21 Secrets to Dominate the Poker Tables Like a Pro

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Introduction

The first time you played poker, you’re already hooked. Nothing beats the feeling of winning a monster hand and shouting “ship ‘em!” while your poker buddies at the table are scratching their heads why they lost to you. It was so elating you thought you could do this day-in, day-out, and probably pondered on the idea that maybe, just maybe, you could take on bigger games and bring home more cash.

Quietly in your room a dream was brewing. You want to become the best at poker and you want to take it to the next level. So you opened your TV, searched for ESPN, and watched the poker pros battled it out. The imagery was so appealing and daunting at the same time. One player’s stacks of chips piled up like skyscrapers and then suddenly he lost almost all of it to another player. The swings were massive as chips switched from hand to hand, while some players get busted out. You smiled and said, “I think I can do that.”

You’re pumped and the next thing you know you’re looking for bigger cash games. You went to the nearest card room in your area. In your pocket is enough cash for a month’s groceries and a handful of payables. You zoned the poker tables like a scout ranger eager to start firing and you did. After a few hands you got murdered.

It was your first time playing live poker and you labeled what happened as “unlucky.” “I’ll get them losses back,” you said. So you went back for the second, the third, the fourth, and up to the twentieth time, and you still got your butt whooped. What could have gone wrong?

If you’re contemplating of playing poker professionally but don’t know where or how to start, then this book is for you. Just a friendly precaution: The secrets you’ll read here are not carved-in-stone-blood-in-blood-out-rules-that-you-should-follow-down-to-the-last-letter. Instead, treat them as talking points or guidelines when you find yourself in very commonly recurring poker scenarios.

Are you ready? Let’s start.

Poker: A Skill Game (and a little bit of luck)

Contrary to popular belief, poker is as much a game of skill as a game of chance. If you’re one of those people who believe that developing your poker skillset, coupled with some luck, will bring you fortune and make you a long-term winner, then you have the right mindset to play this game.

Just like any skill, poker requires a lot of practice. The big dogs in the big leagues didn’t become who they are without total devotion to the game. You need to commit countless hours playing either live or online and play thousands of hands as possible. However, playing for long hours without getting your expected results could become very frustrating. It could even be more stressful when you lose your hard-earned cash to the guy (or gal) sitting next to you.


**Poker as A Job**

For starters, don’t be blinded by the glitz and glamor of a pro poker’s lifestyle – the yacht, the dream vacation, the cash surplus like an unlimited ATM. If you’re thinking about living the life of the Phil Ivey’s in the world, think again. We’re not saying you can’t do it, but you need to understand that it takes more than pure luck to reach the levels of the pros. Sure, you can get lucky sometimes, but you can’t win all the time on the basis of luck without proper training and preparation. You need to work hard for the money. You need to earn it.

You need to treat poker like a business if you want to go pro. “I just want to dominate other players like the pros” you might say, but what you don’t know is that the pros follow a system to ensure they’re always playing on the top of their games. To do that you need to be business-like in your approach to poker. You should be ready to accept the fact that it wouldn’t be a hobby to you anymore unlike the first few times you had a laugh with your friends in a garage back in the suburbs and play poker like crapshoot.

Taking poker seriously means getting ready for it and grind it out. That’s what the daily grind really means. That’s what day-in, day-out means. Unlike other professions, say a corporate clerk, the one thing that would strike you hard in the nose is that you won’t have a fixed income. If you’re not ready for that stark reality then poker might not be for you.

Another is the possibility of losing. If you can’t handle losing hundreds – even thousands of cash – gracefully, then you might be better off doing something else to make a living. You need money and you need to be prepared to lose it as much as you want to take more of it with you.

**The 21 Secrets and Why You Should Read This Book**

What you will read in this book are principles of how to play poker like the pros. Let these secrets guide you and make them your reference before, during, and after your game. Poker is a complex game and any attempt to encapsulate its beauty in a handful of tricks would be a disservice.

These principles will guide you when you play live or online with a full force of intent to make you decide and act like a pro at the tables. To beat a pro poker player, you need to learn how to think like one. And when you think like one, chances are you’ll dominate the poker tables majority of the time.

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YourHandSucks.com is an online poker magazine. We have tons of interesting poker articles and an awesome community. Join us today at www.yourhandsucks.com
The 21 Secrets to Play Like the Pros

**Secret Number 1: Keep Tabs on the Results of “All” Your Games/Recordkeeping**

If you’re seriously considering playing poker for a living and beating all the others at the table, you need to keep a record of your performance each time you play. There’s no excuse for not having one.

Unless you have a brain of a super computer with artificial intelligence that could remember everything, keeping a notebook where you can jot down important pointers, events, play, etc. would be very useful in the long-run. We guarantee that it would look silly at first and people might find you crazy. Sooner or later you’ll realize that you have in your hands a poker playbook that would witness your evolution from a timid poker player to a professional that wins big consistently.

The notebook will help you keep score of your performance for each hand you play. Statistically, you are collecting data of your performance that you could analyze later on: Why did I play this hand this way and not that way? Did I make the right bet for this middle-pair? Was it a bad play to call my opponent’s all-in play when it’s the last hand for the in-the-money spot?

Recordkeeping is not only about recording your wins and losses, but it’ll give you a broader picture of how you are as a player and how well or badly you play that night or those nights. The data that you collect is you. Your record will help you become conscious about the choices you make whenever you’re at the poker tables.

It may sound daunting at first if not outright ridiculous, but trust us on this one. When you get your head straight using the notes you’ll be surprised with the leaps and bounds improvements you’ll have.

**Secret Number 2: Play Even When You Don’t Feel Like It**

How serious are you with playing poker to make a living? This is not the first time we asked the question and this will definitely not be the last. There will be a moment during your poker career when you’d ask this question and if it’s really worth it.

When we say serious poker player, we’re not talking about someone who doesn’t smile or start a conversation when playing (you can opt not to smile at live poker if you so choose, but you could definitely be naked when playing online poker). By serious we mean commitment to the game no matter what.

Do you know the difference between an amateur and a pro? The amateur disappears when the going gets tough, but the pro shows up regardless of the circumstances. We’re not only talking about poker here. This kind of commitment and dedication holds true to all professions.
Do you say “I want some time off from all of this maybe three months or so” if you’re working 9-5 as a corporate auditor? Can you tell your boss that you want an indefinite vacation because you’re having streaks of bad days? Chances are you’ll get sacked.

Part of being a pro is the commitment and dedication to show up even when you’re not at your best, although you still need to play your best. There are myriad reasons: disturbance in the home front, your dog died, brewing domestic misunderstanding with your partner, etc. Name it. Name all of it. But you still need to show up and when you do, play your best every time you report for poker work.

“But I just want to have fun!” If you’re only after the fun of playing then turning pro is not for you. You can go grind as an accountant within a fixed schedule or you can grind as a poker player without a time clock to box you in. The only requirements for pro poker play are commitment and dedication. Put those two virtues to heart.

Secret Number 3: Game Selection

Once you get that recordkeeping thing going and you start to get good at it (in terms of keeping score and winning), what’s next? If you have a relatively good winning streak, would you immediately jump to higher stakes and gamble your months of winnings?

Our advice is to make things easy for you: choose where you want to play to make a living. It could be live or online (or both). It could be a local cardroom in your area. Poker players who turned pro will tell you they uprooted themselves from where they originally were. Some grew up in a friendly suburb where games are very minimal – too minimal they can’t provide for paying rent. That forced them to follow their dreams of becoming pro and relocated in Las Vegas, Atlantic City and Europe.

For some who find it difficult to leave their loved ones behind, they opted to focus on online poker games and honed their skills to earn serious money. Regardless of your choice, we suggest that you try them out for a few weeks or ideally, six months. In that way, you’ll have a feel of what it’s like to be in that kind of environment.

If you plan to play live, go where the money is. If you want to play online poker, study all the online poker websites you’ll encounter. Join their forums, discuss with other players, ask about the sites’ rakes, observe how players play in different limits, and practice playing with them within your controlled game plan, etc.

Just a fair warning, though: if you decide to leave your small town games for the big leagues, remember that the players – the pros whom you’ll encounter – will play better. They come in different shapes and sizes in the poker hierarchy and you need to spot them early on. Why do you need to know who they are? The objective is not to battle it out against them, but to know and find yourself a spot in the game hierarchy. Sooner or later you’d face them, but the initial objective is to strike a balance between the table limits and the amount of cash you’re willing to play each day.
Remember: the amount of money you can earn depends on the quality of your opponents. You’ll soon realize that smaller limits are easier to beat. However, the amount of money you’re likely to earn will be smaller when compared to higher stakes games. The big problem, though, with bigger or higher limit games is that you’ll encounter a tougher lineup of players.

The secret is to find a limit that would provide you a balance between your capacity to earn a living and increase your win rates on a regular basis. The moment you find that kind of table limit and beat it, that’s the time you can say you’re a pro poker player. But hey! We didn’t say you can’t climb up the ladder. You definitely can. Just take slow strides because the objective is not to win instantly, but to earn in a slow, sweet, and stable manner.

Secret Number 4: The Power of Statistics & Expectations

Your gut tells you you’re good enough to play poker for a living. However, there’s something that holds you back. You can’t be certain if you’re already a winning player or not. This next secret is the most technical approach to poker, but it’s not rocket science either. Poker math is different from high-end mathematics they teach kids at Princeton to win Nobel Prizes and then go crazy after. You don’t need a “beautiful mind” to discover your own “Nash equilibrium” at poker.

Instead, you need to learn a little bit of useful statistics to calculate your expectations. A useful tool to learn is the standard deviation of your game. Big words, right? Don’t be alarmed. Your standard deviation simply refers to how “swingy” your poker game is. The higher your standard deviation is each time you play, the higher your variance becomes. That means the likelihood of you getting beaten is also higher. The lower your standard deviation is, the lower your chances of getting hit by bad streaks.

Standard deviation measures how far or near you are from your averages. Just bear in mind that your standard deviation is different from other players. Your standard deviation depends on a variety of factors such as playing style, the way your opponents play, or how swingy the table you’re playing at is.

Once you get a clear grasp of how standard deviation works, it will help you understand and describe the way you play within your hourly winning average.

\[ \text{Poker Standard Deviation} = \text{aggressive play to increase your win rate (expectations)} + \text{not taking too much risks to minimize devastating swings.} \]

Secret Number 5: Are You Risk-Averse?

You’re mid-stack in middle position and you’re dealt pocket tens. The player under the gun raised five times the blind and the player after him re-raised three times. You’re next to act. What should you do? Should you call or fold? Should you re-raise?
You’ll always find yourself in these situations when you play poker for a living. Ask any pro poker player and they’ll give you hundreds of scenarios how you should play that hand. But how should you really play your pocket tens? The answer is: it depends. We’re not joking. It really depends.

Primarily, it depends on how tolerant you are when it comes to risk considering that the information about this particular hand is incomplete (we didn’t include the characteristics of the players involved, the way they play, for how long they’ve been playing, the size of their stacks, etc).

There is no right or wrong answer in this scenario, either. It depends entirely on how much you’re willing to risk in every hand you get. Your style of play determines your approach in every hand. If you’re after a bigger win rate then playing aggressive is the way to go. But remember what we talked about standard deviation. You could also be conservative and win one big bet per hour. However, this also means that you have to play longer hours than usual.

**Secret Number 6: Learn from the Best (and Try to Beat them Afterwards)**

If you’re a hardcore poker fan/player like us, there’s no better example to embody our 6th secret than Tom Dwan. Early in his poker playing days, Dwan admitted that he would mimic how the best poker players play. He would analyze the way their strategies unfold and once understood he’d include them in his own arsenal of moves. Overtime, Dwan developed his own style of poker: aggressive, fearless, and unstoppable (at least that’s what we see on TV).

Can you beat Dwan in his game?

To play poker in the long haul means many sacrifices. Sadly, there are players who can’t balance what needs to be balanced and other parts of their lives suffer in turn. Playing poker can be lonely sometimes and it will help you tremendously if you build relationships with kindred souls. Learn from the most intuitive poker players you can find. Find out how they do things, how they think, and how they approach the game.

We remember one of our staff at [www.yourhandsucks.com](http://www.yourhandsucks.com) telling a story of a pro he played with on several occasions. Let’s keep the pro nameless and his not the type you see on *High Stakes Poker*. He’s just your average Joe who makes part-time living playing cash games. Our staff spoke to this player and he found out that he’s a consultant civil engineer by day and a pro poker player at night. He told our staff that the good thing about a consultant is that he can come and go as he pleases from the construction site.

But what really caught our staff’s attention is the ability of the engineer/player to lay down monster hands. Our staff saw him folded a flush in a three-way hand believing one of the two players had a full-house. Our staff saw him folded pocket kings and pocket jacks in another situation.

“The hand that you let go is as important as the hand you play,” he told our staff. This statement left a mark on our staff. The discipline of the pro poker player he met was relentless. Our staff
also realized that whenever this pro poker player enters a pot he’s very aggressive. He commits, but not too much. And he gets away from bad plays almost all the time. He always leaves himself outs.

You’ll find different characters in cardrooms when you play live, but only a handful of players you can really learn from. Choose the best. When you find them, keep them. You can help reinforce one another.

However, it’s a different ball game when you play online. The approach is slightly different from live players because you need to filter who’s really good and who’s not. You could check out and be active in poker forums and there are poker sites that give free tutorials and help analyze your game. Also, there are poker sites with pro poker players who can guide you through your poker career in exchange for a subscription fee.

It’s your choice. What’s important is that you learn from the best and beat them later on.

Secret Number 7: Do You Know How to Ask the Right Questions?

There are some players who, if not annoying, keep asking the wrong questions. You’ll encounter plenty of them in cardrooms and casinos. There might also be a time that you’re one of them. We’re talking about the kind of player who complains about why he’s getting bad beat all the time or why that idiot from Eastern Europe keep winning with his bad calls and plays.

We’re sure you’ve been in the same situation like those players we just described, right? If you’re the type who asks why “Lady Fortuna” is not on your side each time you play then you need to work a lot with your game. If you’re wondering why your aces won’t hold up while the player on your left wins each time he plays his bullets means that you don’t have control of the table.

You begin to drill a hole in your poker mindset the moment you start to ask questions like these. We’ll be very brutal and upfront with you. Don’t ask such questions. They’re self-defeating. Instead, change your attitude and your mindset when strings of bad cards come along your way. Acknowledge that you can always change the outcome of the game regardless of your position and situation. Those who lose big at poker don’t know how to ask the right questions. They rather blame other players or the circumstances they’re in.

Here’s our suggestion: instead of falling into the claptrap of asking the wrong questions, aka, whining, have a set of helpful questions to help you rise to the occasion. Don’t ask “why is that idiot always winning?” Rather, ask “what must I do to prepare to win?” or “how do I tweak my game’s weaknesses?”

We don’t know about you, but in poker and as in life, positive reinforcement is a game-changer. Focus on what you can improve on, not on your losses. Poker requires skill, determination, courage, and the willingness to soldier on even when everything seems to be crumbling around you. Build a powerful poker system, work around it, improve it, execute it, and trust it. That’s how you win the game.
Playing professional poker can be financially rewarding, but it’s not an easy path to take. If you’re realistic with what you can do, you might be able to earn a lot from it.

**Secret Number 8: See Through Your Opponents**

You don’t need to be the Man of Steel and have X-Ray vision to see through your opponents. What you need is to have the sensibilities of finding out how your opponent plays. In most cases when you’re starting out as a player, you end up playing heads-up with the wrong opponent. How many times have you tried bluffing a player considered a calling-station? There’s no point, right? But you still do that. You know in the deepest portion of your reasonable brain that to win against a calling-station, i.e., a player that can’t be bluff, is to play a stronger hand. Yet, you keep bluffing him.

You need to know your opponents. It helps if you can read their body language, but that only happens in the movies. In fact, players, especially the good ones, could either act it out or show no emotions at all.

So, how should you do it? Observe the way they play. Learn their betting patterns. Find out how they decide. Do they play every hand they’re dealt with? The best way to learn something about your opponents is to observe them when you’re not in the hand. You’ll be surprised how each of your opponents’ behavior unfolds in your very eyes.

**Secret Number 9: It’s Business, Not Personal**

Here’s the thing: You’ve been playing for six hours straight and one of the players at your table has been beaten from all directions. Finally, he was dealt pocket aces (you didn’t know this at the time) and decided he would do whatever it takes to win back what he lost. He slow balled his aces and raised just a little to get ample amount of callers. You, on the other hand, had 9-8 of clubs and on the button. There were two other callers so you calculated your pot odds and realize it wouldn’t hurt to call.

The other player flopped a set of aces with the two community cards 7 and 6 and decided to check. The other two players before you also checked. You also checked and got your nuts straight on the turn with a 5. You have the best hand, but the guy with aces went all-in forcing the other two players to lay down their hands. You immediately called. The river card was no help to him and your hand stands.

Out of frustration the aces guy splashed the pot and challenged you to a fist fight. He wouldn’t stop harassing you not unless you obliged. What do you do?

You know the obvious answer to this. We’re also sure that you’d also feel the same if the situation is reversed (although we’re not sure if you’ll challenge the other person to a duel). When these things happen, control your emotion and let your ego jump out of the window. It’s
easier said than done, but you must learn that poker is a business and you don’t have to take whatever consequences personally.

If another player is picking on you, who calls your raises non-stop, like he’s proving a point, don’t engage. If you lose a hand against him and starts laughing at you like he owns you, let it slide. You’re playing poker to make a living, not to engage in banter or personal vendetta. However, it would still be sweet if you get the chance to get all his chips, but do so when you know you have the upper-hand.

**Secret Number 10: Pay Attention**

You must have seen players wearing earphones or headsets listening to their iPods when playing. Although we have nothing against that, but sometimes not listening to music will help you go a long way. Conversations usually take place at the poker tables and you can get so much information on how other players’ play. Years of experience playing poker will help you pick up tells. Watch the other players hold their chips. Pay attention to their comments for each play. You’ll get so much especially when you don’t have your earphones on.

**Secret Number 11: Poker Forum**

In secret number six, we discussed, albeit short, poker forums to help up your game. Two decades ago, getting a computer, much less accessing the Internet is very difficult to do. Now, owning a laptop computer or a PC is essential to our everyday affairs.

Nothing can be more important than being plugged into the cyberspace if you’re a poker player. Go online, browse through different poker sites, read as much material as you can. You can never go wrong when you’re always in search for knowledge. While you’re at it, you’ll be surprised with the noise that comes with poker chat rooms and forums. By noise we don’t mean loud and rowdy exchanges. You’ll encounter plenty of social chatter and some of it might not be about poker.

Learn to filter the information. It would benefit you to find out that the forum you’re regularly visiting are comprised of smart, intuitive and creative poker souls that could increase the fire of your poker fervor even more. Forums are fertile grounds where new ideas, techniques, strategies and approaches are born.

Write a comment, ask a question, debate (don’t troll), discuss, do anything you can (poker-related, that is) to get insight from more players like you.

**Secret Number 12: You Versus Them**

There are many theories surrounding human nature, i.e., man is basically good (John Locke), man is controlled by social mores and existing political structures (Jean Jacques Rousseau), but the most fitting view of human nature in the poker universe is the Hobbesian (from Thomas Hobbes’) notion that man’s life is nasty, brutish and short.
The Hobbesian view led to more complex descriptions of human nature and society that led military scientists frame peace and conflict into two different animals: the dove (peace lovers) and the hawk (realists). The doves are the peacemakers who opt to avoid as much conflict as possible. They’re diplomatic, experts in the art of communication and know how to utilize different channels of agreements. The hawks, on the other hand, are more practical. They’ll sweep for the kill to ensure survival and to deter any further threats to their life and limb.

We have our own version of doves and hawks in poker. We call them fish and sharks. The fish is shark food.

We’re inclined to hold a more “hawkish” or “shark-ish” view of poker because you’re not in the game to primarily make friends. We’re not saying you shouldn’t have friends. What we mean is all the other mugs seated with you at the table are out to get your money no matter what.

If you want to gain friends and socialize with them and not talk poker, you’re better off attending a promenade, not a poker match. Your mission is to control the table and your game, get as much traction for your strategy to materialize, and bring home as plenty of cash as possible. If you fail to do so then someone else will go home with your money.

**Secret Number 13: Practice… Online**

What do you do when you find yourself physically exhausted you can’t drive to your local cardroom? Practice playing poker online. No excuses. You want to be a pro, right? You need to show up. You need to play thousands upon thousands of hands to get your game going. You won’t win all of them, but on average you should win majority of the time.

The advent of computers and online gaming makes it easier for you to play more poker and get those thousands of playing hands. Unlike live poker games in which the number of cards dealt is very limited, you can have thousands, literally thousands of poker hands in a month. You will get the practice that you need to improve overtime.

Also, what makes online poker distinct is the feature of hand reviews and analyses that come with online poker sites. You can’t go and review your and your opponent’s hands in a live game and ask the dealer to pause and replay what just happened. In online poker games, you can click tabs and the program can give you instant replays so you can review your hand history.

Computers and online sites offer what most humans can’t do – brute mathematical force. You should take advantage of these online poker sites to practice in order to elevate your game further.
Secret Number 14: When it Hurts – Recordkeeping, Again

Sooner or later you’ll get hit by variance and it’ll be the most painful experience you’ll have. There’ll be a point in your playing career that’ll make you ask if it’s worth pursuing. The variance experience differs in degree, recurrence and magnitude. There are some players who get bad beat for one year straight or two years in a row. Sometimes it’d feel like there’s no point playing the game anymore because regardless of what you do, especially when you do it right, nothing falls into place.

Don’t brood when you find yourself in these situations. Keep going with your strategy because you’ll win in the long-run.

Remember the recordkeeping secret we divulged earlier? Go back to it and always check and compare your performance to see what’s been going on. The good thing about keeping records is the fact that it always keeps you grounded. Try to ask any poker player you meet and they’ll often overrate the way they play. No poker player, except the more intuitive ones, will admit that they’re losing and that they’re lifelong winners.

However, if you keep a record of your wins and losses plus an inside look at how you played different hands over the course of your playing time, you’ll have a good grasp of where you are in your poker career. Keep going with your records. Update them.

The mind is a prison. It’s capable of deception and it could be very selective with the information it processes. Your game and win-loss record is your protection against the illusions your mind generates. It’ll help you to dig deeper in your person and in your game.

Secret Number 15: Read Books – It's Not Bad As You Think

Try reading a book on poker at a cardroom and chances are you’ll be sneered upon. You’ll hear comments like, “Been playin’ poker for 15 years now and I don’t need no book to tach me anything!” or “What I need is instinct and gut feel, not some poker book!”

No wonder they keep doing the same mistakes over and over for the past 15 years or so for these players, books are like kryptonite. These are the same players who are very superstitious at the table: they don’t like a particular card dealer because she jinxes their game or they want to change deck because it’s not giving them a fair share of good cards, etc. Be wary of such players because stupidity can be quite contagious.

Instead, read more on poker. Grab as many books as you can. We could come up with a list of great reads and these pages won’t be enough to cover all of them. What separates humanity from other species is its ability to record and distill knowledge. Sure, each poker book will differ in strategy and analyses and it can be confusing at times, but when you read, it broadens your perspective and it enriches your soul.

Don’t make the mistake of trusting what your mind tells you all the time. That’s why you’re keeping records, remember? Reading poker books is no different because it keeps you down-to-
earth and serves as a reminder that you don’t know it all. Poker books are as good investment as the time you spend playing poker every night.

Secret Number 16: On Aggression

You’re walking with your girlfriend along a touristy spot. You’re spending a romantic night together when all of a sudden a group of five men started calling your girlfriend out. “Hey, baby! You’re better off with me than with that Mr. Lanky of yours!” For one, you’re not lanky. Another is that you’ve been practicing the deadly arts of Krav Maga and Brazilian Jiu-jitsu for the past 12 years. What do you do? Do you start breaking necks to defend your girlfriend’s honor?

In life, you know that you have to pick your fights. The same principle applies in poker. That’s why it’s called No-Limit Texas “Hold’em.” Poker gives you the chance to decide whether you want to “hold ‘em” or “fold ‘em.” Just because you’re getting bullied doesn’t mean you have to engage quickly and smash the bully’s head against a rock. There’s no shame in backing-off especially when it’s not tactically sound to engage.

Be selective with your aggression. It’ll bring you places.

Secret Number 17: On Tilt

You’re dealt with pocket aces, went all-in, and some loony with a jack-seven suited called. The flop came and lo’ and behold, two jacks and a seven! You flopped a nuts straight and you’re trying to get as much cash as possible. The turn and the river came consecutively of the same suit and your opponent hit his backdoor flush Aces cracked? A runner-runner?

There are two possible scenarios for you to do: you can be so freakin’ mad you pull your hair (you can even wrestle a bear at this point) or you can let it slide. Daniel Negreneu said that if you can’t forget about the last hand you played, win or lose (especially the one the lost), you still don’t have the mindset of a pro poker player.

Tilting is as bad as getting hit by variance and no poker player is spared from it. Tilting can be triggered even by the smallest of things – a noisy and irreverent player seated at your table, a bad call from a bad player, missing a big pot because you laid a monster hand for caution’s sake, even winning huge stacks of chips can make you tilt, etc. Even the best in the business have suffered from tilting from time to time.

Be ready for it.
Secret Number 18: Shifting Gears

To address tilting, the best (yet difficult) advice we can give is for you to learn how to shift gears. Although you don’t need to suffer from tilting to learn shifting gears, this secret of old has been the best technique the pros use in their game.

Learn to know when to be aggressive and when to be conservative. You can do so by observing the dynamics of the table. How many players are playing wildly at this table? Which one is the conservative player? Boy! That one is like the statue of David! He doesn’t move! You can learn to shift gears smoothly when you’ve experience playing thousands of hands. You’ll get a feel of the different players and how they act per hand played.

Secret Number 19: Is It Worth It? The Element of Time

Secret number 19 is two-tiered: racing to win a hand and timing.

There’s something distinct about pro poker players that separate them from the amateurs. The most common attitude seen among the pros is that they don’t run after draws if the odds are not in their favor. For example, if your odds of winning a straight draw are 3-to-1, but the expected payoff (implied odds) is relatively small, he’ll fold his straight draw to any bet his opponent makes.

The pros would usually wait for a better opportunity with a larger payoff than take the chance of getting deeply committed to a marginal play. To make things clearer, let’s use a real-life example. If you’re a first-time investor in the sports business, say a fitness gym, what are the things that you need to first consider? Do you have the initial money to build the gym? Where is it located? Is the location easy to access for prospective clients and gym members? What is your market niche? Are you targeting only female gym members because you’re a certified Zumba instructor? More importantly, are you willing to give up your time and energy and focus on this business and give up everything else?

For every decision you make there’s always a corresponding transaction cost. Each time you decide to do something, you have to give up another. In economics, it’s called an opportunity cost. If you choose option A, you have to give up options B, C, and D.

The same thing applies to poker. When you decide to play a marginal hand (and lose that hand), you’re giving up the opportunity to win bigger hands in the next rounds of betting. The key is to be productive, meaning you’ll get the most out of every play you’re in.

Here’s another example. Studies show that no matter how cuddly your dog is, it’s not a great idea to pat it on the back when it’s eating. When’s the right time to cuddle your dog? Obviously, not during its meal time lest you want to get bitten. This is a mundane example, but it holds so much value especially in the game of poker. The secret is simple: Timing.

Ask yourself these: is it worth my time, effort and money to get involved in this hand? Is this the right time to engage? Keep these questions your mantra when you play poker.
Secret Number 20: On Safety

Your strategy for the night is only to wait for pocket monsters like aces and kings. You want to play it safe. Besides, you’ve watched *Rounders* over and over and Matt Damon’s line stuck with you, “You don’t lose what you don’t put in the middle.” It’s the precautionary tale of how to be careful at poker. It’s also a recipe of not winning big and not taking chances.

We’re not suggesting that you take bold leaps and risk everything. What you need is to understand that playing it safe all the time can also be dangerous. It’s not as painful as variance or tilt, but it can be as damaging to your bankroll in the long run.

Poker is about making and taking calculated risks. You don’t need to be gung-ho about your play, but playing it “too” safely won’t get you to your target.

Secret Number 21: Walk the Narrow Path

He left Kibawe, a small town in Bukidnon, a province of Mindanao, Philippines, when he was still a teenager. He boarded a ship left his poor family behind to follow his dream of becoming a boxer. At age 16, he fought his first fight and won via unanimous decision. He was poor, hungry, lonely, beaten up most of the time yet, he knows only one way to survive – using his fists.

Manny Pacquiao’s rags-to-riches story captured the hearts of the world winning different titles from different weight divisions. What’s his secret? Keep throwing punches.

Chris Moneymaker was an accountant when he won a seat to participate in the 2003 *World Series of Poker*. He was a total unknown and was able to play after winning a US$39 satellite tournament at PokerStars.com he was declared champion after beating Samie Farha when Moneymaker’s 5-4 offsuit hand quashed Farha’s jack-ten offsuit with a board of jack-five-four-eight-five.

After winning the 2003 series, he started his own company, Moneymaker Gaming and began travelling under PokerStars sponsorship.

The brief examples of the men above are two different stories – one in boxing, another in poker – but both tell a wonderful lesson in standards of character. Both fought hard to be where they are now and both suffered losses along the way. Amidst devastating losses, they moved forward, crafting and improving their skills to become the best in the world.

Keep your head up, keep standards, learn when to say yes and when to say no to yourself, while you journey ahead in your poker career. Most people in rush through life without agenda or plan. They prefer to drift in the sea of life and get blown away by the winds of change. Poker, on the other hand, teaches you how to plan and how to run after your dream of the good life aggressively.

Regardless of what other people say, poker is a great metaphor and model for real life. It brings with it life-lessons that most people take for granted. Be aggressive, be cautious, think before
you act, weigh your options, prepare, plan, commit, commit even more, study, and dedicate your heart and soul to the beauty of the game. Isn’t this what life’s all about?

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