

TALES FROM THE **PIT**

CASINO TABLE GAMES MANAGERS IN THEIR OWN WORDS

EDITED AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
DAVID G. SCHWARTZ



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Moving Up

How do managers get started on the management track? That's the question this chapter seeks to answer. As can be seen, different interviewees had different motivations and experiences in climbing the management ladder.

ED WALTERS

So what made you want to become a floorman instead of doing something else?

I didn't want to. I just did that favor for New York. I needed a job, he sent me into Carl Cohen, Carl Cohen put me on the floor. I didn't even pick it.

Really?

In fact, if he had said, "You would deal," I would've dealt. But because Mr. G. in New York is talking, he made me a boss....

First I was an assistant on graveyard, but then it got too late, we couldn't see when they changed the cans, meaning when they count the money, so then I went on swing shift. And I was in charge of the pit.

Okay, what was that like?

Well I changed it, I did it for two months. You find out you gotta take care of dealers, and you gotta schedule the thing, and you gotta get this guy in. I had to tell Eddie Torres, I spend all my time carrying these fucking dealers, they need a day off, they need—you find out the boss of the pit does all this kind of work.

Yeah.

So I said, “I ain’t gonna do it.” So then I became like an assistant, and they put the guy who was there back, and then I could see why they picked him—he liked doing all that. He made schedules and—

So it was all administrative stuff?

Yeah, you got it. That’s exactly what it was called.

Did you not have time to deal with the players as much?

I—right! Plus, how could I watch Dean’s money if I’m at the desk trying to get a dealer off Tuesday or some shit?

Is that the point of the whole thing?

What?

You’re not watching Dean’s money if you’re at the table?

Of course. Yeah. So, Torres understood. He said, “Okay, Eddy.” So then I was—and I also, most of the floormen had assigned areas—top of the pit, the middle—I’m the only one who had no assigned areas. Because of my connections, and I’m there to protect Dean, I’m allowed to walk anywhere, including the twenty-one pit, the Crap pit. I was the only guy in the joint like that who could walk anywhere.

RUSSELL TERBEEK

I went down to Laughlin where I worked part time on the floor. The casino manager, Mike Granninger, had me training people on how to deal, teaching public gaming classes and stuff like that. They came to me, actually I was still a dual-rate, and they promoted me to a backup shift boss. And at the time, they had the Reno property and all these other Circus properties, and it was Bill Paulos who was the GM. He was in charge over the Edgewater and eventually the Colorado Belle.

And he and Mike promoted only people who were working down at the Laughlin properties, which pissed a lot of people off who worked at the other properties. I guess that he promoted the people who he was comfortable with, and I didn’t have any say in the matter. I just knew that I got the promotion. I found out later that a lot of other people were upset because I went from a dual-rate all the way to a backup shift boss, which is a big jump. But I knew and dealt all the games and was a trainer that helped open the Colorado Belle later on

and was all-in doing whatever they needed me to do. I was just trying to be a good soldier.

Dual-rate pit?

I was a dealer/supervisor; a dual-rate dealer/supervisor promoted from there, not even a full time floor supervisor at the time. But I also put in a lot of time and effort—I won employee of the month multiple times, and the Edgewater was already there, and they built the Colorado Belle, so before that opened up, we had to train and hire the table games staff for it. I mean, I had put in a lot of hours training, and in fact, Rick Gilmore, the assistant that I introduced you to, Rick and I helped train a lot of those people. So we were taking valet employees, and dishwashers, and EVS people, and waitresses, and teaching them how to deal and made sure they were ready to go when the “Belle” opened. So that was kind of our own little contribution to the vision for our new property. Plus, we were hiring fifty percent brand new employees (break-ins) who had never dealt before, and then tried to hire fifty percent who had some kind of experience; some that applied from other properties. So it was like a bee’s nest with so much activity. It was like, wow! We were proud to be part of the process for opening a brand new property. So, that might’ve gotten me the job, I don’t know, but I just figured whatever they needed me to do, if I could do it and help out, I was glad to.

So what did it feel like going up into manager from being on the floor?

It was kind of hard, because you work side by side with all these people, you work with the people who are dealers, and then they see you advance. When I dealt, my procedures weren’t perfect, I didn’t deal the cleanest game but now you’re supposed to enforce procedures, and you try not to tick anybody off. But there was a big difference from me and others who were promoted. It was in my approach. My mentors showed me the “why” we do what we do. I was one of those guys that trained a lot of people, so I got to show them “why” we followed the procedures and by doing that, we protected the games. Many people didn’t know why we did our policies and procedures the way that we do. Upper management also knew that I could demonstrate correct procedures, and I didn’t bust anybody’s chops or anything like that. I would tell them if you’re flashing your hold card while dealing out there, you have to make sure to be careful, keep it from being

exposed and don't give anyone a chance to get a peek at it. There are people that make a living doing just that. So I knew about a lot of the scams that would be going on out there. People picking up hold cards, warping cards was a big one, with the single deck action that they had back then. Marking cards with nail nicks, lip stick, ashes, all that kind of stuff was fairly common. So, I was a trainer that wanted to help dealers and supervisors learn new stuff and not really busting anybody's chops, but it was a tough move at first, going from dealing into management.

BECOMING A TRAINER

It was really fun because I had done training ever since the Edgewater and the Colorado Belle days, so I'd been training for years and doing training through all the jobs that I've had up to this point. It wasn't like I said, "Hey, I'm gonna be a trainer." It just happened.

I would be asked to demonstrate a new policy or procedure for one shift and then someone would ask me, "Can you do this for this shift and that shift?"

I'm thinking to myself, "Okay - sure. Why not?"

So with the job at the Rio, I was the Division Table Games Training Manager and we had over five thousand employees working there. It was the coolest thing, 'cause I'd walk into the director's office (Jim Bonnell) and ask him, "I think that we need to do a training video to improve our dealers counting big buy-ins? I see a lot of mistakes on the floor." He said, "You know what, we do get a lot of big buy-ins here at the Rio, I need you to show dealers how to handle large buy-ins." So he said, "Oh, just go to the cage and get whatever you need." So I go over to the cage and I got twelve thousand in cash handed right to me. No problem! I just signed for it, went to a table in a dead pit, set up a camera with lights and did the video. They bought state of the art video equipment, an editing system, the works. So I did training films, and that's another reason why Jim Keller would always be bugging me. "Hey, what do you have for me?" I can remember that big voice of his asking me as he walked in from the hall. And I'd give him a copy of the stuff that I made. It was the neatest thing because I could see where we needed help, set up a camera and do a training video just that quick.

BECOMING A MANAGER ON DUTY

You know what, you handle everything. Everything from table games issues, security problems, hotel and restaurant situations, you learn to wear a lot of hats fast. I remember when I was coming up, a guy pulled me aside and said to me, “Because you can get rattled, especially if you’re new to the position—you gotta handle everything; restaurant complaints, hotel complaints, all that kind of stuff, (I think it was Moon Mullin, bless his heart), he said, “You know what, you need to turn lemons into lemonade and stop these guys from going to the general manager over something that you didn’t fix. It’s not that you couldn’t fix their problems, it’s that you didn’t do it! So, give ‘em the benefit of the doubt—unless they’re throwing f-bombs your way, and take care of the guest.” And I’ve carried that with me through my entire career. Take care of it however I can and I’m going to make it so that you want to come back. It’s gonna be a win-win situation and go from there. So I try to remember that anytime I’m taking care of a problem.

So what kind of stuff comes up as MOD?

Just a ton of stuff comes up when you are MOD that you have to handle mostly complaints. You try to treat people like it was your mother that had the problem. You want to make sure that afterwards they say how great the problem was handled and they can’t wait to come back to your place. But things have changed drastically from 20 years ago.

I think the biggest single thing that changed, well two things actually, are the focus on HR and the focus on customer service! Remember, there wasn’t any HR way back then. And in tribal casinos, they have their own gaming commission right there on property 24/7. You have HR (and/or Gaming) monitoring your every move.

HR requires you to do A, B, C, and D if you are going to suspend and possibly fire someone. They make sure that you dot the “I’s” and cross the “T’s”. In the old days, if you caught somebody stealing on a game, you just tell them they’re done and then they’d usually go down the street and get another job.

Now you have to make sure that surveillance keeps film; you have to have statements from everyone involved; you have to have progressive discipline and all that stuff. Since gaming has spread to many different states, customer service is a huge part of the game. So, I

think Steve Wynn even calls his floor supervisors in the pit something like *Table Games Ambassadors*, or something like that, to emphasize the role that customer service plays. That's huge.

RON SACCAVINO

Can you tell me a little bit of what it was like to be a casino manager then, in a small joint?

Some joints, for example—the first one was obviously the Las Vegas Inn, little joint. The problem there was, you really, there was nothing to work with, much, and on graveyard shift, they'd have one table going, and if they were getting fucking buried, they would call me up and wake me up. And what do you think I got to do, I gotta get in the fucking car and I gotta go down there.

And what would you do when you got there?

Well, I'd go upstairs and I'd look on the camera, and I'd watch. And it was pretty basic, I never really tried to figure out how a guy's beating me. I would just simply go up to the guy and take my losses, and go up to a guy, customer, and I'd put my arm around him and I'd say, "Sir, we don't want your action anymore, you gotta take it down the street." "Well, what for?" "Sorry, we don't want your action anymore." And I'd run him off. Take my losses, and run him off, and never know how he was fucking me.

JOE FRIEDMAN

I took a job, much to my chagrin, I would find out almost immediately, as a box man, 'cause the dealers there [Hard Rock Hotel] were making crazy money. No one gave that place a chance—it was off strip, they pretty much begged people to work there. I mean, the dealers were all young, everyone was young, and the floor people, managers, were kind of people that didn't have anything better to do. So, it was a real sleeper, and I don't think anyone, including people that were running it, anticipated what was going to happen there, so it was, I was just happy with Tahoe—a hundred-dollar-a-day job was a good job, so I think about making one-fifteen a day, that was even better. So, I didn't know much, so I, instead of taking a dual-rate job, I took a box job....

Well, it's, dealing is fun for a while. And people still, you know,

it just seemed like something I wanted to move up. I wanted some responsibility, you get—it's, it's nice to stand there sometimes, but you get sick of it. So, I was lucky enough at the Hard Rock—they were desperate.

Yeah.

They were desperate for people, they didn't pay much, and I said one fifteen on the floor, even back then, sucked. You know, it's sorta Downtown money. So within a week or two, the holidays—this is November—so the holidays were coming up, they're like, "Okay, go stand over there, and this is how you work the computer, and now you're a floor person."

Okay.

So that was pretty much the training. And, I started training by fire, and just went from there. I got promoted—did the schedule and got promoted to pit manager, and then eventually the assistant shift manager.

So tell me what you're doing as a floor person there. What are your responsibilities?

Floor person at the Hard Rock, you're really just trying to keep chips in the tray, 'cause it was so busy, you're just trying to, you know, make sure there's enough red, make sure there's fills going out, make sure, you know, people are staying somewhat in line. But it was just, I've always seen the floor person as being part of that, you know, the service chain, you know, not to bring up Wynn things, but it's, uh, I think you're part of the customer experience. For better or for worse that, you know, the stone-face dealer, the stone-face pit boss—those days are gone. You know, and they just don't hold water anymore. So you, I think you have to be talking, and plus, it makes the night go by faster if you're talking to people, you're out there, you know, shaking hands, kissing babies. It was so busy, you were just, really just trying to keep up.

Okay. How many games would you have?

Anywhere from four to six. It was a lot, and it was always busy. And the limits were fair, and it was always busy. There was never—all shifts. I mean it was, most places die out, maybe one or two, and this place didn't die out till five or six. It kept you busy.

So what shift were you working?

I opened on swing, and spent time on all the shifts. I've never been a graveyard guy, I mean, I worked graveyard, but never really liked it. Some people love it, but I did work all the shifts there....

Floor, maybe a year or two to get promoted to pit, and then another year or so to get back up shift.

So when you got promoted, did you have to switch your shift to another shift?

They rotated. Every year, or so, they just would rotate people around, rotate shifts, pits—sorta everyone had a look at things, you know, perspective's good.

Yeah. So what was that like making that jump? So, now you're running the pit—how many games were you doing?

Usually you're just, you're running around doing everything. You're putting out fires. There were no cell phones at the time. (Laughs) So you had a pager, and your pager went off, and you went to a phone, and you put out another fire. It's, the nice thing about the Hard Rock, since there wasn't that infrastructure, is you got to do a lot of things, you got to wear a lot of hats, which I enjoyed, because it would serve me well later at other properties where they did have a lot of infrastructure but you kind of still knew what was going on. It was—one boss, Brad, he'd look at his pager, and he'd say, "Joe, it's the cage, handle it." So, it was, sort of that "handle it" mentality, and you got to do stuff, and usually you were right, you know, or at least you did something, wasn't crazy. But yeah, you never, it could be valet, it could be, you know, the front desk, could be Mr. Lucky's.

HOWARD DREITZER

Did you start moving up into management at the Flamingo?

Yes, I became a box man there, and then I was sort of working box man and floorman there. And then, it was interesting, what happened at that point—I haven't thought about this for years—they had this inquisition, and I'll never forget it. They called me into the office, and all the senior management was there and they said to me that they knew that supervisors were taking money from dealers as I was describing before, as tips from the crews. So I didn't comment. I mean, everybody knew that, there was no mystery about that. Everybody knew it everywhere in town. Then they said they wanted me to—did I

know anybody that was doing that. And I said, “Well, not really.”

And they just kept pushing me on that, and of course I did, and they knew I did, but I wasn’t going to say anything. And then they said, “Well, who do you think is doing it?” And I said, “Well, I’m not really comfortable saying that because you’re going to fire them,” and I said, “If I know somebody’s taking it, I’ll tell you,” which was a bit of a lie on my part, but I had to tell them something. And I got fired over that. That was the only time in my career I got fired.

So how does moving to property manager change your focus—now you’re not looking at a particular shift or just table games—how are you getting your new knowledge about what’s going on in the casino?

Well a lot of it has to do—you just have to stay in tune with all the news that’s being published. You keep your contacts live, I mean, you’re always meeting with people from other casinos to discuss issues to see if they’re having the same experiences as you—from other jurisdictions, various conventions, there were already one or two in those days. You got to those to try to stay updated, you deal with the manufacturers to understand what their focus is and where they’re heading, and they’re also trying to pick your brain to see what you want. You do research, you start getting involved in research through marketing and focused studies of product, as well as marketing programs. Now, marketing can become, also, very consuming if you allow it.

My philosophy was to hire a good marketing person and just sort of stay in touch with them. You lead them by direction, but not by specific programs. So you just need to be aware of what they’re doing, but you have to stay in touch with, most importantly with marketing, you have to stay in touch with how they measure what they’re doing, because as creative as they can be with their programs, they can be even more creative with their measurements, and obviously, when you’ve got the same department generally measuring their own productivity, a lot of times you have to really dig in there and make sure that their assumptions and the way they’re measuring is correct, because marketing can squander millions and millions of dollars, and make it look good.

And you’re the Chief Operating Officer there?

Right.

So how's that different?

Well at that point, I did take in a bunch of different departments—IT and HR and all of that. And that became a challenge in terms of trying to spend the appropriate amount of time in each place. You had to make sure you didn't neglect anybody, but on the other hand, you couldn't be focused too heavily in any one area that would detract from revenue enhancement at the end. So that's where I honed my skills doing that. And fortunately, the property was doing well, so when the property is doing well, it permits you to have a much different focus than when you're struggling for revenue.

And are you ever interacting with the players at that level?

Oh yeah, I always have forced myself to do that, because I don't want to lose touch. It really is where the business is, so I would still walk the floor, I would still talk to customers, I would still go to customer events and sit with customers, and talk to them, and give speeches to them. I think that's a part of the business that if you—some people are in these positions that don't really enjoy people. They enjoy management or power, whatever their issue is, but the danger with that is it's very much a people business. And we have no product, really. We're basically letting them buy time, and you have to understand their motivations and their likes and dislikes, and you have to be seen, I believe, as a person who likes them. If they don't see that, then they disconnect from the property and from the management and eventually leave, particularly the better players. So, yeah, I spend a lot of time with them.

ELLIOTT SCHECTER

I started off as the relief boss, 'cause I was the youngest of the group and had the least casino experience, so I was working all three shifts for the first six months. That was interesting. And they let me—because I was pretty young, I decided to do it in reverse. Instead of working day shift and swing shift and graveyard shift, I turned it around and managed to work grave, then swing, then day, so I technically worked five shifts in four days. When you're 24 and 25, you can get away with it. Of course, by the time shift four came around, the day shift, after the quick swing turnaround, you didn't really want to be near me the first few hours of the shift. I was very tired and cranky.

How did becoming a manager change your perspective?

I like to think it didn't. Certainly, I had more responsibility. I certainly had to answer for a lot of decisions that the people I reported to had to answer for, uh, "Where's the revenue, why are you doing this, how can we do that, what's the production of doing that, how do you make this work, show me the math?" Questions I didn't have to answer before, I had to answer and show proof. So, I mean, that was both new but incredibly exciting. I learned a lot of things on the way. The GM there was basically the ex-CFO, so he taught me a lot about the, the PnLs and financial reviews and justifications, how to put actual presentations and proposals together. So I picked up a lot of skills there, important skills that I'll certainly need for the rest of my career, that's for sure.

DAVE TORRES

It was, it was hard at first, because I thought like a dealer. And, as I was telling you previously, a dealer always thinks he can do a boxman's job. Like, he just sits there, he doesn't do anything, it's easy money, till you're in that position and you realize, like there's a lot more to this than I thought. I'm keeping track of stuff, the boss is on me, was that there, was—so, now I'm not just keeping track of my end or my prop box, I'm keeping track of the game. "Oh my God," and they're asking, that's when I run across as a boss, my first counterfeits and things like that, I had to—so, you run into counterfeit money, and now what do you do? As a dealer, you just think that's funny, you go around, right?

Yeah.

And, as a dealer, it's easy. Some guys haven't talked to the suit. You don't really have a lot of pressure. "Hey, guy wants a comp, hey, guy wants cocktails." You hand off a lot, right?

Yeah.

So, I've tried to liken it to someone being in college with their parents paying all the bills. You think you're an adult, but you're not, really, you know what I mean? You're not in the real world yet, but you think you are. So, then you get to be a box man, and you're like, wow, there's more responsibility. And I started standing up pretty fast, so I was, there was no such thing as dual-rates at that time.

Really?

You were a boxman or you were a floor. But they would start standing you up, and they called that grooming rather than, so I'm grooming you, right. And I was jacket-heavy—what I mean by that is, because I was not secure in being a boss, I made a lot of over-the-top decisions, or yell at people, “Do what I say!”

And the transition was hard, and you're a hard ass, because you try, they see you as their peer, and you're not their peer anymore—you're above them. So, that's why I agree with what the businesses used to do at the time is you had to change shifts. If you were working swing shift, you became a boss, you're going to graveyard. We're gonna train you there, and then day shift. You're not going to back on swing shift for at least a year, maybe two. You worked with these guys and they need to see you as a boss.

Yeah.

Same thing as a floor, you start training as a floor, now you're in charge of two dice tables, or four blackjack tables. “Oh my God,” you know, it's different, changing cards, did you make the call, is this guy counting on me, did he cap that bet?

So you have to start seeing things from a different position. Where do you stand, where's the best place to stand? Well, guys would tell you, you want to stand on this edge of the podium, look this way, don't worry about watching that guy, and running down games as you go, 'cause this was when everybody was afraid of counters, right, so everybody was afraid of counters. So, you start, was he counting?, oh he pressed his bet four units up.

And it's all these things to remember, okay, fills, okay what time do they pull the boxes, okay, this guy—then the boss would tell you and ask you things like, “How long is that dealer in?” “I don't know.” Well, now I need to keep track of how long my dealers are in, so you start adding these skillsets as you go up. So, as a dealer, I'm only in charge of this felt in front of me. Then as a box man, I'm in charge of these crew. And as a floorman, I'm in charge of these two or four tables, but all of the details that go along with it—lammers, markers, credit. Okay, I'm issuing credit—what do I look at when I give credit? When's a good time to come in? Do I interrupt the guy? And you're reading people. And the public sees any suit as a pit boss.

CHRISTINA GENTILE

I dealt there quite some [at the King's 8/Wild Wild West]. I actually, that's where I, I went into doing the floor.

Okay, so tell me about that. How did that, why did you decide to do that?

My boss at the time, the shift manager, he encouraged me to step up into a supervisory role, and I did. I covered, when he was gone, I would cover his days off. So I was a dual-rate, it's a little different than the normal Strip casinos, I was dual-rated from a dealer to a shift boss.

Okay.

So, because, being so small, you didn't have floor.

Interesting.

Yeah, and that was real nice.

So what did you have, did you have to get any license or anything to qualify, or do anything to qualify as dual-rate, or did they just make you dual-rate?

No, they just, it's upon, it was upon them to do it. Nothing special was needed.

So what made you want to go into management in floor and shift boss?

Eventually, I decided to go ahead and do more just full time floor, so that I could move up to a shift position, and a daytime shift, I was looking for the daytime hours again. I did have a stepdaughter back then, and my schedule was crazy, and the nighttime shift is just not family-focused.

So what was it like going from dealing to being a floor, to working floor more often, and even doing the dual-rate stuff?

Dual-rate stuff—at the Wild Wild West, it was difficult. We had a new director of casino operations come in, and he and I struggled with our differences of, I was no longer a dealer, I was now a floor or a manager, and I shouldn't stick up for the dealers, you know, that I wasn't a part of their group, and the separation—I struggled with separating myself from them, because we were an entire group.

CHRIS BIANCHI

So, after breaking into the Barbary Coast, what'd you do, where'd you go? So you're dealing there?

I was dealing there for about a year-and-a-half, and then they promoted me as a floor supervisor for about a year. In late 2005 my casino manager at the Barbary Coast informed me that I was going to be transferred to the South Coast as a pit manager. He was so excited to tell me, that he made me call my dad right away to tell him the good news.

Huh.

And I was 25 years old.

Wow.

I actually felt bad I was leaving because Barbary had become my home.

So tell me a little bit about transitioning from dealing to floor person—was that dual-rate or was that, did you just go up all at the same time?

There was no dual-rate. I did stand as a floor supervisor when I was a dealer but I still received my dealer wages.

So, how many tables were you, are you looking after when you're a Floor?

Usually around four to six games in your section. It just depends on what pit you're in.

Tell me a little bit about what you're doing as floor—what, what's your shift life on a daily basis?

As a floorperson, you pretty much walk in and you get your instruction from your pit boss as far as what pit and section you will be for that day. You're going to get a rundown from the shift before you on who's been playing recently—if they're a big player, if someone's being a problem, or vice versa, someone's being a really nice guy, he's tipping the dealers well, etc. And then you're responsible for those four games in the pit. Any problems that may come up, or if someone's winning/losing a lot of money, you report to the pit manager.

JIMMY WIKE

So tell me about moving up to floor.

Well, it was actually pretty easy for me. I was comfortable around the games, and it was, I mean it's different, but you're still, you're just looking at a crap game from a different angle.

Tell me about how it's different.

Well, it's different—you know, when you're dealing craps, if you're on the pole, you know, you're watching both ends; but when you're dealing, you're kinda responsible just for, for one end. When you're on the floor or you're on the box, you're kind of responsible for the entire game. And multiple people doing multiple functions, including guest service. You know, by this time, this is like '80, '81, and it started to be more important. There had been a little bit more competition, and it was just starting to be more important.

There was a guy, a shift manager down there, his name was Mike Sarge, but his real last name was Gambino, and he was from Philadelphia, but he always went by Mike Sarge. And Mike liked me, and he would have me watch the pit. Sometimes he would go home and he would say, count out. That's—we used to do a count every eight hours back in those days. Now we do what we call a twenty-four hour drop—once a day, we count the money. But in those days, we used to do it on every shift.

Okay, and what are you doing on the count?

You're taking inventory of the chips. So what happens is, you take inventory of the chips and put a copy in the drop box/cash box. Now when you're going through the drop box, you have your cash markers, your credits, and your fills. And you take that against an opening inventory and closing inventory, and it will tell you what each game won for that eight-hour period. So I used to take the count sometimes.

Mike was the first guy that I ever saw in this business as a boss that, when he went home every night said good night to the staff. The shift managers—they usually come in earlier than the bulk of the supervisors and dealers, and that's just so they can kinda get the lay of the land before their group comes in. And Mike was the first guy that ever came around when he was going home, walk through the pits, and tell all the supervisors, "Good night, thank you." Nobody ever

did that. It was just, that was just the business. But he would come around and say, “Good night, thank you.” And I remembered that my whole career, and I always tried to implement it. If I was a floorman, I’d thank the dealers, unless there was something wrong with them. When I was a pit boss, I would thank the floormen. When I was the shift boss, I thanked the pit managers, etc. So, Mike was the first guy that did that, and it kinda made an impression on me.

GOING TO BALLY’S

I was an entry level supervisor. I sat box, I worked on the floor, I went in the twenty-one pit, I kinda went everywhere. And I was also the last person on the shift. I was working two jobs at that time. I was working six nights a week at Bally’s, and I was working five days at a dealer school. I had a secondary education license to teach twenty-one, craps, roulette, and mini baccarat. Like I said, I worked four hours a day at the dealer school, and then I worked eight hours or more, usually more, at night.

So, I was the last guy out on swing shift, which means I was always that guy that would send home that last nine o’clock, nine to five—I had a nine fifteen shift. It’s just the worst possible shift because people come in at seven o’clock, eight o’clock, nine o’clock, you know, like that, but nine fifteen means you’re absolutely the last person out every night.

And in those days, we had to close to an impress bank. So, the crap table was thirty thousand, six hundred; the twenty-one and the roulette tables were forty-two hundred, so at the end of the night, you just didn’t close the game and lock it up. You had to credit chips off if you had too many, and then get a fill, so that every day, every bank roll opened up with an identical amount. But that also meant that even if they closed the game at five in the morning, by the time security got around to you, you’d be there till five thirty, quarter to six or later.

Well, it was a really great experience for me being that late guy even though I didn’t like it because I got to work all over the casino. I worked in the high limit baccarat, I worked watching the princes play roulette, I watched the biggest twenty-one games, and whatever was in dice, so it was like an invaluable experience, and I was never a complainer; even though I worked overtime, I never complained. In the first place, nobody keeps you there if they don’t need you. And I was never a guy looking at my watch going, oh God, when am I gonna

get out of there, you know, where's my break—I never complained.

And I remember that New Year's of '87—nine days in a row, I worked overtime, and it was at least an hour every time. The graveyard boss, he told me one time, he says, "Jimmy, I'm sorry to keep sticking you like this," and I says, "That's okay, you wouldn't have me stay if you didn't need me." And about two months after that, in February of 1988 they had a big shake up there and that one graveyard boss, he kind of ascended, and I got promoted to pit manager. I was there for eight months and got promoted to pit manager. That just killed people that had been waiting since 1973 at the MGM hoping to get, become a pit manager. But, and the only thing I can think of is, I watched all the games, and I never complained, right?

Yeah.

And, that's the way it was. Now, during that time, there was a tremendous amount of change. So from, when I went to work there in '87, until I became casino manager in '95, I was the eighth person to become casino manager in eight years....

So Bally's, it just changed how I looked at the casino, I mean it was just different. Like I said, I was there eight months, and I got promoted to pit manager, and there were seven casino managers before me in 8 years. They were Bob Payton, Alan Anderson, Dan Snowden, Rick Howe, Gerry Alicia, Dale Darrough, Rick Richards, and then me in eight years. And every time, with one exception, every time there was a new casino manager, there was something they had to change.

There's no casino manager in the world that will walk in and say, "Yeah, I like the layout, I like the way things are," because that will beg the question of why do we need you here? The last guy thought this was okay, and he's gone. So, whether it's real or imagined, whenever a new casino manager comes in, they say, "Well, we gotta do this, we gotta do that, change the procedure," you know, do something, they gotta do something different to make it look like they're doing something positive, and all they're really doing is hoping to get lucky and that the hold percentage turns around. But there were all those people, and I survived, and I kept getting promoted almost every time that there was a change.

So after being pit manager, what'd you get promoted to?

I got promoted to assistant shift manager.

Tell me about the change in becoming a pit manager.

Well, pit manager, that was pretty exciting. So, here I am a pit manager, and I was relief pit manager, which was even better because that means I relieve the pit manager in the twenty-one pit, in the dice pit, and in the high limit baccarat pit. So, I got to relieve and anybody in the casino business knows relief's the best spot on anything, whether you're a dealer, a pit boss, whatever—being relief is good because you don't get stuck in one spot all day long. So, I was a pit manager, and if you're a dealer, you think you know how the schedule should be run. When you're a floorman, you see a little bit more, and you think you know how the pit manager should act. When you're a pit manager, you think you know everything and you know how a shift should be run. And when you're a shift, you think you know how the casino should be run. I never worried about going to the next level. I just always thought, when I was a floorman, I just thought I wanted to be the best floorman I can, and if I get promoted, that's fine. And when I was a pit manager, I just thought, I just wanted to be the best pit manager I can be, and don't worry about it. And then I got promoted to assistant shift manager. Then there was another shakeup, and I got promoted to shift manager.

Which shift?

Well, I started out on graveyard, I worked on graveyard. I worked as a shift manager for six years, almost six years. I got promoted to shift manager in February of 1990. Then my first shift was graveyard, and that's another thing about shift managers—all the shift managers think their shift is the most important. The day shift managers, they go to most of the meetings, meet with other department heads, so they think they're the most important.

The swing shift manager thinks, "I'm here when the action hits, you know, this is where all the action is, I'm the most important shift manager here."

And the graveyard shift manager says, "I'm cleaning up everybody's mess, I'm doing the count, I'm taking care of this, taking care of that, closing the games but not trying to run customers off—I'm the most important shift manager." And I know that because I worked all three shifts, so I know the mentality. In reality, all three shifts are important, but different....

I was named interim casino manager, and then in December, I was named permanent casino manager.

What was that like?

And with that I was assistant vice president for about a year, and then became a vice president.

Well what's it like knowing that you got eight guys in eight years before you?

Yeah, I'll tell you, my biggest fear was, I wanted to last a year. I just thought, let me last a year, because if I don't last a year, everybody's gonna say, "He blew it, he couldn't handle it, they gave him a shot and he blew it," because that's what the rest of us said about a lot of the people that had been in that job when they would get fired. They'd say, "They couldn't handle it, they couldn't do it." So, I had a terrible fear of losing that job in the first year, but my other fear was executive meetings. I was always comfortable on the casino floor, I mean there was nothing that bothered me or fazed me on the casino floor. But all of a sudden we had weekly executive meetings, and I'm in the company of some highly educated people—the vice president of the hotel, vice president of human resources, vice president of food and beverage, the CFO, and all this. And they're talking in terms that I had never heard before. They're talking about REVPAR, benefit costs, and yielding up occupancy, and turnover and covers in the restaurants, they're talking about all these things, and I thought, oh my God, I'm like an idiot here because this I don't know this stuff.

And do they, I guess they don't prep you at all for that?

Well no, and every Thursday we're having a meeting up in the executive office where dept heads may as well be speaking in tongues. But during this, we always had a roundtable discussion, and then towards the end, it'd be, "Jimmy, what's going on in the casino?" And I would go, boom, boom, boom, boom, right. And, I noticed everybody's watching me intently, and after about the third meeting I had an epiphany, it dawned on me that, yeah, okay, I don't know what all the terminology is for these other departments, but I'm the expert in the casino. I know more about the casino than any of them, so that's fine that I don't know everything about their departments—they don't know, they know next to nothing about mine. So, after that, I just felt very, very comfortable with them, and I made friends with all of them, and I talked to them, and tried to find out as much as I could about their departments. But I still had this nagging fear that I wouldn't last a year, just because of the history of Bally's.

CHRIS VAN BUUREN

So what was the transition into being assistant shift manager, assistant casino manager like?

It was very little. You don't really have, because the casino is so small, you don't have a lot of extra duties apart from being a dealer. You really do the counts, and that's about it. I mean, once the casino manager is on the floor, he basically runs everything. He'll run the break list, he'll make sure the customers are happy, he'll do the marketing, he'll do that VIP clubs, which we don't have very much of in the beginning. So the assistant is really just there to carry an extra set of keys and open up a slot machine here and there if need be.

Okay.

From there, going into the casino manager role, that was a little bit more involved, to learn a little more about slot machines, which is basically very self-taught. While I was on the ship, there wasn't anybody that teaches you about these things; you basically do it yourself. Also, you have to worry more about paperwork when you're the casino manager. You've got to worry about daily reports, you got to worry about hot and cold slot reports that you have to send shore side, and the money has to balance. I mean, you take responsibility for probably about \$150,000 in cash as well as maybe chips, eight to ten racks, maybe \$450,000, \$500,000 in chips.

GARY SANOFF

A couple years into the Union Plaza, about a year and a half, a gentleman by the name of Jimmy O'Keefe that came from the Tropicana, came to the Union Plaza as a pit boss, and he befriended me and taught me how to play golf, which he told me would be very advantageous later in my career. He was an old-timer at the end of his career, after his heyday at the Tropicana. And he said, "You don't want to deal anymore, you should get into management because the future is management." So he put me on the box.

Back then the crap tables had a floorman to watch the game and a box man that sat in the middle of the game and watched the money. So I went there and I went from this great tip job to making \$65 or something like that a day.

Yeah.

But he said, “This is the way to go, and we’re going to work you up onto the floor,” and that’s how it went. I worked the box for about six months, and then he promoted me to the floor.

Can you tell me a little bit about the transition from dealing to box, what was that like?

At that point, being the person I was, the transition to box was almost a relief because dealing the kind of action, although it was great, we had a lot of 25 cent craps down there, and the quality of play wasn’t the greatest, so I wasn’t thrilled dealing at that point, and I welcomed the box.

You got to put a suit on, and I’m 25, 26 years old at this point, so it felt good to get dressed up and get a lot more respect than you did as a dealer. And I said, “Well, this would be a good way to go,”—I don’t mind management, and if I can be on the floor, they would start using you, though not paying you, they would still use you to stand up from the box and work the floor for a while so they could teach you, and I liked that a lot.

But what happened was, I liked working the floor, and I stopped liking sitting the box, because I felt very confined as you were under the table.

Can you talk a little bit about the difference between floor and box?

Well, again, when you’re sitting box, you’re in one spot and you don’t have the mobility to get up and walk around, to talk to customers. You’re kind of sandwiched in between two dealers, you’re down at a lower level, people looking down at you, and although the job was important at the time, it seemed like an old man’s job, because that’s where old floormen and pit bosses went to retire to a box job. Unfortunately, to learn the businesses, this was the route I had to take. Right now, few properties have boxmen.

Why do you think that is?

It’s definitely an economic thing. Certainly, the boxman was there for game protection. What they found out, more boxmen were stealing than not stealing, so what you were paying in salary for that, plus what they were taking out.... I’m going back 30 years ago, 35 years ago, this was the business. I mean, there were guys 65, 70 years old sitting box and getting paid \$65 dollars a day and supplementing

their income—not that that was accepted, but I think that’s part of the reason boxmen went away.

So tell me a little bit about going up to floor now.

So now, I get the full-time promotion, I’m up to \$77.50 a day working on the floor, and I’m learning all about baccarat, roulette—I learned that in the two years dealing there. Now, to watch those games, a lot of responsibility is put on you, and I guess it was always in my personality to be a leader, and that was sensed, even my old timer boss Rod Morris sensed that, and they started using me on high-end games, and we had good marker action for a Downtown property.

Plus, we weren’t automated down there, so there weren’t pit clerks, and markers were taken the old-fashioned way, not by computer, by index card. You had to go to the cage to check a credit line. And when you wanted a fill on your game, which means if your game was running out of chips, you would write your own fill slip, deliver it to the cage, they would call you to the cage, physically—we wouldn’t have security—to pick up the chips. You’d go to the cage and pick up the chips yourself, carry them to the game. At the end of the shift, you would then go around and I was tasked with what we call counting the games, which is checking the inventory at the end of the shift, and I was learning a lot and liking it very much. I figured this was the career I wanted.

CLIFF CONEDY

You know, so we were working three, four days a week, but the twenty-one dealers, the regulars, they were envelope, they were twenty-four hour envelope, and so when it came time to file taxes, they were filing on what they made, and we were filing on what we made, and two years in a row, I got audited by the IRS.

Wow.

I’m going, man, I got, here’s my calendar, I put down, you know, when you see a line there, that means I made nothing. You know, when you see that twelve hundred dollars, that’s what I made for that day, you know. And they said, “Well, the general consensus from other dealers, you know, you made ten thousand a year more than what you’re claiming.” Well, you can’t compare twenty-one dealers

with crap dealers. But that didn't fly, I still had to pay, so that's when I made the decision to go into management.

Okay.

And I took my first box job at the Imperial Palace. I worked at the Imperial Palace for eleven years.

What was the transition like going to Box?

(Laughs) The guys I dealt with thought I was crazy.

Really?

Especially because of, right before Christmas and New Year holiday (unintelligible) money, and they were all making three, four hundred dollars in tips and everything, so it was a step back in order to take two steps forward.

Okay.

It was kinda tough, but I needed to know how much money I had coming in. I couldn't, it was like I was stressing and sweating whether I was gonna make any money or not in order to pay my bills, you know, I have babies at home, I need diapers and milk. I wasn't a strong arm hustler-type of person; I felt guilty asking somebody to make a bet for the dealers, and so eliminate that and eliminate the IRS issue, I just said, well, I'm gonna have to sit on a box, they're gonna have to take theirs off the top, 'cause it seems like no matter what I claim, they still say it's not enough....

But going on the floor, like I said, at that time was a lot easier, because you had a box man and a floor supervisor for every game. And it was more pushing paper, you know, you have to make decisions on questionable calls or claims or things like that. I like the floor much better than the box.

What do you do on the box?

Box—you just sit there and drop the money.

(Laughs)

The stick man watches one end, he watches the end the dice land on, the box man watches the opposite end. And, that way, they feel like the playing surface is covered. And he makes corrections on his end, the stick makes corrections on his end. "Give him another nickel, you shorted him," you know, or, "That's not right, bring that back," or whatever. The supervisor, somebody that comes up and asks for

markers, and that was, the Imperial Palace wasn't a big marker house, it was mostly cash. If you did you get a marker it was five hundred dollars or something like that, but that was—and then they started tracking play. And it was all by hand. (Laughs) You know, write out the player slip and then as, while I was a pit manager, we had to log them all in, and that's how they initially started tracking.

CHRIS TONEMAH

Yes, going from floor to pit, it's different because you have to know the skills of each one of your floormen. You have to observe them and watch them, and that's where being on the floor and working with floormen, you become aware of each one's strengths who would work best in certain areas, and I could tell who wasn't and what I needed to do to help or teach, who I need placed in a different pit area. And because you're a pit manager, you can see the schedule for the next day, and you can ask your scheduler to move people because of business needs—not because of personality. You can never let a personality—for me, as a manager—I can never let someone's personality get in the way of the job. If they are an excellent floorman, and I have high limit guests, I'm going to want them on that game, because I know the procedures will be done, the payoffs will be correct, the game will be protected, and the integrity of the game—those are my things, and that's where I have a problem with my upper management, because they tell me, “Don't worry about that, don't worry about the pace of the game, don't worry about watching the money, just don't worry about it—make sure the guest is happy.” And I'm going, how can you run a business this way?

TO THE STRIP

HOWARD DREITZER

What was it like going from Downtown to the Strip?

Well, that was great. That was a big move. I hadn't anticipated being able to make it that soon, and when I got up there, my income increased significantly. I was able to start saving money and living a little bit better. I had met my wife by then, we weren't married yet. So I started getting settled and thought about—well not at that time—but not long after, started thinking about my future.

JIMMY WIKE

I worked there for a little bit more than a year but I wanted to get a Strip job. So, I didn't know anybody, I had some juice at the Tropicana, and after that first year at the Vegas Club I was supposed to go to the Tropicana. Well, the Tropicana, they just turned over, turned over management teams all the time. And so, I called this person that was a parent of a friend of mine, and says, "I'm ready to go to the Trop," and they says "So-and-so just left here," or like the week before or something like that, so that was that. So now, I'm just out trying to hustle a job on the Strip. Do you want me to continue in this?

Please do, please do, yeah, this is really interesting.

So then, I start pursuing, I'm looking for a Strip job. The MGM was going to open up, they opened up in December of '73. I went out there, but they said I didn't have enough experience, but there were people leaving from other properties to go there so jobs were opening up. So, I was going out auditioning, but I did want to stay at the Fremont about a year, just so I felt comfortable dealing a bigger game, and also, you get—hustling sounds negative, but just that whole aspect of how to treat customers, how to ingratiate yourself with them. So, I went out, I auditioned at the Hilton, I auditioned at the Flamingo, I went to the Riviera, I went to the MGM, and I went to the Stardust. I ended up going to work at the Stardust.

Is this before Argent owned the Fremont and the Stardust?

Yeah, I'll tell you the whole story if you'd like. I was there when Rosenthal took over.

Okay, yeah, please. But before you do that, tell me a little bit about the audition process back then. What would you do?

You would just go in and ask for the pit boss and say, "My name's so-and-so," and you always try and look presentable. In those days, people were wearing long hair, but in the casinos, you didn't, except for the Horseshoe—Horseshoe, you could, they didn't care. You could come to work blind drunk on drugs, and as long as you could deal the game, you're okay. They, Binions didn't care. But you had to perform.

So I always try to maintain myself, you know, neat and presentable, and I just would say, "I'd really like to come to work here, could I get an audition?" And most of the time, they would say, "Got nothing for

you, kid,” you know, “Got nothing for you,” or “Come back and see me next week.”

But I went out to the Stardust, and the guy that was the pit boss on days was a guy named Jimmy Horn. And he says, “Okay, let me take a look at you.” And he puts me on a game, and he leaves me there for two hours, and he’s gone. And, finally I says to the boxman, I says, “Most auditions are twenty minutes.” Most auditions they put you on the stick for five, ten minutes, and then put you on the base on a busy game for ten minutes, and they get a general look at your hands, you know, your capabilities. I mean, it’s not a hundred percent accurate assessment, but they get a pretty good idea in twenty minutes.

And I’m on this game for two hours, and finally, so I told the boxman, I says, “How long am I gonna be here.” And he calls the floorman, he says, “Hey, he’s been on here for a couple hours,” and they knew. It turns out later, they know, but they just do it, and used to do it to everybody.

So, they take me off the game. I go to Jimmy Horn, and he says, “I’m sorry, I didn’t get a look at you,” he says, “I got busy, I didn’t get a look at you, go back on there.”

So they put me back on there for another forty minutes. And then I get off and he says, “Ah, you did okay, come back and see me next week.”

So next week, on my day off, I go out, and he says, “Let me take a look at you.” And I don’t want to say anything, ‘cause I want the job. And so I go on there for about another forty minutes, forty minutes to an hour. And he pulls me off, and he says, “Yeah, you’re fine,” he says, “Come back and see my next week.”

So, I go back the next week, and he says, “Well, let me take a look at you.” And I says, “Okay,” but I’ve auditioned twice,” and he says, “Oh yeah, that’s right, that’s right.” He says, “Come down here tomorrow morning and fill out your paperwork and start.” So I says, “Okay,”

So I went down to the Fremont. I told them “I’m quitting, and I’m going to work at the Stardust.” And I went to work there—the first day I worked there, I went down there about nine thirty, ten, and filled out the paperwork, and Jimmy Horn says, “Well, we need you at eleven, to work at eleven, had a call-in.” So I says, “Sure, great,” I wanted to work.

And so, I go on, and the dollar chips were silver. I dealt chips, but never silver. And silver is, I don’t know how much heavier they are

than clay chips, but they're much heavier, and you have a tendency when you deal is to over-pick. You know, if you need eight chips, you grab fifteen just so you don't run out. But with silver, it's so heavy and your hands just aren't used to that. So by the time I got off at seven o'clock, my hands were kinda cramping up a little bit.

And then this guy comes up to me and he says, "We need you at nine." I says, "Okay, I'll be back at nine in the morning." He says, "No, nine tonight." And I just kinda went, "Huh?" And he says, "Do you want the job or not?" And I says, "Yeah, I want the job, I want the job." So I called home, and said, "I'm not coming home." And I was there till five o'clock in the morning. And then I did have to come back at eleven o'clock the next morning, but by then my hands were just like claws from dealing the silver.

GARY SANOFF

And I stayed there until August of 1984 when I had the opportunity, strictly through juice, because you couldn't get into an elite Strip job without some juice, and my family had some connections in town—can I mention names?

Yeah, sure.

Burton Cohen.

Oh yeah, I knew Burton.

Burton, well, you see a picture on my wall with me and Burton. And Burton was a friend of my family, and he said, "Well, he's been dealing enough and has enough experience, I'm going to introduce him to George Devereau, the casino manager of the Desert Inn, send him in to see me." So in August of 1984, I went to see Burton, who introduced me to George, and I sat in George's office, and he said to me, "Well, I have a job for you, it's dealing twenty-one."

I said, "But George, I've been on the floor for almost four years now, I want to be on the floor." And he said, "Kid,"—back to the kid thing—"Kid, you don't want to be on the floor here, you want to deal."

And I said, "No, I want to be on the floor." He said, "Kid, I'm telling you." I said, "But I've moved away from dealing, I really want to be in management."

He said, "Well, here's what I got for you, I got a twenty-one job dealing; do you want it or don't you want it?" So of course, I took the

job. So I went into the Desert Inn in 1984, started dealing blackjack, which wasn't my main game, but had learned it Downtown at the Plaza.

And I dealt that there for about a year and a half, and George was always saying to me, because I would hit him all the time, "Well, if I'm going to be dealing, I want to deal craps," because back then, and this is big, craps went table for table....

Now, I couldn't get into dealing dice there until George felt I had paid my dues, even though I had that great juice. So he had me deal blackjack for about a year, and then in the second year, he said, "I need you to cover summer vacations on graveyard." I was working swing at the time, which was six o'clock at night to two in the morning. So he said, "If you cover graveyard vacations in dice, I'll see how you do as a dice dealer, and I'll make my decision afterwards, maybe I can put you in dice on swing."

Long story short, I cover, hated graveyard, absolutely hated it, but suffered through it, and after the summer was over, he put me back in twenty-one, and a month after that, the Desert Inn was in the midst of a sale (it was sold five times, and I was at the Desert Inn for almost full fifteen years, so this was the first sale). Summa owned it when I got there, and they were selling it, I believe, to Kirk Kerkorian. And before the old management team left, they put me in dice full time.

HOWARD DREITZER

So tell me a little bit about the shift from being a pit boss to being a shift manager. What's that like, how does that change your perspective?

Pit manager, I think, is one of the best jobs in gaming because it's the last management job that you can pretty much come in and do your eight hours and go home, and you don't have to think about it too much. I mean, you do, and the more industrious guys, the guys who want to move up, do, and I did at the time. But if you want to just be a pit boss, which pays relatively well, and you don't have to take your headaches home, and you can do a good job and not have to be obsessed with your career, it suits that. When you go to shift manager, you've made a commitment.

Everybody that becomes a shift manager is ambitious. Well, some people are in it just for the power, and some are in it for the money, or

both. Some want to just move up in a natural sort of ambition. And when you become a shift manager, you sort of own the shift you're working on, particularly if you're not a relief, and you're day shift or swing shift, and sort of like a mini casino manager, you're concerned about how the shift performs, the morale of the shift, the productivity in terms of efficiency of the shift, and so on, and the perception of other people of how the entire shift works. So it's your first foray into kind of being a casino manager on one level. In fact, some places actually call them casino managers.

And are you dealing with table games exclusively, or are you also dealing with slots?

Most places, you deal with table games, exclusively. It's sort of a weird setup, or it was in those days, it may have changed now, but you pretty much handle the table games, but even though slots have obviously moved up in terms of their contribution and level of profitability to being the majority player, the issues to deal with in slots are not generally as complicated as tables, and don't involve singular, large players as much either, so as a shift manager, then, you basically approve large slot payouts, and you'd handle slots, but pretty much the slot guys took care of the day-to-day stuff, and there weren't a lot of issues that came out of it. Tables where all the issues were in sort of the glamour and the focus, inappropriately so, as the profits were changing. And some companies realized that.

So on a day-to-day basis as a shift manager, what are you doing—what happens, when do you come in if you're working swing shift, when does your day start?

Well, it would vary, but swing shift, let's say you started at eight, so you'd show up there between 7:00 and 7:30. You'd find out who was in house, who's playing, credit situations, any staff issues, callouts, that sort of thing.

Scheduling, you think about what you want to open or what you want to close, any special events, any shows, things like that—restaurants that are having anything different, or opening or closing lines, any regulatory issues that are floating around, and then any projects. A lot of times, we'd be working on different projects as shift managers in terms of administration, whether it is evaluations or head counts, or different scheduling issues, different things like that.

And what kind of problems make their way up to you as the shift manager?

Well, as a shift manager, you've pretty much dealt with all the day-to-day problems of all the staff on your shift. So you would deal with callouts that fell outside of the normal parameters of what's going on or needed your approval. You would deal with any gaming-related issue that the pit managers and floor people couldn't handle, or that the customer wanted somebody's boss to deal with. You'd walk around and be responsible for making sure that the floor was balanced, that the table limits were appropriate, that the pace of the games was correct, that all the things that are supposed to be happening are happening. You'd liaise with surveillance to see what, if any, issues they were having, or if you wanted somebody watched, whether it's a player or a staff member, for whatever reason. And you would also deal with the regulators to make sure that they didn't have any issues as well.