and develop their core curriculums.
- The on-the-job training method should remain in place and should serve as a recurring refreshing course to support and continuously develop TGDs during their career.

The overall value of TGD profession should also be improved with the help of the major industry operators. Offering career advancement and high quality management training programs, TGDs will be more motivated and make efforts to advance. Finally, by implementing the three components this paper examined, the overall quality and skill level of break-in TGDs would significantly progress and the entire gaming industry would benefit.

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