

# GET PAID TO GAMBLE!

**The Inside Story  
of Casino Complimentaries**



# CHAPTER ONE:

## IMAGINE YOU WERE A HIGH ROLLER!

Do you remember the old television show “Queen for a Day?” Well, just in case you’re not as old as I am, I’ll explain it to you. Each show had three “contestants.” They were almost always housewives, and they always had an incredibly sad story to tell. The host (I think it was Ralph Edwards if memory serves) would interview each housewife for about seven minutes and give her an opportunity to tell her tale of woe.

And what a tale of woe it was!!! A typical contestant might talk about how she lost her home in a tornado, how her husband’s business had gone belly up, how her children were sick (usually with terminal diseases), how she had wrecked her car driving her child to the hospital, how the bill collectors were hounding her family, even how her dog was in dire need of a life-saving surgical operation which, of course, she could not afford.

Then after all three contestants had a chance to tell their stories, the host would turn to the audience and ask, in effect, which one of these three women was the most pathetic. He’d place his hand over the head of each woman in turn, and the audience was supposed to register its opinion with applause. An “applause meter” on the television screen would show who the audience felt sorriest for.

But then came the best part. The winner would get prizes. And prizes. And more prizes. Of course, she’d get her home repaired, her children cured, her dog operated on, and her car fixed ... but that was just the beginning. Then she’d get a new washer/dryer. A new station wagon. A new television set. A wardrobe of new clothes. A diamond bracelet. It went on, and on, and on.

After it was all over, while the winner collapsed in grateful tears, the host would always end the show with the same words, “I wish I could make EVERY woman in America ‘Queen for a Day!!!!’”

Well, of course, only a handful of women ever got to be Queen for a Day. But if you ever become a high-rolling gambler, you’ll soon find out what it’s like to get the same kind of “royal” treatment.

Imagine being whisked to your favorite casino in a free limousine, with an open bar and videotaped movies in the backseat. When you arrive at the casino/hotel, there’ll be no waiting in lines to check in. A “casino host” will greet you at the door and escort you up to your suite. Bottled liquor, fresh fruit, and a bouquet of flowers will be waiting for you in your room. When you go to dinner, the restaurant captain will greet you by name. The chef will make your favorite meal for you, exactly the way you like it prepared. Once inside the

casino itself, dealers and pit bosses will greet you by name. No need to bring any cash to gamble with, just sign your name on a slip of paper and it will be given to you -- hundreds of thousands of dollars. The table minimums -- and maximums -- will be adjusted to your liking. If you'd rather not have any small bettors at your table, the floorman will put out a sign saying \$100 minimum. If you'd like to bet \$50,000 a hand at blackjack, the house rules will be changed to accommodate you. During your stay at the hotel, virtually everything will be free. Free massages, manicures, long-distance telephone calls, gourmet meals, snacks and drinks. You'll never have to wait in line to see the hit shows, and you'll always get the best seats. After the show, you might be invited to meet the star at a small cocktail party. Imagine getting your picture taken as you share a drink with Frank Sinatra, Johnny Carson, or Cher!

**[NOTE: Yes, I know that two of those celebrities are dead now, and one of them ought to be. But "Get Paid to Gamble" is being reprinted exactly how it was originally published in 1993. So please bear with me when you see these little anachronisms and anomalies.]**

And yes, just like on "Queen for a Day," there will be gifts. In fact, every time you go back to your hotel room, there may be another one waiting for you. Cameras, crystal glassware, television sets, expensive cosmetics, gold watches, a complete set of luggage, a gold picture frame, silver serving trays, leather accessories, stuffed animals (for your kids or grandkids), even pets!

If you are a high roller, or what casino people call a "whale," this is the kind of experience that awaits you whenever you visit a casino.

## CHAPTER TWO:

# BUT WHAT IF YOU'RE NOT A HIGH ROLLER?

But wait a second, you say. I'm not a high roller. I love going to the casino, and I usually bet a fair amount of money. But I'm not rich. I can't afford to bet thousands of dollars on a single roll of the dice. All these comps can't possibly be for someone like me.

Well, yes and no. You're right when you say that you can't get all of these comps. But even if you're just a nickel slot player, you can get some of them ... if you know how.

Look, let's face it. If you were a high roller, you wouldn't be reading this book. Real high rollers -- and by that I mean people who have credit lines of \$100,000 or more and bet up to \$1,000 on a single hand of baccarat -- never have to worry about getting comps. They don't have to beg for them, they don't have to cajole them out of pit bosses, they don't even have to ask for them. All they have to do is keep gambling in their normal fashion, and they'll get more comps than they could possibly want or use.

But even "low-rollers" like you and me can get our share of comps, if we know how to work the system. Take my last trip to Atlantic City, for example.

I flew to Atlantic City from my home in Washington, DC on a private plane chartered by the casino. The regular roundtrip airfare on a scheduled airliner costs about \$360. My trip was "comped" by the casino. There was no hassle with tickets, baggage and parking at a busy commercial airport. Instead, I went to a private airport outside of Baltimore, parked for free, and stepped aboard a luxurious private airplane.

The trip only took about an hour. (It takes me close to four hours to drive to Atlantic City.) When I got to the casino in the morning, I spent a few hours playing blackjack and craps. Around one o'clock, I started getting hungry. So I asked the floorperson at my blackjack table for a coffee shop comp for one. It was granted without hesitation.

After lunch, I hit the tables again and stayed for about five hours. I could do no wrong! I was winning big, and I really didn't want to leave. So I had a decision to make. My free charter flight back to Washington was leaving in a few hours, but I was making so much money and having so much fun that I really didn't want to go back. So I stopped at the hotel desk and inquired about the availability of a room, without telling them who I was. They said they were sorry, but there was a big convention at the hotel, and there were no rooms available.

I stepped over the house telephones and asked for the "Casino Host Department." When I was connected, I asked to speak to a certain host whom I'd gotten to know on previous trips. "Here's my problem, Jane," I said. "I'm on a hot roll in the casino, I've made a

lot of money, and I really don't want to take the charter back home tonight. But the front desk says you're all booked up. Is there any way you could find me a room?" She put me on hold.

When she came back on the line, suddenly the hotel wasn't so booked up anymore. She offered me a suite at the casino rate. And although there were no charter flights back to Washington the next day, she said she could put me on a Washington-bound bus for free.

"By the way," I said, "I see that the Amazing Kreskin is in the showroom tonight. Do you think I could get a ticket on short notice?" She said she'd take care of it.

So I went back to the front desk and got my room key. When I got up to the room, I was amazed. It wasn't one room, but two! In front, there was a pleasant little sitting room with a dining room table, a couch, a television set, and a fully-stocked refrigerator. The picture window looked out over an interior courtyard twenty floors below. In the back was a luxurious bedroom, another color television set, and a gorgeous view of the shore.

How much do you think a room like this would normally rent for? My guess is that on a weekend night in the peak season, it might cost \$300 or more -- that is, if it was available to the general public. Can you guess what I paid for it?

Forty dollars.

By now, it was time for dinner. So I went down the steakhouse, and had a terrific T-bone steak which was listed on the menu for \$32.50. I also had a side order of onion rings and a fabulous dessert of cheesecake. Total tab, about \$50. I charged it to my room.

Then I went back to the casino and gambled for a few more hours. Believe it or not, I continued to win. I was on one of the luckiest streaks of my life, and I was making a lot of money. My bets, of course, kept getting bigger and bigger. So I was giving the casino good action, and the pit people were noticing it.

When the time came for the late show of the Amazing Kreskin to begin, I walked over the showroom. There was a long line of people waiting to get in. But they were in the regular line. I walked over to the "Invited Guest" line where there was no one waiting. I told the maitre d' that I can't see very well (this is true, by the way, I wasn't lying), and I'd appreciate a seat up close to the stage. He looked very sympathetic as he coolly took the twenty dollar bill out of my outstretched hand. Show Mr. Armstrong to Table Three, he said to the waiter. As it turns out, I was seated so close to the stage that I could tell you things about the Amazing Kreskin's complexion that his wife doesn't know. I was afraid he might call on me as a volunteer, but fortunately I escaped this fate. When the tab came, I was hoping that Kreskin would make it disappear. But instead, I charged it to my room.

The next morning, I hit the casino again. My lucky streak continued, and I was making very large individual bets. So when I asked the floorperson for a lunch comp, he was

more than happy to oblige. But now it was time to check out of the hotel and get my bus back to Washington. When I got to the desk, the clerk handed me the bill. I paid \$40 for my suite, and that's all! My steak dinner, and my evening with the Amazing Kreskin, were comped by the casino!

Now let's take a closer look at those numbers, and compare my trip to Atlantic City with what the same trip would have cost you if you didn't know how to get comps.

<b>What You'd Pay</b>		<b>What I Paid</b>
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<b>One-Way Airfare</b>	<b>\$180</b>	<b>Free</b>
<b>Coffee Shop Lunch</b>	<b>\$15</b>	<b>Free</b>
<b>Hotel Suite</b>	<b>\$300</b>	<b>\$40</b>
<b>Steak Dinner</b>	<b>\$50</b>	<b>Free</b>
<b>Floor Show</b>	<b>\$45</b>	<b>Free</b>
<b>Coffee Shop Lunch</b>	<b>\$15</b>	<b>Free</b>
<b>Bus Trip to DC</b>	<b>\$40</b>	<b>Free</b>
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<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>\$645.00</b>	<b>\$40.00</b>

Plus, I went home with \$1,243 in casino winnings, so in effect, I got paid a thousand bucks to take a free vacation to Atlantic City!

Am I a high roller? No! Not by any stretch of the imagination. I work for a living - as an advertising copywriter. I go to the casino about ten times a year, and I bet between \$5 and \$100 a hand. I have a credit line of \$5,000 at several casinos, but I've never lost more than about \$800 of it on any one trip. My average bet at blackjack is \$25 a hand. My average bet at craps is five dollars on the line, with two additional come bets of five dollars each -- all with full odds. So if a shooter gets on a good roll, I usually have about \$45 on the table at any one time. If the dice really heat up, I might increase my betting to a quarter on the line bets. Sometimes I toss a dollar or two on the "yo" or the hardways. In Atlantic City, I would be considered a very average bettor ... maybe even a tad below average. In Las Vegas, depending on where I am playing, I might be considered a slightly above-average player. But only slightly.

Okay, on the trip I just told you about, I was betting heavier than usual. But that's because I was winning. If I had been betting at my normal level, my steak dinner probably would not have been comped ... and neither would the floorshow. But I still would have gotten the casino rate on the room (even if the rooms were "not available") and I still would have gotten a late reservation and a good seat at the show.

So if I'm not a high roller, how do I manage to get all these comps and discounts? I get them because I know how to work the system. And that's what this book is all about.

Even if you're a smaller bettor than I am, I can show you how to get a ton of comps, freebies, discounts and giveaways from your favorite casino. And if you're a bigger bettor than I am, watch out! Because after you read this book, you'll have to lock your windows to keep from drowning in all the comps that are going to come your way.

# CHAPTER THREE:

## WHAT EXACTLY IS A 'COMP' AND WHY DO CASINO'S GIVE THEM AWAY?

Before you can learn how to get more comps, you have to understand exactly what they are and why casinos give them away.

The first thing to understand is that a comp is a gift, but it's not free. Beautiful summer days are free. Rainbows are free. Wildflowers are free. But a casino complimentary is a consideration that is given to gamblers in recognition of, and appreciation for, their business.

Comps, as we've already seen, come in many forms. They may be in the form of a bouquet of flowers that is left on your dressing table in your hotel suite. They may come in the form of a limousine driver who knocks on your door and whisks you away to Atlantic City. Or they may, in fact, come in your mailbox in the form of coupons, discounts, and vouchers.

Most of the comps that we'll be talking about in this book come to you in the shape of a little slip of paper that looks a lot like a check. It is signed by a casino executive. It specifies an exact dollar amount. It is addressed specifically to you. And it clearly outlines what goods or services it may be redeemed for. This is what you get when you ask a pit boss or a slot host for a lunch comp, for example. You will take this slip of paper and hand it to the waitress when you first sit down. Instead of charging your bill to your American Express Card, she will charge it to the dollar-value listed on your comp. (And no, you don't get change back if you don't use it all up.)

What kind of comps are available to you, as a small or moderate gambler? Well, not free limousines, that's for sure. And probably not expensive gifts, bottled wines, or first-class airfare either. But many of the same comps that are showered on high rollers are available to you, as well -- just in less quantity and with less frequency. You can get a free room at a hotel. You can get all or part of your transportation costs paid. You can get free meals, even at some of the more expensive restaurants. You can get free shows. And most importantly, you can get VIP treatment, special courtesies and favors that regular casino customers never receive and, in many cases, don't even know about.

How much do casinos give away in comps? Well, in 1991, the twelve casinos in Atlantic City distributed approximately \$740 million dollars in casino comps and giveaways. That's nearly three-quarters of a billion dollars! The figure is even more amazing when you consider that this comes out of gross revenues (gross, not net) of only \$3 billion dollars. In other words, one-fourth of every dollar that Atlantic City casinos win at their tables and slot

machines is passed back to gamblers in the form of comps. Are you getting your fair share? In other words, if you lost \$400 on your last trip to A.C., did you get back \$100 in comps? Until you bought this book, probably not.

Why do casinos give away so much money for free? Two reasons: 1) to attract new customers; and 2) to keep the customers they already have. Running a casino in Atlantic City or Las Vegas is a highly competitive business. Customers who don't feel their business is appreciated at one casino can easily move to another one.

It wasn't always this way, of course. When gambling first became legal in Atlantic City in the late '70s, Resorts International was the only casino in town for nearly a year. People waited in line just to get inside. Once they got in, they often stood five deep behind the blackjack tables waiting for an open seat. Back in those days, it was almost impossible to get a comp from Resorts International. With that much business, why should they give anything away for free?

But now, there are eleven more casinos in Atlantic City. In order to gain and keep their share of the market, each casino -- including Resorts -- must give away substantial amounts of money in the form of comps. Many years ago, in the early days of legalized gambling in Nevada, comps were reserved entirely for high rollers. But in today's competitive gaming environment, comps are an important part of the marketing mix used to attract each segment of the gambling public -- from the high rollers who arrive at the casino by free limousine ... to the daytrippers who come on a bus and get a free roll of quarters to put in the slot machines.

Many people mistakenly believe that comps are just for table players. Not true. High-rolling slot machine players are among the most heavily comped players in the world. And as a group, slot machine players get a much larger portion of the total funds distributed as comps than table players do. Understanding why casinos give away comps, whom they tend to give them to, and how they go about it, will make it easier for you to get your fair share of comps ... or perhaps even more than your fair share.

# CHAPTER FOUR:

## HOW TO GET (MORE THAN) YOUR SHARE OF CASINO COMPS

There was a time in the casino business (probably not long after Bugsy Siegel founded Las Vegas) that there were really only two types of casino customers -- those who always got comped and those who never got comped. To many casino owners, those were the good old days. There was never any question of who deserved to get comps and how much they deserved to get. High rollers and big-money players got all the comps they wanted. If their action was big enough, they would get free room, free meals, free airfare, even free call girls. They didn't even have to ask for these things; it was all "taken care of."

By contrast, the average and even the above-average players never got comped to anything. Even if you were a \$50 pass-line bettor at craps or a \$25 a hand blackjack player, no one would ever offer you a comp, and you wouldn't dream of asking for one. Of course, prices were so low in Las Vegas back in those days it didn't really matter, and no one ever complained. These were the days when you could have a nice room in a luxury hotel for \$30 a night. Meals in the restaurant were dirt cheap, floorshows were a bargain, and of course, drinks and cigarettes were (as they are today) free to anyone who gambled. So who needed a comp?

Then one fine day -- I think it was along about the time that the Bugsy Siegels and Mo Dalitz's of Las Vegas started dying of unnatural causes and the major casinos began to be bought up by large corporations -- casino managers realized that they could start charging high prices for their hotel rooms and amenities ... and still make big money from gamblers in the casino. Suddenly, it cost over \$100 a night to stay in places like Caesars Palace or the Desert Inn. Dinner in the gourmet restaurants could cost up to \$100 a person, and tickets to floorshows featuring big-name entertainers could cost as much as \$50 a seat. Sometimes those tickets were unavailable at any price.

Two things happened at this point. The casinos realized they were giving away too much in freebies to their big players without putting adequate financial controls on the process. And the average and above average gamblers -- people like you and me -- realized they were getting screwed. Here we were gambling (and losing) a ton of money in the casinos, and paying dearly for the privilege with high hotel prices, expensive meals, and costly entertainment.

Something had to be done to make this situation more equitable -- for high rollers and low-rollers alike. So the casinos began to systemize their procedures for granting comps. Player's were "rated" at the tables to determine how much action they were really

offering the casino. The big players would continue to get virtually anything they wanted in the way of comps, but now for the first time smaller players would be rewarded, too. Suddenly it was possible for an average guy with a daily bankroll of \$300 to \$500 to get a free meal in the coffee shop or a reduced room rate if he spent a sufficient amount of time and a sufficient amount of money in the casino.

Yet despite these new procedures, the distribution of comps continues to be “unfair” to some extent. Not because the casinos are unfair, but because the players themselves are often unaware of how to take advantage of the comps that are available to them.

How many times, for example, have you brought \$500 to \$1,000 with you to a casino and come back with nothing in your pockets but lint? You gave the casino good action -- in fact you lost a ton of money -- but you didn't get a free meal, a free room or even a free pat on the back for your trouble?

Well, guess what? If that has happened to you, it's not the casino's fault. It's your fault. If you gamble \$500 to \$1,000 in a casino in a single day -- win or lose -- you are eligible to receive a bundle of comps. But you have to know how to get them. As I said before, only the real high rollers have comps showered on them without any effort on their part. The rest of us not only have to ask for our fair share of comps, but we have to deliberately put ourselves in a position whereby our request is likely to be granted. How?

Here are fourteen tips:

### TIP NO. 1: PLAY AT ONE CASINO

When I first started gambling, I used to like stay at Bally's Park Place in Atlantic City. Why? Because it was right smack in the center of the Boardwalk. It was exactly equidistant from the Showboat on the north end of the Boardwalk to the Bally's Grand on the south end. Moreover Bally's Park Place was in a tight little cluster of casinos in the middle. From Bally's it was no more than a five minute walk to Caesars Palace, the Trump Plaza, the Sands and the Claridge.

I loved this, because it meant that if I got into a cold streak in one casino I could easily move on and try my luck at another one. I also liked the stimulation and excitement of playing at different casinos. Each one had a different character and “personality.” Different decor, different sounds, different smells, different dealers, different rules, and (don't tell my wife this) even different cocktail waitresses! I loved the variety.

It was not unusual for me back in those days to take a \$2,000 bankroll with me for a single daytrip to Atlantic City. And unfortunately, it was not unusual for me to lose it all. But then one day, this thought occurred to me: how come I never get any comps?

I mean, after all, I wasn't a high roller. But I was a \$5 to \$50 bettor with a daily bankroll of \$2,000 who always gave the casino good action. I had club cards for every casino on the Boardwalk, and I never played without them. Yet every time I went to check out of my room at Bally's I would wait hopefully for the desk clerk to tell me that my room had been comped, or that I had been given a casino rate, or that my lunch in the coffee shop would be comped ... or something. But it never happened. Then I'd go home and check my mailbox for a month or so. No one ever sent me any coupons, or coin vouchers, or discount coupons, or anything. Okay, so I wasn't a high roller. But what was I -- chopped liver?

I decided I was spreading my action too thin. Yes, I was a \$2,000 bankroll player, but if in the course of a day of gambling I visited all the casinos on the Boardwalk (and it was not unusual for me to do so), each of those casinos had no reason to believe that I was anything other than a \$200 player, or, to use the casino jargon, a "flea." Even if I sometimes put \$50 on the pass line at craps, I probably looked to the pit boss like some poor guy who just made \$50 plucking chickens and who was now going to risk a week's wages on a roll of the dice. In other words, I didn't look like a high roller; I looked like a chump.

So one day, I decided that instead of staying at Bally's Park Place in the middle of the Boardwalk, I'd stay up at Harrah's in the marina. I figured that I'd give my entire weekend's worth of action to Harrah's and see what happened.

Now I don't know if you've ever visited the marina section of Atlantic City (I'd only been there once or twice myself), but if you haven't, you should know that compared to staying on the Boardwalk, staying at the marina is something like living at the South Pole. There are only two casinos up there (Harrah's and the Trump Marina), and it's not a very short or easy walk between the two. In other words, you're stuck. If you want to try your luck somewhere else, you pretty much have to get in your car and drive. So I began my weekend at Harrah's with some trepidation. I didn't think I was going to like it.

But no sooner had I sat down at my first blackjack table and made my first \$25 bet than a floor manager came over to me with a big smile on her face and said, "Would you like to be rated?" I mumbled something about not having a Harrah's club card, and she said, "No problem, I can get you one." I said, "Well, I'd rather play blackjack for a while and then I'll pick up a club card later." She said, "Don't worry about it, you don't have to go anywhere. I'll get you a club card and bring it back to the table for you. It'll only take a minute." So I filled out a little application, and she went and got the club card for me. I was beginning to like Harrah's. So for the rest of the weekend, I played nowhere else.

Harrah's bills itself as "The Better People Place," and prides itself on the friendliness of its staff. As near as I can tell, Harrah's does indeed make a special effort to be friendly and polite. But this isn't a commercial for Harrah's. I've been treated politely and courteously at several casinos, and I've been treated discourteously at some of the same ones. The

difference between casinos is not all that important. What is important is the difference between a casino where you're known and one where you're not.

My most favorable impression of Harrah's, however, came after I left. I hadn't been home for more than three days when I got a nice letter from the casino manager at Harrah's thanking me for my recent visit and offering me some comps for my next trip. There was a coupon for a casino room rate (half off the usual price), a coupon for a free coffee shop meal, and a coupon for a free floorshow. At last, I thought, somebody is treating me like something other than chopped liver!

Now I give all my business to Harrah's. I never stay anywhere else, and I never play anywhere else either. Okay, there are some drawbacks. Going to the same restaurants gets a little tiresome. Being "stuck" in one casino when you're on a serious losing streak feels a bit confining. But let's face it, the difference between a craps table at one casino and a craps table at the casino next door is only psychological. Even the table you're playing at can go from ice cold to sizzling hot with one roll of the dice. And if you really are on a losing streak, then going up to your room and watching television is a much smarter move than switching casinos.

The best part is that the people at Harrah's now know me. Of course, they don't think I'm a high roller. My meager action doesn't justify that. But they know that I'm a steady, frequent player who gives the casino a good shot at my modest bankroll. When I ask for a comp, I don't get a scowl from the floorperson that says, "Who the hell are you?" I get a big smile, and I get the comp -- even if I haven't been playing very long.

So the moral here is to give all your action to one casino. It doesn't have to be Harrah's by any means. You can get the exact same treatment at Bally's Park Place or any other hotel on the Boardwalk simply by resisting the temptation to casino-hop. The marina hotels in Atlantic City or the off-strip hotels (like the Las Vegas Hilton) in Nevada make it easier to stick close to home. But the point remains the same anywhere. If the casino doesn't know you, you'll have a hard time getting a comp anywhere. But if the casino does know you, getting comps is easy. And that brings me to my next tip.

## TIP NO.2: GET A COMP CARD AND USE IT RELIGIOUSLY

How does the casino get to know you -- especially if you only get to A.C. or Las Vegas a couple of times a year?

Well if you're betting \$50,000 a hand at baccarat, you don't have to worry about it. They'll know you. And they'll remember you. Even if it's been five years since your last visit, don't be surprised if a pit boss says, "Hello, Mr. Jones! It's great to have you back again."

But if you're a \$5 or \$25 player like me, the casino personnel needs a little help in remembering who you are. And that help comes in the form of a little plastic card called a "club card" or a "comp card."

The comp card looks exactly like a credit card. It's made of shiny plastic and it has a magnetic strip on the back of it. Nowadays, virtually every casino in America offers one. They can be used by both table game players and slot players. And the purpose of these cards is to help the casino "rate" your play to determine how much you're entitled to in the way of comps.

Applying for a comp card is easy. As I mentioned a moment ago, if you're a \$25+ table player, the floor manager will approach you about getting a comp card. If you're a \$100+ player, they'll practically insist on it. But even if you're just a 25¢ slot player, you can get a comp card by going to the appropriate booth (it's usually called "the promotions booth") on the casino floor and filling out a simple application. The casino will use the information on your card to rate your play, and it will automatically put you on their mailing list to receive a variety of freebies and giveaways. How many such offers you receive, however, depends greatly on how much action you give the casino. If you apply for a club card and play nickel slots for fifteen minutes, don't expect to be showered with direct-mail vouchers from that casino by the time you get home.

Nevertheless it does make sense to apply for a club card in every casino you visit. You are likely to get at least some freebies from every casino that has you on its mailing list. And playing at a variety of casinos will help you pick out the one casino you want to give all your action to (see Tip No. 1).

Once you have identified your "home" casino, it's important to use your comp card religiously. I know they can be a pain in the neck. I know that pit personnel sometimes ignore your comp card so long that you're tempted to just put it back in your pocket and forget about it. I know that it's a bother to pull out your comp card when you're simply moving your chips from one table to another. I know the floorpeople sometimes act like they're doing you a favor to rate your play. And if you're a slot player, I know that there is that ever-present danger that you'll walk off with your card in the machine and lose it. Nevertheless, I repeat, always use your club card. Because every dollar you gamble that you don't get rated for is another quarter (approximately) that you won't get in comps.

How do you use your comp card? It's simple. If you're a table player, you simply give your card to the floorperson as soon as you make your initial buy-in. Baccarat, blackjack, and roulette players simply put the card in a prominent spot on the table in front of them. Craps players can either drop the card on the table with their buy-in or leave it

propped up conspicuously in the chip rack. (The custom on this varies from casino to casino.) No matter what game you're playing, a floorperson should notice the card within five minutes or less. If it takes longer than five minutes for a floorperson to pick up your card, try to get his or her attention by making eye contact or (politely) waving the card. Don't play for longer than five minutes without being rated, or your play is being wasted.

For slot players, it's even easier. Nowadays virtually every modern slot machine with a coin value of 25¢ or more has an electronic card reader attached to it. Simply place your card in the reader according to the directions and wait for the display terminal to say, "Card Accepted." Then begin playing the machine as you normally would. The card reader will automatically record who you are, how long you play, how much you bet, and (in some cases) how much you win or lose. This information will be used to determine how many comps you are entitled to receive.

As I alluded to a moment ago, the biggest hassle for slot players using comp cards is accidentally leaving their cards in the machine. It's easy to get distracted when you're playing the slots and forget all about your card when you walk away from the machine. That's why I recommend you buy yourself a "Card Leash." The card leash, as its name implies, is simply an elastic clip that keeps you attached to your club card.

For modest players like you and me, the club card is the single most important key to getting comped by the casino. With it, you'll soon be entitled to free meals, discounted room rates, coin vouchers, and gift shop discounts ... at the very least. Without it, you won't get squat!

### TIP NO.3: GET TO KNOW CASINO PIT PERSONNEL, AND MAKE SURE THEY GET TO KNOW YOU

By now it should be obvious that one of your key goals in your quest to earn more comps is to have the casino personnel get to know who you are. But in order to do that, you must start by getting to know who they are. Your initial step, in other words, toward getting "known" in the casino is to get to know the casino and all its flora and fauna. You have to know who the key players are, and how they can help (or hinder) you in the pursuit of comps.

Many gamblers mistakenly believe, for example, that everyone who stands behind the tables wearing a suit and tie is a "pit boss." Not true. There is only one "pit boss" for every pit, and everyone else in that pit reports to him. That's how he gets his title. So who are all the other people? Here is a brief dramatis personae of casino employees.

**DEALERS:** You know who they are, of course. What you may not know is that their job is nowhere near as glamorous as it may seem. Although their position does indeed place

them among the top-rung in status of non-professional hotel employees (i.e. bellhops, chambermaids, desk clerks, dishwashers), they are at the very bottom of the totem pole among casino personnel. (Okay, change girls and cocktail waitresses are lower). They are paid a very small amount in regular salary and earn most of their income in tips. (Nowadays, tip income is pooled among all employees, so it's nothing to write home about either). Dealers work very long hours, they are on their feet most of the time, they get short breaks, and they get a lot of abuse from both the people in front of them (the players) and the people behind them (the management). Don't look at the dealers and envy them. If you've got a job as a janitor or trash collector, you're probably a lot better off.

**FLOORPEOPLE:** Chances are the guy you've been calling a "pit boss" all these years is actually a "floor manager" or "floor supervisor" or, more simply, a "floorman." Their job is to observe the tables they're assigned to, maintain the honesty and integrity of the game, adjudicate any disputes between dealers and players, keep an eye on the cash flow of each table (including calling for more chips when necessary), and -- this is important -- rate the players who wish to be rated.

We'll discuss the business of "ratings" in more detail later. For now, suffice it to say that the floorperson is the one who is in charge of watching your play and determining if you deserve comps. In most cases, he or she will be the one to whom you turn when it's time to ask for a comp. But the ultimate decision as to whether or not you get a comp probably does not rest in her hands -- in most casinos, only the pit boss can make this decision -- but her evaluation of your play will be the key factor in making the determination.

In the craps pit, floorpeople often double-up as "boxmen." One or two boxmen (or box-women) sit at the center of the table and supervise the game. Their job is to exchange cash for chips, supervise the dealers, enforce the rules, arbitrate disputes, and maintain the pace of the game. When a floorperson is "sitting box," as the saying goes (which, when the table is cold, is rather like sitting shiva) he or she is not involved in rating the players or issuing comps. That is left to the roving floormen behind the pit. However, if there is some doubt about whether or not your play deserves a comp, the box person might be consulted. As we'll see later, it's easier to fool the floormen about the extent of your play than it is the boxman. So the boxman at a craps table should be politely ignored. You gain little by making him a friend, and gain nothing at all by making him an enemy.

One of the principal jobs of the floorpersons is to be on the lookout for above-average players and make sure their play does not go unrewarded. If you start betting \$100 a hand in blackjack or put a black chip on the pass line in craps, you will meet a floorperson in a big hurry. But if you're a smaller bettor than that, it will be your job to make sure the floorperson notices you (more on that in a moment).

**THE PIT BOSS:** As I said before, all the floorpeople in a given pit report to the pit boss. His job is to supervise the floorpeople, take ultimate responsibility for the profit and

loss of the pit, and make the final decision on comps. You don't get as many chances to meet and talk with a pit boss as you do an ordinary floor person. However, floor persons eventually become pit bosses, just as Lt. Colonels eventually become "full bird" Colonels, so it pays to be friendly with every floorperson you meet. Knowing a pit boss personally is a very big step toward getting your maximum share of comps.

**THE CREDIT MANAGER:** With his office usually located in a room just off the casino floor, the casino credit manager is the man in charge of issuing credit to players and, of course, overseeing that credit. I'll have much more to say about using casino credit later, but for now suffice it to say that the credit manager is an important person to know.

**THE CASINO MANAGER:** This is the top dog on the casino floor. He's in charge of the whole kit-and-caboodle. And yes, he does have the power to issue comps. More importantly, he has the power to oversee all the comps that are issued by his underlings. If a floorperson writes a comp that does not appear to be deserved, that floorperson will be invited to discuss the matter in detail with the casino manager. That's why you'll rarely get any comps on the strength of your charm alone. You either have to risk enough money to earn a comp, or you have to look like you've risked enough money to earn one. Most of the advice in this book is geared around making it easy for the floorpeople and pit bosses to justify your comp to the casino manager.

By the way, since there are 24 hours in a casino's day, and even the most energetic casino managers can't work more than about 14 of them, there is also such a thing as a "shift manager." The shift manager is the casino manager ex officio for one of three eight-hour shifts -- day, night, and graveyard. Everything I've said about the casino manager above applies equally to the shift managers.

**CASINO HOSTS:** When it comes to getting comps, the casino host is the single most important person in the casino for you to know. His sole job is to pass out comps to high rollers (and others). That's why I've devoted the next tip in this list entirely to casino hosts.

**THE MAN UPSTAIRS:** Casino executives who do not normally appear on the floor of the casino usually work "upstairs" in the administrative offices, hence their name. This includes everyone from the President of the hotel on down. It doesn't hurt to be personally acquainted with any of these people, but unless you're a high roller you probably won't have the opportunity to meet them. Among these executives, however, is one who might contact you from time to time (usually by mail) and who can be very important in your quest for more comps. He is the manager, director, or vice president of "Customer Development." As his title implies, his job is to "develop" customers. This not only includes finding high rollers, but taking low-rollers and medium-rollers and encouraging them to achieve a higher level of play. How does he do this? By comping them!

Okay, so now you know who's who in the casino. How do you go about meeting them and getting them to know who you are?

Begin by focusing your attention on the floorperson who is supervising the table where you're playing. When you make your initial buy-in at the table, try to make eye-contact with the floorperson. At most casinos, the dealer is required to shout out the amount of the cash buy-in if it is for more than \$100. Before he gives out the chips, he must receive acknowledgment from the floorperson of the buy-in. The dealer will usually shout out "Change \$100" or "Change \$500," etc., and the floorperson is supposed to turn to the dealer and say, "Okay."

But the floorpeople are almost always too busy or too distracted to make this work on the first try. Usually the dealer has to shout out "Change \$100" two or three times before the floorperson will acknowledge it. You can make this little game work in your favor by fixing your eyes on the nearest floorperson while the dealer is trying to get her attention. Then when she finally turns to acknowledge your buy-in she will glance at the dealer and probably at you also. Give her a little smile or a wave. Nothing elaborate, just a little gesture that says, in effect, "Hi, here I am again, back to lose all my money."

At this point, try to steal a glance at the floorperson's nametag on his or her lapel. In Nevada casinos, it's customary for these tags to also list the city or state where the floorperson is originally from -- since almost no one is originally from Nevada. Try to get a look at this too, since it will give you something to talk about.

In a few minutes, the floorperson will come over to pick up your club card and begin rating your play. But instead of sitting there glumly like a nobody, act like you're the floorperson's long-lost friend. "Hi, Mary" you say, "how have you been?"

Believe me, these people see so many different gamblers everyday, they will think it's their fault they don't remember who you are. "Oh, hi there ..." she'll say, "Gee, it's been a long time." (A very long time," you'll think to yourself, since this is my first visit to this casino.) Comment on the rotten weather, or compliment her on her dress, or say anything to make a little conversation. (Don't start off bitching about your losses, though, because dealers and floorpeople are sick of hearing this.)

Chances are, when she comes back from processing your club card in the computer, she'll call you by name, wish you luck, and maybe stay and chat a little longer. A friendly customer is a very rare thing in most casinos. Most of them sit there stoned-face, and if they talk at all, it's only to complain about how much money they're losing or about how lucky the dealer is. If you act like a real person, the floorperson will remember your face, remember your name, and be much more likely to grant you a comp when the time comes.

Incidentally, don't be afraid to use your sex appeal in this situation. If you're an attractive woman and the floorperson is a man, you've got it made. Just be outgoing and a tad flirtatious. House policy says that casino comps should only be offered to substantial players, but I'll bet you won't be the first person to be comped just because the floorman thought you were cute. (He'll take it upon himself to make sure your rating card looks like

you've been betting big.) The same goes for male players dealing with female floorpeople. Of course, the very attractive female floorpeople probably get hit on quite enough, thank you. But if you're a good-looking man and the floorperson is an average-looking woman, turn on your charm. Treat her like you would treat a good-looking woman sitting next to you at the bar. Engage her in conversation, smile, make her think you might be interested in her. It can't hurt, it might help.

#### TIP NO.4: GET TO KNOW A CASINO HOST

Nowadays, casinos give away so much in comps that they hire one type of employee whose sole job is to dispense complimentaries. He (or she) is called a "casino host."

The casino host is paid to maintain a list of high-rollers and heavy-action players, and to make sure these gamblers continue to patronize the host's casino. His job is to make sure that all or most of the money that the high-roller brings to Atlantic City or Las Vegas with him is deposited right at that casino. And he achieves this goal by showering the player with freebies, gifts, and -- perhaps most importantly -- personal service.

If a big player needs an extra bar of soap in his room, he doesn't call the front desk or the chambermaid ... he calls the casino host. If he needs to make reservations at the gourmet restaurant, he doesn't call the maitre d' of the restaurant, he calls the casino host. If he needs a limo, he calls the host. If he needs his shoes shined, he calls the host. If he needs a little spot on the small of his back scratched, he calls ... guess who?

Thirty years ago, it was common for casino hosts to be celebrities. After Joe Louis spent all the money he made as the heavyweight boxing champion, he earned about \$40,000 a year by being a host at Caesars Palace. Willie Mays and Mickey Mantle also had brief careers as casino hosts. Even to this day, the profession seems to attract ex-athletes, although there are very few big names left in the business.

Nowadays the typical casino host is an ex-dealer or floorperson who is using the host position as a steppingstone to a more lucrative and responsible job in upper management. Although, depending on the quality of their "contacts," some casino hosts are paid a great deal of money and may have no desire to leave their current position.

As is the case with floorpeople, you'll have absolutely no trouble meeting a casino host if you're a high roller. Put \$10,000 on the pass line at craps and before the shooter has a chance to throw the dice, a casino host will have materialized next to you, sort of like in the transporter room on "Star Trek." But if you're a smaller bettor, it will be your responsibility to figure out how to meet a casino host.

At some casinos (like Bally's Park Place in A.C., for example), the casino hosts have their own booth off the casino floor and it's always staffed. If you want a comp, or a favor, or just want to get acquainted with a casino host, just go up and say hi.

If that doesn't work, the best place to run into a casino host "accidentally-on-purpose" is in one of the gourmet restaurants. Notice I didn't say the coffee shop or the buffet or the deli, I mean one of the two or three top-of-the-line restaurants in each hotel. Go ahead and spend \$50 a person or more to eat in one of these restaurants. It's worth it. The food is usually good and the experience is even better (as it is, for example, at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas, where male customers get a free back massage from toga-clad waitresses.)

As you're eating dinner, watch for men and women wearing nice suits and casino I.D. badges to come into the restaurant and stand at selected tables chatting casually with the customers. These aren't just ordinary customers, though, they are high rollers. And the men and women with badges are casino hosts. In many cases, the hosts made the restaurant reservations for these high rollers and now they're just stopping by to say hello and make sure everything is alright.

If you get a chance, try to buttonhole one of these casino hosts on their way out of the restaurant. Tell them you're new to the casino, that you're very impressed with it, that you'd like to visit again soon, and that you'd like to get to know a host. Give him your business card, and make sure you get his.

Don't ask for any favors or special treatment right now. Just be friendly and outgoing. Remember, the casino host doesn't know you from Adam. You could be a penny slot player for all he knows. But if you're in the gourmet dining room, and you're dressed nicely, he might just assume you're a "whale" ... and he'll be very pleased to meet you.

Then the next time you go back to that casino, instead of making reservations through the front desk, call the casino host. Remind him of when you met in the restaurant and ask him if he could help you get a nice room. Again, don't expect the room to be comped. But if you're visiting on a weekend, you are likely to be assured of having a room (not always easy on a Saturday night in the summer at Atlantic City) ... and if you're visiting on a weekday, you might get a casino rate (essentially half price).

Now, how much more you are able to get from this host is up to you. It depends on how much you play, and how skillfully you use the techniques in this book for making your play appear larger than it is. But the hard part is over, you've got a relationship with a casino host.

Another trick you can use to get the attention of a host works especially well when you're visiting a distant casino for the first time. About a month before your departure, write a letter to the casino host at the hotel where you'll be staying. Just address your letter to Casino Host, XYZ Hotel, etc. etc. In the letter, specify the dates of your trip, tell them what kind of player you are (be reasonably honest about it), and ask for some little favor -- like arranging credit, or asking for a special rating card for your visit, or asking some innocuous question that you'd like the answer to.

Then when you arrive at the hotel, if the favor has been granted, call up the host and thank him. Try to engage him in a little conversation. Tell him how lovely you think the hotel is, how pleased you are with the room, how excited you are to be in Las Vegas, whatever. At this point, he'll probably say something like, "If there is anything I can do to make your stay more enjoyable, please don't hesitate to let me know." Say thank you and hang up.

Give the host a rest for a day or two while you establish yourself in the casino, then go ahead and take him up on his offer. If you want a comped meal in the restaurant, ask him to make the reservations for you. Don't ask for a comp; just ask him to make the reservations. If you're having trouble getting into a sold-out show in the hotel, call him and ask if there's any way he can squeeze you in. Chances are, you'll not only get the reservations or the tickets you want, you also get it on the house.

Once you have established a good relationship with a casino host, don't try to manipulate him or play mind games with him. Specifically, if you've won big in the casino, don't try to complain to your host about all your losses. The casino host may not be present while you're gambling at the tables, but believe me he has gotten a full report on your activities there. He knows whether you won or lost. In fact, he probably has a better idea of how much money you've got left in your wallet than you do. Lying about your results in order to get more sympathy or more comps is insulting to him and will only serve to make him suspicious of you in the future.

Casino hosts should not be tipped; they consider themselves professionals. Nevertheless, what goes around comes around, and if you send your host a thank-you letter or a small gift in gratitude for his service, it will come back to you many times over in future comps. Not surprisingly, very few high rollers treat their hosts with courtesy and respect. It's a real doormat of a job. And even if you're not your host's biggest customer, you can easily become his favorite one.

#### TIP NO.5: DON'T PLAY WITH CASH -- PLAY WITH CREDIT OR FRONT MONEY

Aside from getting a rating card, the single most important thing you can do to put yourself in a position to receive maximum comps is to refrain from bringing cold cash to the tables.

You'd think the casinos would like cold cash, and they do! Believe me, they do. But cash customers are hard to keep track of. What's more, cash customers are usually "fleas." The whales play with credit, so do the heavy-action players who aren't quite as rich as whales.

I'll have much more to say about casino credit later in this report. But what if you don't want casino credit? What if you're scared of it (as perhaps you should be). What then?

Well, you have another option -- front money. Front money offers all of the advantages of casino credit, and none of the pitfalls. To play with front money, all you have to do is take your wad of cash (or traveler's checks, or a cashier's check) to the casino cage and deposit it. For the rest of your stay, you can write "markers" off this money, just as you would if you had a credit account.

Not surprisingly, the casinos love front-money players. They don't have to worry about collecting bad debts, and they know you are a serious gambler who will put his money in play. When it comes to rating your action for comps, a \$5,000 bankroll in front money is equivalent to \$10,000 in credit. In other words, if you deposit just \$5,000 in the cage, you can expect to be treated like a small high-roller. And even \$2,500 of front money will earn you much more in comps than you'd get if you played \$2,500 in cash.

#### TIP NO.6: ROLL OVER YOUR ENTIRE CREDIT LINE OR FRONT-MONEY DEPOSIT ON EACH VISIT

But the key to making your front money -- or your credit line -- work for you is to use the entire amount. That's right. In a single trip, you should use every penny of your credit line or front money.

Now, does this mean you have to lose it all? No way! Don't you dare lose it all. In fact, you don't want to lose any of it. You want to win. But in order to get your share of comps, you must try to use all the front money or credit you have stashed in the casino cage.

Let's suppose for example that you have \$5,000 in front money deposited in the casino cage for use during a long weekend vacation in Lake Tahoe. You go to your first craps table and ask for a marker for \$1,000. The floorperson hands you a marker to sign, and the dealer gives you \$1,000 in chips. You play for about an hour, put about \$300 or \$400 in play, and you hold about even. You're up a little, you're down a little, and when you finally decide to leave the table, you've won about \$100. So what do you do? Do you go to the next table and start playing with \$1100 in chips?

No. You go to the front desk and ask for a safety deposit box. You deposit your eleven black chips in the box, and you go out to dinner. Then after dinner, when it's time to play craps again, you go up to the table and ask for another \$1,000 marker. Win or lose, you repeat the same process. You don't have to put the whole thousand in play. As long as you're playing with green chips and you don't look overly timid, the pit will scarcely notice that you never put more than a few hundred dollars in play during the session. Obviously, if you're winning, you can be much more aggressive. But don't stand there thinking that you have to risk your entire \$1,000 in order to get a comp.

So it goes throughout your whole weekend in Lake Tahoe until you've written markers equal to the total of your front-money deposit. When it's time to go, take all of your chips out of your safety deposit box and bring them to the cage. Hopefully, you've made some money. But even if you haven't, at least you didn't lose it all.

As far as the casino knows, however, you've put all \$5,000 in play. So be prepared for a very pleasant surprise when you check out. At the very least, the casino will comp some of your meals and entertainment. It's quite possible they'll comp your room as well.

### TIP NO.7: DON'T BE STINGY WITH THE TOKES

Unfortunately, you can't tip your way into a comp. That's because dealers do not have the "power of the pen" -- the authority to dispense complimentaries. If they did, heavy tipping would probably be the best way in the world to get comps.

But tipping does create an aura of good feeling about you among the dealers, which in turn can find its way into the pit. It's all a matter of chemistry, and it's not a sure thing. But if you make the dealers feel good about you, if they get to know and like you, the floor people are likely to respond in kind. Over a period of time, this can translate into more comps.

### TIP NO.8: VISIT THE CASINO AT OFF-PEAK TIMES

Have you ever been to Atlantic City on a Saturday night in August?

Okay. Now have you ever been there on a Tuesday morning in February?

I bet you thought you were in two different cities, didn't you? On a weekday in the off-season, the crowds are smaller, the table minimums are lower, the rooms are cheaper, the restaurants are less crowded. It's a very different place. I've even seen \$3 blackjack tables and \$2 craps tables on weekdays in the winter. Yes, in Atlantic City!

When it comes to comps, the difference between off-peak and on is even more dramatic. On a Saturday night in July, for example, a \$5,000 credit line player with an average bet of \$25 is nobody special. As far as the casino is concerned, he's Joe Blow.

But should the same player show up on a weekday in January, it's "How are you, Mr. Blow ... So good to see you, Mr. Blow ... How do you like your suite, Mr. Blow?" Believe me, it's like night and day.

The same is true in Las Vegas, where weekends draw huge crowds from California, while the midweek can be downright dead. Slow times in Las Vegas include the middle of summer, when it's too hot, and late fall/early winter when it's too cold. The slowest time in Vegas is probably between Thanksgiving and Christmas. But be forewarned, even a normally slow time can get quite busy when the city is hosting one of its huge conventions.

If getting a comp has been like pulling teeth for you in the past, consider going to Atlantic City or Las Vegas during a slow time in the middle of the week. Chances are, you'll get twice the comps for the same action.

#### TIP NO.9: GET TO KNOW A WHALE

No, I'm not talking about the dolphins and killer whales in the aquarium at the Mirage. I'm talking about the kind of guy who bets \$50,000 on a single hand of baccarat. Behind their backs, casino personnel refer to these super high-rollers as "whales." And they refer to people like you and me as "fleas."

Fleas and whales don't run together in the casino any more frequently than they do in Nature, but sometimes a smart flea can latch onto a whale and go along for the ride.

The real whales get more comps than they need or even want. So they wind up passing a lot of them along to their friends. After all, it's easy to be generous with something you can't use and don't need. That's why the Salvation Army always has plenty of used clothing.

Whales will get comps to gourmet dinners and sold-out shows -- not just for themselves, but for their wives and for as many additional friends as they'd like to bring along. Sometimes a single free suite isn't enough for a whale, he wants a whole bank of free suites so he can bring some friends to Las Vegas with him. When a man who puts \$10,000 on the pass line in craps asks his casino host "Do you mind if I bring a few buddies to the show with me?," do you think the answer is no?

Do you know someone in your business, or neighborhood, or church(!) who qualifies as a "whale?" Perhaps not. After all, whales are a rare and endangered species. But if you do, why not suggest to him that the two of you go to Atlantic City or Las Vegas together sometime. Chances are, he's looking for a gambling companion since his wife is probably bored with the whole scene.

Remember, when it comes to comps, the next best thing to being a whale is being a whale's best friend.

#### TIP NO.10: ASK FOR THE COMP

As I said before, the real high rollers never have to ask for a comp. All they have to do is play in their normal fashion, and comps will be showered on them like rain from heaven. In fact, high rollers sometimes have to refuse the offer of comps they don't want or need. One day I was sitting next to a guy at the blackjack table who had a stack full of black chips in front of him and was betting \$300 to \$500 a hand. The pit boss came over to him and started talking about how good their gourmet restaurant was and, by the way, would

he like to eat there tonight? “Naaah,” said the high roller without looking up from his hand, “the old lady wants to go someplace else tonight.” Can you imagine?

Unless you happen to hit the lottery someday, chances are this will never happen to you. No pit boss will ever walk up and drop a valuable comp in your lap. In order for people like you and me to get a comp, we have to ask for them.

So who do you ask? The most likely person to ask is the floorperson who has been observing your play. Although he or she may not have the “power of the pen” themselves, it is a simple matter for them to pass your request on to the pit boss, who, in most cases, will simply take their word on whether you deserve the comp or not.

In casino’s that have a staffed casino host desk, you can simply go up to the desk, hand over your comp card, and ask if your play justifies a certain comp. They will check their computer and give you an answer in moments. If you try this approach, however, be careful to wait long enough after your playing session to make sure your rating has been entered into the computer. Let’s say, for example, that you’ve spent the last two hours at the blackjack table betting \$25 chips. If you ask the floorperson at your table for a coffee shop comp, it will be granted immediately and without question, because the floorperson has been observing your action. But if you leave the table and walk up to the casino host desk, there’s a very good chance that your rating has not yet been computerized. As far as the casino host knows, you just walked out of the parking garage and asked for a comp. Be prepared for a stern frown and a sharp refusal.

The same holds true for slot players. Slot players, as I’ve mentioned before, have a somewhat more systemized procedure for requesting and receiving comps. Usually there is a booth somewhere on the casino floor that is specifically designed for handing out comps to slot players. (In many cases it is the same booth where you go to get your comp card.) As an example, the “MVP” booth at Bally’s Park Place is located right at the East end of the casino near the Boardwalk entrance. To get a comp, just hand your card to the desk clerk and see how many “points” you have accumulated. But again, allow about 30 minutes for your action to work its way through the system.

Keep in mind that casino employees are held strictly accountable for the comps they write. After all, the comp is “free” to you, but it’s definitely not free to the casino. Every dollar written out in comps is a dollar that won’t be collected in restaurant checks or hotel bills. So don’t expect any floorperson or casino host to toss out comps the way they toss out beads at Mardi Gras.

When should you ask for a comp? Please don’t ask when you first sit down at a table -- even if you’ve just switched tables after playing in the casino for several hours. The floorperson will consider you a newcomer and will be somewhat put off by your asking for a comp as soon as you plop down in your seat.

But don't wait until you're just about ready to leave the table either. Comps can take a few minutes to authorize and prepare. If you continue playing while you're waiting for your comp, you'll not only be playing longer than you wanted to play, but you'll also be distracted and annoyed. As you sit there with your comp decision hanging in the balance, you also may be subconsciously tempted to increase your betting to help justify the comp.

Don't put it past the floorperson to deliberately take his or her sweet time preparing your comp for these very reasons, by the way. They know that if you continue to play while you're waiting for your comp, you'll continue to lose money -- perhaps even more money that you would have lost if you hadn't asked for a comp.

Therefore, the best time to ask for a comp is about fifteen minutes before you're ready to stop playing. If, for example, you sit down at a table with the expectation of playing for an hour, you should ask for your comp after 45 minutes of play. Then if the comp isn't in your hands by the time an hour is up, tell the floorperson you'll come back for it in a few minutes.

How do you ask for a comp? First of all, be specific about what kind of comp you want. Don't just say, "Give me a comp," or "What kind of comps can I get?" Remember, floorpeople have other things to do besides handing out comps. It's only a small part of their job. So you should ask them politely, respectfully and specifically.

The easiest comps to get are probably a free-parking pass in the garage and a "line-pass" to the hotel's floorshow. A line pass will allow you to use the "invited guest" line at the showroom and avoid the lengthy delays which sometimes occur in the general admission line. In shows with open seating, using a line pass in the "invited guest" line may also get you a better seat.

A free ticket to a show located inside the hotel -- especially one where no food is served -- is also a fairly easy comp to get. Don't expect to get a comp to a real headliner, though, like Bill Cosby or Frank Sinatra. When Sinatra comes to the Sands in A.C., for example, you usually can't even pay to get a ticket. They're all sold-out or comped-out to high rollers. But if a casino/hotel has a long-running musical comedy, magic act, or adult revue in its showroom, a free ticket is a comparatively easy comp to get.

The hardest comp to get, undoubtedly, is free airfare to the casino. You have to be a high-roller, or something closely approximating one, to consider this a possibility. Free tickets to shows that are located in a hotel other than the one where you're gambling are also very difficult to get. In order to grant this kind of comp, a pit boss or casino host will have to use his connections with other bosses or hosts in town, and he knows he'll have to repay the favor in spades at some point.

There are some comps that the casino definitely does not like to give -- even to fairly substantial players. Room service comps, for example, are rare because they're easily

abused. This is especially true of bottled liquor and bottled wine, which often find their way directly into the gambler's suitcase. Casinos aren't usually very enthused about restaurant comps for more than one guest either. If a gambler takes his wife to the gourmet restaurant, that's fine and that's expected. But if he takes his wife, three business clients, his mother-in-law, and his second cousin (once removed) from Cleveland, the casino feels a bit exploited. Of course, whales can get away with this. But people like you and me cannot.

You should always make it easy for the pit boss or host to justify the comp. By that I mean, don't ask for a comp that's way out of proportion to your play. If you've been playing at a \$10 table for two hours, don't hand the pit boss your first-class airline ticket from New York to Nevada and say, "Take care of this, my good man." That's ridiculous.

But two solid hours at a ten-dollar table should indeed rate a coffee shop comp for one, a buffet comp for two, or something of that magnitude. If you're a \$25-to-\$50 player, you can get a lot more ... but again, be careful what you ask for. Try asking for a room comp instead of a restaurant comp, for example. Because rooms are rented at a fixed rate, while there's no telling how high a bill you could run up in the gourmet restaurant, even with only two people. Or try asking for a restaurant comp for only one person, because this is a fairly easy comp for the floorperson to justify. Better yet, ask for the comp with a win/win question like this: "Does my play qualify me for a coffee shop comp for one person or two?" Then if you can't get two, you'll probably get one.

Note that the key word in all of the above is "ask." Don't demand. Don't insist. Don't argue or make threats. A comp is a gift. It's a privilege. It's not your right -- even if you've been playing with purple chips (\$500) for 24 hours straight. The decision about whether or not to grant you a comp is totally up to the casino.

Over the years I've found that a nice polite way to ask for a comp is as follows. Hand your card to the floorperson and say, "Would you be kind enough to check and see if I've had enough playing time to rate a coffee shop comp for one?"

When you ask in this fashion, you're not actually asking for the comp itself. You're simply asking the floorperson to check and see if you rate a comp. That gives her an easy out and makes her feel more comfortable about the whole exchange. If you truly do not rate the comp you've asked for, she'll simply come back and say, "I'm sorry, but you need a little more time." Or she may offer you a comp of lesser value. This is much more civilized than if you simply made a demand and put her in the position of having to refuse you point-blank. And guess what? Because you have treated her respectfully and politely, you are much more likely to get the comp.

Once you have been given a comp, don't abuse it. Don't try to use up the entire value of a restaurant comp, for example, by eating or drinking more than you normally would. One day at Bally's Park Place, I was sitting at the coffee shop counter next to a little old lady whose eating habits struck me as a little peculiar. She didn't appear to be over-

weight or a “foodaholic,” but she ordered a huge meal and topped it off with a giant piece of cheesecake. Then she ordered another piece of cheesecake and had the waitress wrap it up to go. Next she took out a piece of paper and a pencil and began doing some computations. When the waitress came back with her cheesecake to go, she ordered another two pieces of cheesecake and a Danish to go. “Is this woman keeping a dog in her room?” I wondered.

Then I realized what was going on. She had been given a coffee shop comp with a set value on it -- probably \$25. Her lunch had probably only cost about half of that amount, so now she was trying to use up the balance by ordering pastries to go!

This little old lady probably didn’t know any better, but let’s face it, this kind of behavior is abusive and rude. Look, you asked for a free lunch and you got a free lunch. Don’t try to carry out the entire contents of the deep freeze in your handbag! That’s not fair. Above all, don’t make the casino regret that it gave you a comp. While the unused portion of your comp doesn’t exactly go back into your “account,” it does help build up an account of goodwill whenever you refrain from abusing the system.

Along these lines, always leave a good tip for the waitress when you’ve eaten as a guest of the casino. And when you’ve finished your meal, go right back to the pit where you’d been playing before and thank the floorperson (again) who gave it to you. Then sit down and play for a while, just to show him you’re not a hit-and-run artist. Believe me, this kind of polite and thoughtful behavior is exceedingly rare among casino gamblers, and it will make you a veritable prince in the eyes of the floorperson. Don’t be surprised if you’re greeted with open arms the next time you come to the casino.

#### TIP NO.11: USE IT OR LOSE IT

Although the casino does indeed take into consideration your action on previous trips and previous days when it makes a decision about granting you a comp, it’s best to take advantage of your “points” as you’re building them up.

Suppose, for example, you visit the Trump Plaza in July and you simply can’t lose. Although you’re normally a \$25 bettor, you find yourself on such a hot roll that you’re routinely betting \$100 a hand and making money like it’s going out of style. You’ve got so much free cash in your pocket that you feel stupid asking for a comp. So you eat in the gourmet restaurant, pay the tab with a hundred dollar bill, leave a big tip, and walk out fat and happy.

But when you come back to the Plaza in August, your financial situation has changed, and so has your luck. Let’s say you got laid off your job and you really can’t afford to make big bets at the tables anymore. Plus, you can’t seem to win a hand to save your life. So you’re betting with “scared money,” putting each five-dollar chip in the betting

circle with trembling hands like it was your last five bucks on earth. Well, now you could really use a free lunch, right? So you ask the floorperson for a comp, and you think you ought to get it because of all the action you showed in July without asking for anything in return.

Well, the information about your action in July is still on the computer, and the pit boss may very well take it into account in making his decision. But put yourself in his shoes. Basically what he sees before him is a \$5 player -- a timid one at that -- with the gall to ask for a comp. Even if he decides in your favor, he's not going to be too thrilled about it because he knows he's going to have the shift manager on his tail asking why he gave a comp to a flea.

So the moral is, use it or lose it. Comps tend to be based more on current play than on past performance. Small bettors who play steadily and frequently are rewarded with comps, but their comps usually come in the form of promotions and giveaways (more about those in a later chapter). The valuable restaurant and room comps are reserved for people who put their money in play.

#### TIP NO.12: PRESS YOUR ADVANTAGE ON COMPS

If you're a craps player, you know what the word "press" means. It means you've just won a bet, and instead of taking your bet down, you double it by applying your winnings and letting it ride.

Pressing is not always a good strategy at the craps table, but when it comes to playing for comps, you should always "press" your advantage. When you're winning, you're betting bigger. And when you're betting bigger, it's time to ask for your comps.

As I alluded to a moment ago, there is always a temptation to give the casino a break when you're winning big. When you've won \$500 at the craps table, for example, you might say, "I won't bother to ask for a dinner comp, because the casino is paying for my dinner anyway."

Wrong, dice breath!!! Now is precisely the moment to ask for a comp, because you've been showing the casino good action and if you ever "deserved" a comp in your life, this is the time.

By contrast, you are much more psychologically inclined to ask for a comp after you've suffered a loss. You're running low on money, and you figure the casino ought to give you a break. But unless you've lost very big -- so big that the floorperson is aware of your loss and sympathetic about it -- you are not likely to be comped. Once you started to lose, chances are your play became timid and cautious. You suddenly became a flea -- worse yet, a frightened flea -- and this is not the kind of person the casino likes to comp.

### TIP NO. 13: NEVER PAY CASH FOR ANYTHING AT A HOTEL WHERE YOU'RE STAYING OVERNIGHT

Are you a football fan? If so, then you probably know the old expression, “Don’t take points off the board.”

Suppose a team has a fourth-and-two at the thirty yard line and decides to try a field goal. The kick is good and they score three points. But there was a flag on the play. The defense was offsides. Now the coach has a choice of accepting the penalty, which would give him a first down but take away his three points ... or refusing the penalty, which would give up possession of the ball but keep the three points on the board.

In this situation, most coaches will refuse the penalty. Why? Because they’ve learned from bitter experience that if they take the points down, they may get intercepted, or lose a fumble, or be pushed out of field goal range ... and come away with nothing.

What’s my point? Well, quite simply, casino/hotels don’t like to take “points off the board” any more than football coaches do. If you’ve eaten in the gourmet dining room and paid the tab with cash or with your American Express Card, the casino host is very unlikely to comp your meal because you’ve already paid for it. But if you’ve signed for the meal and charged it to your hotel room, the casino may well decide to cross it off your bill when you check out.

### TIP NO.14: ABOVE ALL, REMEMBER YOU DON'T HAVE TO LOSE TO GET A COMP

Every time you enter a casino, your ultimate goal should be to win money and get comped. It’s not as unlikely as it sounds. In making the decision to give you a comp, the casino doesn’t really care all that much whether you win or lose. Oh sure, they’d like you to lose, and in fact, they expect you to lose over the long run. But they are very patient, and they know they have the laws of mathematics on their side. But if you win once or twice, they’re happy to give you a comp as long as you’ve given them sufficient action.

Here’s an interesting fact: The gamblers who are most likely to be comped heavily are the big losers (of course) and the big winners! The guy who loses \$50,000 in a night of gambling is obviously going to be comped to high heaven. But the guy who wins \$50,000 also will receive a bundle of comps. In fact, the \$50,000 winner is much more likely to be comped than the poor soul who loses his last \$1,000 at the tables. Why?

Because the casino wants its money back, that’s why! If you win \$50,000 playing craps, you’ll get a free room, dinner, champagne ... anything you want. The Godfather used to say, “Keep your friends close, but keep your enemies even closer.” Well, if losers are the casino’s friends, then winners are definitely the casino’s enemies ... and the casino wants to

keep them as close as possible. The last thing they want is to have them wandering down the Strip and depositing their \$50,000 at another casino!

So never deliberately lose money in order to win a comp. Now there are times, as we'll discuss later, when you'll want to disguise your playing style so that it appears as though you're losing money. But even this must be done judiciously and cautiously. Even when you're doing an "act" to get more comps, your intention is not to lose money, but simply to look like you don't care if you lose money or not.

## CHAPTER FIVE:

# HOW CASINO PERSONNEL “RATE” YOUR PLAY AND HOW TO GET A HIGHER RATING THAN YOU DESERVE

Once you’ve taken steps to make sure the casino knows who you are and that they are carefully observing your play, the next step to getting comped is to acquire a high casino “rating.” If you know what to do, you can actually make a \$1,000 bankroll look like \$10,000 to the casino. And \$10,000 players are, as we have seen, comped generously.

The casino approaches this process with the understanding that not all gamblers are alike. Some gamblers come to the casino twice a year and play quarter slot machines. Others come nearly every week and routinely bet \$25 to \$100 a hand. A few bet thousands of dollars on a hand, but they only show up every couple of years. Each of these players is entitled to some type of comp, but obviously they are not entitled to the same comps.

To separate the wheat from the chaff among gamblers, casinos “rate” their play. In doing so, they take into consideration such factors as how often a gambler comes to the casino, how much he bets on an average, how long he tends to stay at the table (or the slot machine), and what games he prefers to play.

From the casino’s point of view, certain games are “better” than others. The casino loves roulette players, for example, because roulette has a very high “vigorous,” or mathematical expectancy against the player. For every \$100 you bet at roulette, you are expected to lose at least \$5. By contrast, \$100 at the craps table has an expected loss of only \$1.60. And highly skilled blackjack players can actually reverse the odds of the game in their favor.

Some slot players feel left out when it comes to comps. They believe that most of the comps are reserved for table game players. But nothing could be further from the truth. The casino loves slot players, because slot machines have a mathematical expectancy against the players that ranges up to 17% or more. Some of the most heavily comped high rollers in the world are \$25 and \$100 slot players.

As we’ve seen before, the process of rating slot machine players is done electronically. When you place your club card in the machine, a computerized record will be kept of how long you played, how much you bet, how much you won (or lost), and what the mathematical “hold” of your machine is. These figures will be calculated into “points,” which may be redeemed for comps at the promotions booth ... or which may find their way back to you in the mail with coupons, discounts, cash-back vouchers, invitations, and the like. Of course, if you are a heavy \$5, \$25, or \$100 slot player, you are likely to come under the

scrutiny of a “slot host.” Like the “casino host” discussed earlier, this person will be charged with observing your play and doling out your comps. Don’t worry, he won’t be watching over your shoulder. He’ll simply be keeping an eye on your electronic totals, and perhaps observing you from a polite distance in the casino from time to time.

As you can tell, the process of “rating” slot players is very systematized and automatic. It’s difficult to “hype” your slot play in such a way as to appear to be a bigger player than you are. If you drop a sufficient number of coins in the slot, you’ll get your comps. If you don’t, you won’t. It’s that simple.

But the procedures for rating table game players are much more subjective, and therefore, from the player’s point of view, easier to influence.

When you sit down at a table and hand the floorperson your comp card, she will take your card to a central computer in the pit and make out a rating card for you. She will then bring the card back to your table and place it in a little file located behind the table, usually at the dealer’s left. Approximately every ten to fifteen minutes, she will observe your play and make a notation on this card. Don’t confuse rating cards with club cards or comp cards. A club or comp card is something you use, the rating card is something the casino uses to evaluate your play.

A typical rating card will contain entries for the following information. Name of the player; the player’s comp card number; today’s date; the type of game being played; the particular table; the time the player began playing; the time the player stopped playing; the player’s credit limit; the amount of credit the player requested, or the amount of this cash buy-in; the player’s average bets (at the beginning of the game and at the end), the speed of the game (as compared with other games of the same type); a rough estimate of whether the player won or lost; and a preliminary rating or “grade” for your play.

The three key factors on this card which will determine how much you may receive in comps are: 1) the size of your average bet; 2) the number of hours you play; and 3) the house advantage of the game. Some casinos will also consider your style of play, e.g. are you a wild and reckless gambler or a shrewd, “tough” one? Other casinos will make an attempt to measure exactly how much you won or lost at the table.

To put all this in the broadest possible perspective, a \$25 a hand gambler who plays five hours a day can get a casino room rate and several coffee shop comps. At \$75 a hand, he’ll get a free room and free food at the coffee shop or one of the other low-priced restaurants. At \$100, he can expect complete RFB -- room, food, and beverage. He’ll stay in the best room, eat at the best restaurants, and get free drinks -- in or out of the casino. Anyone who bets more than that will likely get his airfare to and from the casino comped as well. But these are just the broad outlines of the comping formula, let’s look at it in more detail.

The mathematical formula for evaluating your play in most casinos is simply to multiply your average bet by the number of hours played by the house percentage in the game. This equation yields your expected loss. Again, your actual win or loss may come into consideration and it may not. But when it comes to issuing comps, most casinos are only concerned with how much money you put into play and how much you are theoretically expected to lose.

The value of your comp is usually equal to approximately 20%-to-30% of your expected loss. So let's look at the equation, where "C" is the value of your comp, "B" is your average bet, "N" is the number of hours you play, and "V" is the vigorish, or house advantage on the game.

$$C = B \times N \times V \times 20\%$$

Okay, get out your old high school algebra textbook and let's find out how long you have to play in order to get a certain comp. Let's say you want a coffee shop comp for two people, worth about \$25. You're a \$5 craps player who usually puts \$5 on the line and places two additional come bets of \$5 each per hand. In other words, you usually have \$15 working on each hand. The house advantage in the game of craps is roughly 1.5%. So now the equation looks like this:

$$\$25 = \$15 \times N \times 1.5 \times 20\%$$

Solving the equation for "N," we get:

$$\$25 \div \$15 \times 1.5 \times 20\% = N$$

Which simplifies to:

$$\$25 \div 4.5 = N$$

Which simplifies to:

$$N = 5.55$$

In other words, if you're betting at the level described above, you must play approximately five and a half hours at the craps table to qualify for a coffee shop comp for two people.

Five and a half hours for a lousy coffee shop comp? Well, yes. But remember, these figures are based on a relatively small bettor playing craps in the most cautious style imaginable. Chances are, you bet more aggressively than this. But even if you don't, there are certain things you can do to "hype" your play and make the pit think you're a bigger player than you really are. Here are some key tips:

### TIP NO.1: NEVER, NEVER PLAY WITHOUT BEING RATED

I've said this before, but it's well worth repeating. Never put a dime of your gambling bankroll in play at a casino without getting rated for it.

If you buy in for more than a few hundred dollars, you'll probably be rated automatically. But don't take any chances. Be sure to ask to be rated. Or better yet, get yourself a comp card and never play without it. Handing the floorperson your comp card takes the place of asking to be rated, i.e. it's understood.

Some casinos (notably the Trump Plaza in Atlantic City) will not rate you unless your average bet is over \$10. Unless you routinely bet more than this amount, I suggest you avoid casinos with this policy. It's a not-so-subtle way for the casino to say that it won't be giving many comps to smaller table players. Even the \$10-to-\$25 player will not get much in the way of comps at this kind of casino. (The Trump Plaza and its next-door neighbor, Caesars Palace, are the two casinos in Atlantic City which place special emphasis on comping high rollers, sometimes at the expense of smaller players. In Las Vegas, it's Caesars Palace and the Desert Inn. Steve Wynn's Mirage Hotel and Golden Nugget hotel attempt to accommodate both high rollers and moderate players. But \$5 average bettors would be well advised to avoid all of these places if they're interested in comps.)

I know that getting rated every time you play can be a hassle. If you're a smaller bettor, the floorpeople sometimes act like they're doing you a big favor to take your card and rate you. Sometimes your card sits on the table gathering dust and cobwebs before a floorperson deigns to come over and pick it up. And going through this process every time you switch tables -- maybe ten times or more in a single session of gambling -- can be tedious indeed.

But if you want to get more comps, this is the price you'll have to pay. Always, always get rated.

### TIP NO.2: BUY IN FOR MUCH MORE THAN YOU INTEND TO PLAY

To get maximum comps, as I said earlier, you should play with casino credit or front money. But even if you're playing with cash, it's important to make an initial buy-in that is much higher than the amount you actually intend to risk at the tables.

If, for example, you are a \$1,000 bankroll player who usually buys in at a new table for \$100, you should start buying in for \$500. If you are a \$2,000-to-\$5,000 bankroll player who usually buys in for \$300-to-\$500, I'm suggesting you start buying in for a thousand or more. As a rule of thumb, if you've been accustomed to buying in for approximately one-tenth to one-fifth of your entire gambling bankroll, I'd like you to consider buying in for closer to half of it.

In most casinos nowadays, thousand-dollar buy-ins are not by any means rare. But they are infrequent enough to attract serious attention from the pit. "Here is someone who has come to play," is what the typical floorperson says to himself when he sees someone buy in for a grand.

Now, I'm not saying you have to play all the money you buy in for. Far from it! Play in your usual style and make your usual bets. If you're accustomed to buying in for \$300, don't let yourself lose anymore than \$300. But if you're winning, by all means, press your action and increase the size of your bets. From the pit's point of view, you no longer look like a \$300 player who got lucky. You look like a \$10,000 player who bought-in for a tenth of his bankroll and is doing moderately well with it.

Stop and think about that for a moment. Just by altering the size of your buy-in, you've gone from looking like a flea to looking like a small whale. From the standpoint of comps, that's the difference between night and day ... and it didn't cost you a thing.

But what if you lose your \$300? Just pick up your chips and go. The floorperson probably won't think that's unusual. Even high rollers won't stay too long at a cold table. There's no law saying that you have to stay at a table until you've lost your entire session stake.

But what you do next is crucial.

Do not -- I repeat, do not -- simply pick up your chips and go to another table. If you're a cash player, go to the cage and convert your chips into cash. If you're playing with credit or front money, take your remaining chips to your safety deposit box. Take a break for a while, then go back to the casino and repeat the whole process. Draw another marker for \$1,000 or buy in with another \$1,000 in cash. The floorpeople don't know what happened to the rest of your chips, and neither does the computer. As far as they can tell, you look like a guy who just lost \$1,000 and is now throwing another \$1,000 down on the table. In other words, you look like a player. You look like someone who can and should be comped.

### TIP NO.3: COME IN LIKE A LION AND GO OUT LIKE A MOUSE

In addition to making a large buy-in, there are a number of other ways you can attract the pit's attention when you first come to the table. If you happen to know the dealer or the floorperson from previous gambling trips, now is the time to give him or her a big

hello. Try to engage the other players at the table. Ask them if they're winning any money. Is the table hot, is it cold, is it choppy? Although I've warned you in the past about complaining too much about your bad luck (simply because dealers and floorpeople are sick to death of hearing this kind of talk), this might be an appropriate time to announce that you've arrived at this table to recoup your losses elsewhere, e.g. "Man, I hope this table is hot, because I just lost two grand playing craps ... I got to play some blackjack to make it back." The floorpeople may not be convinced that you just lost \$2,000, but they're well on their way to believing that you're a sucker. And guess what? Suckers get comps.

One time I saw a guy sashay up to the craps table where I was playing and drop ten one-hundred dollar bills on the table one at a time. "Okay," he announced in a loud voice to no one in particular, "let's get ready to play some craps. Let's gamble, for chrissakes. Let's heat this table up. Let's get it hot." All of us -- players, dealers, and floorpeople alike -- were utterly transfixed by this new arrival. We watched as the boxman counted out his chips, and we stared as the dealer verified the count and pushed the chips over to him. What would this guy do next, we all wondered. I've seen larger buy-ins than this, but I must admit I've never seen one accomplished with such flair.

Yes, you should arrive at the table like a lion. But you should go out like a mouse. When it's time to leave, you want to slip out quietly and unobtrusively.

Why? Because if the floorperson doesn't notice you're gone, you might get credit for another ten or fifteen minutes of play on your rating card!

The best time to leave is immediately after the floorperson has updated your card. It's easy to know when this is happening, because the cards are usually kept in a little file right next to the dealer. Every ten or fifteen minutes, the floorperson will come over and pull your card from the file, observe your play for a moment or two, and make a little notation. She'll do this for you and every other rated player at the table. Then she'll move on to the next table. As soon as she turns her back, it's your cue to skedaddle.

But if you plan to make a clean getaway, don't "color up" with the dealer, i.e. don't have the dealer exchange your chips for larger denominations. If you do, the dealer will shout "Color coming in!" and the floorperson will swing her attention back to you. Instead, when the time comes to go, just look at your watch, grab your chips, and bolt.

What if you have too many chips to carry? (We should all be so lucky!) In that case, you'd better get them colored up ahead of time. Not just because they'll be hard to carry, but also because the dealer may frown on you depleting her chip tray and may, in fact, insist that you change color before you go. If this is the case, you should ask for a color change three or four hands before you're ready to depart. If you do this, the dealer will think you're simply going to increase the level of your betting. In fact, if you can arrange this to happen at the precise moment that the floorperson is observing your play, you might get credit for larger bets on your card. A \$5 player who plays this little drama exactly right,

for example, might get credit on his rating card for 15 minutes of \$25 action during a time when he wasn't even at the table!

#### TIP NO.4: MAKE YOUR FIRST BET YOUR BIGGEST BET

This goes against the conventional wisdom of gambling, which always says you should start out small and increase your bets as you win. But remember, you're not just playing for a win, you're also playing for comps. And one of the keys to getting more comps is making bigger bets.

The floorperson is supposed to make a notation of your "average" bet. But human nature being what it is, she is not going to stand there with a pocket calculator in her hand, observing your every bet, and keeping a running total of the mathematical average, mean, and median. Instead, she's going to pay particular attention to your very first bet, your very last bet (if she's on hand to witness it), and a few bets in between. You can get a giant head start on this process by making your first bet your biggest bet. Later, if the table gets cold, feel free to cut down on the size of your bets. But in the casino, just as in a singles bar, the first impression you make is the most lasting one. If you appear to be a whale when you first sit down, it will take a lot of small bets to convince the floorperson you're really a flea. But if you appear to be a flea when you first sit down, you'll have to make a lot of large bets before she starts thinking of you as a whale.

Craps players, in particular, should always ask for some action with their buy-ins. Don't be a timid craps player who buys in for \$100, asks for "change only," and stands there waiting quietly for the next come-out roll before placing a bet. Act like someone who can't wait to put his money in action. If you drop ten C-notes on the table and ask for "\$64 across and change," I guarantee you that the ears of every floorperson within twenty-five feet of your table will perk up like a German Shepherd hearing a police whistle.

Of course, "\$64 across" is a ferkaka bet, so you might want to steer away from it. Unless you happen to hit a hot table, you're going to lose money betting across the board. That's why my first bet at the craps table is almost always "\$41 No Ten." In case you're not familiar with that particular bet, it's a \$40 buy bet against the ten, with a one-dollar commission. If a seven comes up before a ten, I win \$20, the house keeps the dollar vig, and I get my \$40 back. This is a very good bet from a gambling point of view. But from a comps point of view, it's even better. First of all, it makes me look like a \$50 average bettor, even though I'm not one. It's a very unusual bet, so it attracts attention from the dealers, the boxmen, the pit, and the other players. (Most of the other players will be wondering what the hell you just played.) It's a "wrong" bet, so it will make you stand out from the rest of the table. And it's a "lay" bet, so you're laying the long end of the odds. In other words, you're putting out a lot of money in order to win a little. Although the casino has no extra advantage in that kind of bet, they rather like being on the long end of the stick for a change.

## TIP NO.5: ALTER YOUR PLAYING STYLE WHEN THE FLOORPERSON IS WATCHING YOU

I'm not suggesting that you go wild. But if you're ranging your bets in blackjack from \$5 to \$25 anyway, why not have your \$25 bet out in time for the floorperson to see it.

If you're playing craps, wait for the floorperson to zero in on you and throw a few proposition bets to the stickman. The house utterly adores proposition bettors, because prop bets have the highest vigorish in the casino, even higher than slot machines in some cases. Look, even the toughest craps players will occasionally put a dollar on the "yo" or \$5 on a hardway to bring out the point. All I'm saying is that if you're going to make some of these bets at the table anyway, you might as well wait and make them while you're under observation.

If you've won a good deal of money by playing smart and playing tough, it wouldn't hurt to change your play when you're under the direct observation of a floorman in order to earn a comp. In fact, if you've won a lot of money at the craps table, taking a few proposition bets or across-the-board place bets may not be such a bad idea. If the table stays hot, you'll make some money. And if the floorman hears the words "\$64 across" come out of your mouth once or twice, you're bound to hear the words "free lunch" come out of his.

## TIP NO.6: ACT LIKE A "PLAYER"

I've talked a lot about fleas and whales. By now you know that fleas hardly ever get comped (except, of course, through promotions and discounts), while whales get more comps than they ever could use.

But there is another type of gambler in the casino. He is neither a flea, nor a whale. And yet he gets more much more in comps than his modest amount of action would normally deserve. He is a player -- someone who has come to the casino to play. He may not be rich (in fact, chances are he's a lot poorer than many of the fleas), but by God, he's going to take all the money he has to the casino and he's going to gamble with it.

What's the difference between a whale and a player? Well, it's like what F. Scott Fitzgerald said about wealthy people. "The rich are different from you and me," said Fitzgerald, "they have more money." The only difference between a whale and a player is that whales have more money. Other than that, they are exactly the same kind of person and they exhibit the same kind of behavior in the casino.

Like the whale, the player bets as much as he possibly can on each hand. He bets recklessly and shows a particular fondness for the worst bets on the table. (If he's a blackjack player, for example, he doubles down on anything up to and including a stray cocktail napkin. If he's a craps player, he "insures" every come-out with a C&E, covers every even-numbered point with a hardway, takes place numbers across the board, and keeps feeding

chips to the stickman with horns, high-lows, whirls and yo's.) He drinks while he's gambling. He smokes while he's gambling (preferably a fat cigar). He shows off to his girlfriend and keeps up a running patter with other players at the table. (At craps, he detests wrong bettors and will sometimes offer them a green chip or two just to leave the table. He'd bet wrong himself, but he's probably not smart enough to know how it works.) He tips the dealers heavily and ostentatiously. He makes a lot of noise at the table -- win or lose. If he is a craps player, he has an elaborate, stylized and time-consuming shooting routine that would make Jack Nicklaus look sloppy and rushed while standing over a putt. And if a mistake is made at the table in the house's favor, he makes a fuss that would register on the Richter scale and leave radioactive fallout in the casino for centuries to come.

In short, he makes his presence known.

There's no way you can successfully act like a whale in a casino. You either are a whale or you aren't one, and nothing you can do will change it. If you try to act like a whale, the floorpeople will either laugh at you behind your back or, if they're in a nasty mood, laugh right in your face.

But the good news is you can act like a player -- even if you can only afford \$5 bets. All you have to do is mimic some or all of the behavior I've described above.

Look, real high-rollers are comparatively rare. I've only run into a few of them in my life. One time in Lake Tahoe, I sat next to a guy at a \$25 minimum blackjack table who was betting stacks of purple (\$500) chips on every hand. I was impressed. Another time in A.C., I stood next to a craps player who kept about \$2,000 on the table at any one time and was toking the dealers with \$100 field bets. But I can count these occasions on the fingers of one hand. And I can honestly say that I've never run into a real whale, the type of guy who bet more on a single hand of baccarat than most of us make in a year. There are two reasons for this, I guess. One is that I never play baccarat (boring game if you ask me). The other is that nowadays most casinos have private rooms for their super high-rollers, so they won't have to rub shoulders with ordinary folks like you and me.

Nevertheless, I've seen lots of people get showered with comps over the years. Most of these were not whales. They were players.

#### TIP NO.7: ATTENTION CRAPS PLAYERS -- ODDS DON'T COUNT

If you're a craps player and you've read a little about how to play the game, then you already know the "free odds" bet is the best bet in craps. It's so good, in fact, that the casino doesn't even put a betting square for it on the table ... you simply have to know about it. Of course, the more odds a casino offers, the lower the house advantage is against you.

That's why I love to play craps in downtown Las Vegas. Because many of the casinos down there offer ten-times odds! In other words, you can put \$5 on the line and \$50 behind it. That's darn near an honest game of craps. In fact, the house percentage is so low in such a game that you might go so far as to say the casino deserves its meager cut of the action just for providing the table, the dealers, and a roof over your head.

Yes, playing craps with full odds is the way to go. But when it comes to comps, you must remember that the size of your odds bet does not influence your rating.

Take my example of downtown Las Vegas, for instance. Suppose I'm in Binion's Horseshoe and I'm betting \$5 on the line with \$50 odds. The casino does not consider me a \$50 bettor. As far as comps go, I'm just a \$5 player. I could play for an hour in this way, and if I ask the floorman for a coffee shop comp, he'll tell me to get lost.

So when you're at the craps table, keep in mind that it's your odds bets that win money ... and your line bets that win comps.

#### TIP NO.8: ATTENTION BLACKJACK PLAYERS -- CHOOSE A DEALER WHO SHOUTS "BLACK ACTION" OR "CHECKS PLAY"

If you've never bet \$100 on a single hand of blackjack in your life and you never intend to, you can skip this section.

But if you, like me, are the kind of blackjack player who occasionally works his way up to \$100 bets when you're winning, take this advice.

Many casinos have a policy of requiring dealers to announce to the pit when \$100 or more is being bet on a single hand of blackjack. If the player is betting a \$100 chip, the dealer is supposed to shout "Black action!" If the player is betting four \$25 chips, he is supposed to shout "Checks play!"

This policy works very much in your favor because it reminds the pit every few minutes that you're a big bettor. After an hour or so of listening to your dealer yell "black action" or "checks play," the floorman will be inclined to give you just about any comp you ask for.

But the problem is, some casinos don't have this policy. And among those that do, many dealers don't take their assignment very seriously. Sometimes they forget to say anything. And sometimes they mumble "black action" or "checks play" under their breath, like they're bored with the sheer tediousness of it all. (And by the way, keep in mind that while a \$100 bet may seem like a lot to you, it's not enough to impress a dealer.)

So if you're a blackjack player who occasionally bets \$100 or more a hand, you must first find a casino that has this policy and then find a dealer who really takes his job to heart. Do that, and I guarantee your action will be noticed by the pit.

## TIP NO.9: SELECT THE APPROPRIATE TABLE MINIMUMS

There are two schools of thought on what kind of table minimum to select to maximize your comps.

Some experts believe that you should pick a table with a very high minimum, because the floorpeople in the high-minimum pits are more accustomed to writing comps, have more authority to do so, and tend to be more generous about it.

Others say that you should pick a table with a very low minimum because if you bet above the minimum, your play will stand out more and will be more likely to be noticed by the floormen.

I tend to favor the latter approach, but both theories are reasonable. You probably should try both and see which one works best for you. The one thing to avoid, however, is to put yourself somewhere in the middle. Don't play at \$10 or \$15 tables, because they offer the worst of both worlds. Your action won't stand out, and the personnel in these pits are not favorably disposed to comping players.

For slot machine players, there's absolutely no doubt that playing at higher minimum machines will earn you more comps. From the standpoint of winning money, I'd rather see you put five tokens in a one-dollar machine than put a single token in a five-dollar machine. But when it comes to comps, \$5 slot players get much better treatment than \$1 players do. Dollar slot players are a dime a dozen. But \$5 slot players are comparatively rare, and the casino values their business greatly.

## TIP NO.10: COMBINE YOUR RATING WITH YOUR SPOUSE

If you and your spouse go to the casino together from time to time, make sure you both have comp cards and you both use them religiously. Then if you're ever turned down for a comp, ask the floorperson or host to consider the action on both cards before making a final decision. It's possible that the combined action will be sufficient to earn a comp -- the total, after all, is sometimes greater than the sum of its parts.

# CHAPTER SIX:

## HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT CASINO FOR MAXIMUM COMPS

I said earlier that in order to maximize your comps, you must give all your play to one casino. But which one? How do you choose the one casino that will become your gambling “home?”

First of all, pick a casino that you like and that’s comfortable to you. Pick one where the employees seem friendly and courteous. Pick one where the rooms are comfortable and spacious, the restaurants inexpensive and good.

Pay attention to the casino’s house rules. Are they favorable to the player in the games you enjoy most? If you’re a craps player, for example, are you allowed to put double odds (or more) behind the line? If you play blackjack, can you double down on any two cards? Double after splitting pairs? Does the dealer stand on a soft seventeen? Do you have any option bets (like over/under 13) or bonus payoffs, like a jackpot for three suited sevens?

If you’re a modest bettor, choose a casino that caters to your kind of player. In Atlantic City, TropWorld and the Showboat are the two casinos that pay special attention to the market of smaller bettors. Caesars Palace, by contrast, emphasizes high rollers. Your \$25 average bet will make you look like a flea at Caesars, but the same bet might garner some favorable attention from floorpeople at the Showboat.

In Las Vegas, the downtown hotels -- with the notable exception of the Golden Nugget -- cater to small bettors. Lady Luck, the Four Queens, and the Plaza, all offer good games and generous comps.

On the strip, Circus Circus, the Riviera, Barbary Coast, and Excalibur are the low-roller emporiums. At Caesars Palace, the Desert Inn, and to a certain extent, the Mirage, you’ll find higher table minimums and fewer comps for modest players.

As we’ll discuss in more detail later, however, you must beware of any casino that offers good comps but a bad game. Bob Stupak’s “Vegas World” was the classic example. If you took a Vegas World vacation, it seemed like almost everything in the hotel was free ... or “virtually free,” as Bob’s advertisements had it. But once you got in the casino, you found that most of the Vegas World giveaways came with a string attached. And the games themselves -- some of which were outwardly quite appealing -- were actually among the most mathematically biased in town.

# **CHAPTER SEVEN:**

## **BEAT THEM WITH THEIR OWN MONEY!**

Many people think that casino credit is only for high rollers, but nothing could be further from the truth. The highest rollers, in fact, often play with front money, since most casinos are not in a position to extend ten million dollars of credit to a single individual, no matter how wealthy he may be.

You don't have to be a high roller, or even rich, to apply for (and receive) casino credit. Credit lines have been issued for as low as \$500, and five-thousand dollar lines are quite common. If you have a Visa or MasterCard, chances are you will qualify for casino credit.

There are distinct advantages to using credit in a casino. You don't have to carry around large sums of cash in your pocket, and the money you borrow doesn't have to be paid back right away. You are, in effect, using the casino's own money to beat them with. Even if you lose, you pay no interest on the use of their money. Meanwhile you're still drawing interest on the money you left in your bank. Best of all, the casino finds credit players easier to track, and therefore easier to comp.

Only a small minority of gamblers apply for credit. But they are among the most active players in the casino. Their action probably accounts for a greater percentage of the casino's overall "drop" than all the cash customers combined.

Casino credit is a little different from the kind of loan you might get at your bank. First of all, it's never dispensed in cash, only in gambling chips. What's more, you are expected to gamble with it. If you tell your local bank officer that you need a home-equity loan for gambling, he'll laugh in your face and tell you to close the door on your way out. But this is exactly what the casino credit manager wants to hear. He would be very angry if you used the money to do something sensible, like buying a new car or adding a new room to your house.

In the old days, it was quite possible to use casino credit for non-gambling purposes because -- at least in Las Vegas -- the chips from one casino could be cashed at any other casino in town. All you had to do to get an interest-free loan was take out a marker at the Sands for \$5,000, gamble for a few minutes at the table, and then go cash your chips at the Desert Inn. Many people financed new businesses or got out of old debts by pulling just such a scam. Maybe that's why the Nevada gaming commission eventually changed its rules on the negotiability of gambling chips.

Other than stating your reason for requesting the loan, the process of applying for credit in a casino is indeed very similar to applying for a bank loan or a credit card. The casino's Credit Department is usually situated in a prominent location just off the casino floor. Walk in and ask for an application. You'll be given a sheet of paper that asks for your name,

address, occupation, employer's address, and -- most importantly -- information about your bank accounts and other liquid assets. It also will ask exactly how much credit you want.

Just like a banker, the credit officer will spend some time after you're gone verifying the information. He will check with your bank to see how much you have in your accounts. He will verify your employment. He will check with "Central Credit" in Nevada (or a similar firm in New Jersey) to see if you have credit accounts at other casinos (and if you have handled these accounts responsibly). He may also check with a conventional credit bureau like TRW for general information about your consumer credit rating. (But having no credit cards is not necessarily a strike against you.) His purpose in doing all this, of course, is simply to make sure you have the financial wherewithal to repay your debts. But he is also interested in learning if your requested credit line is compatible with your record as a gambler. For example, he doesn't want to issue \$20,000 of credit to a \$5 gambler, even if that person could afford to repay it. To do so would be asking for trouble.

Don't expect to be issued credit on the same day you enter the casino. It's best to fill out an application and give it time to be processed before your next trip. Or write ahead to the casino and request a credit application by mail. The process normally takes at least two weeks.

When your application has been approved, you will be issued a credit "line" equal to the total amount the casino feels it can safely lend you on any given visit. As I said before, credit lines can be as low as \$500 and as high ... well, as high as the sky. I'm sure some "whales" have credit lines in the millions. Most people, as I said before, have lines in the \$5,000-to-\$10,000 range.

Don't feel you have to ask for all of your credit every time you go to a table. Markers are usually written in increments of \$500, with \$1,000 being the most common request. When you go up to the table, tell the dealer you need a marker, and he will whistle up a floorman at once. Hand the floorman your comp card, and tell him how much money you need. (Once you get known by the floorpeople, you can make your request simply by flashing your fingers -- five for \$500, ten for \$1,000.) In Nevada, the dealer will promptly give you a few hundred dollars to begin playing with while your marker is being prepared. In Atlantic City, you'll have to cool your heels until the paperwork is done. **[NOTE: As you've probably noticed by now, I'm not updating everything in this book to reflect the realities of 2006, but I can't let this one pass. I'm afraid that if you flashed five fingers nowadays, you'd get \$5,000 and if you flashed ten, you'd get \$10,000!]**

In a few minutes, the floorman will come back with a marker for you to sign. You'll notice that the marker looks very much like an ordinary bank check. That's because it is one. For all the glamour and mystery surrounding it, that's all a marker is -- a bank check. The casino will hold it for a period of time, and if you don't buy it back with chips or with your own check, they will deposit it in your bank just like any other check. You might be old enough to remember when it was common for businesses, especially those located in

small towns, to use “counter checks.” If you didn’t want to pay for your groceries in cash, the grocer used to have a stack of blank checks nearby and you could simply write out a check at the counter. Well, that’s exactly what you’re doing with a marker.

Once you’ve signed the marker, the floorperson will hand it to the dealer (or the boxman in craps), and it will be stashed in the drop box just like cash. (In Nevada, it may be kept in the pit.) At this point, the dealer will give you chips equal to the amount you’ve requested in credit. Now you’re ready to begin playing.

The procedures on redeeming your markers vary a bit from casino to casino and from state to state. In Atlantic City, you usually redeem your markers at the cashier’s cage. In fact, if you show up at the cage with more than \$500 in chips, the cashier will pointedly ask you if you have any outstanding markers. In Nevada, you are usually expected to redeem your markers before you leave the table (assuming you’ve won). In effect, you “buy back” your marker with chips. Once the marker is back in your hands, be sure to tear it up.

As we discussed earlier, your overall goal on any trip to Las Vegas or Atlantic City will be to roll over your entire credit line. Not all at once. But in increments of ten to twenty percent per gambling session. Again, I’m not asking you to lose all that money. I’m just asking you to use it all. If you draw it out and play it in the way I outlined before, the casino will have no reason to doubt that you put your entire credit line in action. And that’s the key to getting maximum comps.

Can slot players get credit too? You better believe it! The casino loves slot players with credit lines. The only difference between you and the table player, however, is that you must follow slightly different procedures for getting your money. Since these procedures vary greatly from casino to casino, be sure to ask the credit manager exactly what you need to do.

What happens if you can’t repay your debt? What happens if you walk out on a marker, and then the marker “bounces” at your bank? Well, don’t worry too much. You won’t wake up with a severed horse’s head in your bed. Those days died out with Bugsy Siegel’s Flamingo. Most likely the casino will come at you with the same battery of unpleasant letters and phone calls that you’d expect to get from Sears Roebuck. If this ever happens to you, simply say “Look, I want to pay you back, but I need some time. Let’s work out a monthly payment plan.” Not only will most casinos accept this offer, but if you keep your payments current, they’ll probably let you continue to gamble on credit!

But don’t forget that using casino credit does have its pitfalls. One is that the money is so readily available and so easy to get. After playing for a few hours with plastic chips and markers, you start to forget that this is real money you’re dealing with. This aura of unreality is exacerbated by the consumption of alcohol. The history of casino gambling is replete with stories about drunks who kept asking for markers until their entire estate was gone. To avoid such a calamity, make a vow to yourself that you’ll never drink while gambling. And just to be sure, tell the credit manager that you won’t be responsible for any markers you write over and above your credit line.

# CHAPTER EIGHT:

## HOW TO GET A FREE LAS VEGAS OR ATLANTIC CITY VACATION

Imagine being picked up in a limousine and being whisked by your driver to the airport as you drink a cocktail and watch a videotaped movie in the back seat. You're not just going to a regular airport, though, you're going to a special airport where only private planes, corporate jets, and charters are allowed to land. Don't worry about your baggage, it's all checked through to your destination. And your tickets are paid for. Once on board, you sit in a spacious first-class seat, enjoy a delicious gourmet meal, and drink as many free cocktails as you want. You pass the time playing cards with your fellow passengers and, before you know it, you've landed in Las Vegas, Nevada. Don't worry about hailing a cab, there's a special bus waiting to take you to hotel, and your bags will be waiting in your room by the time you get there. For the next few days, you'll be staying at a fabulous strip hotel as a guest of the casino. Your suite is free. Your meals are free. Your entertainment is free. And everything from the bouquet of flowers on your dressing table to your green's fees on the golf course are free too.

Is this a dream?

No, it's a junket. A "junket" is, quite simply, an all expenses paid vacation to a casino/hotel. It's a way for the casino to attract heavy gamblers and keep their business.

So how do you sign up for a "junket?" Hold your horses for a second. If you're not a \$10,000 bankroll, \$25 minimum player, the kind of junket I've just described is not for you. (Although you do have some other options which I'll get to in a moment.) Even if you do meet this description, dream junkets like the one above are becoming increasingly rare. Most casinos nowadays have decided it's prohibitively expensive to run junkets for \$10,000 players and give them the key to the city, so to speak. Super high rollers still get this treatment. But in recent years, most casinos have begun to put tighter controls on junket players, requiring more play, and in some cases, asking the gamblers to pay some of the costs upfront.

Most junkets last between three and four days. The most common itinerary is for gamblers to arrive in Las Vegas on Sunday night and leave on Wednesday morning. When you consider that such a trip might normally cost \$700 or more, a "comped" trip to Las Vegas is a pretty good deal. As a rule of thumb, the casino expects to return approximately 50% of a gambler's theoretical loss in comps -- or about 10% of his total bankroll. But the gambler has his responsibilities, too. Namely, he must gamble. He must bring a substantial amount of money with him on the trip (or have it available in casino credit), and he is expected to put virtually all of it in play.

Aren't junkets only for high rollers? Well, yes and no. The real high rollers -- the \$50,000 a hand players -- never go on junkets. Their life is a junket. If they want a free trip to Las Vegas, all they have to do is call their favorite casino host and tell them they're taking the next flight out. Everything will be taken care of, and everything will be paid by the casino.

Junkets are designed to attract "medium-rollers," or "players," as I defined them earlier. These gamblers usually have credit lines of between \$5,000 and \$20,000, and they will put all or most of it on the tables during their stay. The casino expects them to lose about 20% of that bankroll, but it doesn't require a loss. It is certainly possible to get a free trip to Las Vegas and still come home a winner.

What the casino does require, however, is that junket players gamble only with \$25 chips or higher. They must spend at least four hours a day gambling in the host casino. And they must put a minimum of about \$10,000 in action during their stay. You don't have to lose that money to be invited back on another junket. A casino would much rather invite back a player who beat them for \$25,000 than one who lost \$500 with cautious and timid play.

How do you get invited on a junket? Perhaps the best way is to get the recommendation of a friend who is already an experienced junket player. Junket representatives, or "junket masters," as they are sometimes called, are not all that fond of first-timers. They want people who are proven gamblers and who will live up to the expectations of the casino. But if you have a friend who can vouch for you, you're likely to get a shot. Consider it a kind of try-out or audition. If you pass, you'll be invited back again on your own merits.

If you do not have a friend who is a regular junket player, you can contact the casinos themselves. Call or write your favorite casinos in Las Vegas or Atlantic City and ask to speak to the casino manager's office, the credit manager's office, or the office of customer development. (You may get the runaround, but if you let it be known that you're interested in junkets, you'll eventually get the right person.) If you want to go to Las Vegas, stick to the Strip hotels; the downtown hotels don't tend to run junket programs. Stay away from the high-roller emporiums, and concentrate on the hotels where the action of a moderate player is likely to be appreciated -- the Riv, the Stardust, or the Trop, for example.

Once you've located the right person at the casino, he will refer you to a junket representative in your city or state. In most cases, this will be an ordinary travel agency that runs Las Vegas or Atlantic City junket programs on the side. Tell the junketmaster what kind of gambler you are, and be honest. If he has nothing to accommodate your level of action, he'll tell you -- and you'll both save yourselves a lot of trouble. But if he does have a junket program for a bettor like yourself, he'll tell you exactly how much bankroll you'll need, what kind of minimum bets you must make, and how many hours a day you'll be required to play at the casino. A junket player should always know in advance exactly what is expected of him.

Once you've been on your first junket, and assuming you live up to the casino's expectations, you'll never have to worry about getting on another one. You'll be deluged with direct-mail invitations from casinos and junketmasters. You could spend the rest of your life going on junkets ... or at least as long as your money holds out.

The junket rep will be like your official tourguide on your trip to Las Vegas. He'll book your seats on the plane for you. He'll take care of your baggage. He'll make sure you're happy at the hotel, and he'll attend to any little problems or special favors you may have. But he'll also be there to whip you into shape if you don't gamble enough. Junketmasters have been known to knock on their customer's doors at two o'clock in the morning and insist that they go down to the casino. If a junketmaster brings too many stiffes on a trip, he'll soon find himself out of the junket business.

Casinos rate junket players in much the same way they rate ordinary players for comps - except much more carefully and attentively. As a junket player, you'll be issued a special VIP card which you must show whenever you're gambling in the casino. (This is also the card that will guarantee you free meals, shows, drinks, and so on.) The floorpeople will keep a careful record of your play, paying particular attention to how many hours you spent at the table, how many bets you made, and what denomination chips you used. In most casinos, you will be given a letter grade -- just like back in high school! -- for your play.

An "A" means you are an aggressive player with lots of money. You stay at the tables even longer than the casino requires, you make huge bets, and you bet with reckless abandon. You may win big, or you may lose big, but one way or the other, you put a ton of money in play.

A "B" means you're essentially the same kind of player, but you simply don't have quite as much money to gamble with as the "A" player does. That's okay. The casino understands that we can't all be rich. It still wants your business.

The "C" player is one who plays just enough to satisfy the junket requirements. If the rules say he must spend four hours a day in the casino, he's out of there at one minute past the fourth hour. If the rules say he must gamble with green chips, he does so ... but just one at a time. He is usually a "tough" player who knows the mathematics of the game and plays in the most guarded manner possible. If he's playing craps, for example, he puts \$25 on the pass line, takes full odds on the point, and establishes two additional come bets, also with full odds. This is a very sensible way to play craps. The casino hates it.

The "D" player is, from the casino's point of view, a "bum" or a "stiff." Either he barely lives up to his minimums or he falls considerably short of them. Yet he takes full advantage of his comps. He sees every show in the hotel. He spends every morning on the golf course. He eats a big lunch in the coffee shop every afternoon and a huge meal in the gourmet dining room every night. Maybe, if he has time, he might spend a few hours in the casino, too.

So what do these grades mean? The “A” player, of course, will be invited back with open arms. In fact, he may no longer have to go through the hassles of getting himself on a junket. In the future, he’ll be able to come to the casino any time he likes and present his airline ticket to the casino host. His airfare will be comped, and so will his stay at the hotel.

The “B” player won’t receive quite the same degree of royal treatment, but he will never lack any opportunity to return to Las Vegas on another junket. He’s not a high roller, but from the casino’s point of view, he’s an ideal junket customer.

The “C” player is on the cusp. The junketmaster may pass along the news to him that the casino wasn’t exactly thrilled with his performance ... or he may simply cross him off his list of future invitees. If the “C” player continues to pester the rep for more junkets, he may weasel his way onto another one if there is space available. But the junketmaster probably will let him know in no uncertain terms that he must increase his action.

The “D” player not only won’t be invited back, but he may in fact jeopardize the career of the junketmaster who sponsored him. Too many “D” players, and the junket rep will be back in the travel agency business.

Many of the strategies in this book are designed to help you “fool” the pit personnel into thinking you’re a bigger player than you really are. But I must warn you, don’t try this on a junket. Junket players are observed much more carefully and evaluated much more extensively than walk-in gamblers. The agreement you make with a casino when you go on a junket is not a formal written contract, but it’s a very serious understanding between two parties. The casino agrees to give you free airfare, room, food, entertainment, and beverage. In return, you agree to give them a sufficient amount of action.

Over the years, there have been many players who have tried to abuse this system or scam it. One of the most common ploys is to work a partnership at the craps table. One partner bets “right” and the other bets “wrong.” Even if they put thousands of dollars in action, they only risk a minimal loss (due to the “Bar 12” or “Bar 2” on the Don’t Pass Line). The problem is, the casinos have seen all these tricks before. There’s almost no way to fool them.

If you’re “hyping” your play by using the techniques I’ve revealed in this book, that’s fine. But if you’re doing it on a junket, it’s not only unfair and dishonest, it’s also unlikely to work. Therefore, you should never go on a casino junket unless you really are prepared to give the casino as much action as it requires.

If you live somewhere on the Eastern Seaboard and you simply want to run up to Atlantic City for the day (or if you live in California and you want a “quickie” trip to Vegas), there are a number of options available to you. Of course, I don’t have to tell you about the cash-back bus trips to Atlantic City leaving every morning from cities like New York and Philadelphia. But you may be surprised to learn that you also can get free or low-cost airplane trips to Atlantic City (or Vegas), as well.

Contact the Customer Development Department at your favorite casino, and tell them you're interested in an up-and-back or overnight airplane trip to Atlantic City from Baltimore. When you tell them where you live, they'll put you in touch with a representative in a city near you. Harrah's, for example, offers an up-and-back package on Wednesdays during the off-season for only \$79 roundtrip. And if you're a qualified slot or table game player, the trip is free.

One more thing about junkets before I move on to the next section. When you go on a casino junket, don't leave your brain at home. Don't try to impress the casino with overly aggressive and reckless bets. Play only the games you know best, and play them as intelligently as you know how. Steer away from high-percentage games like roulette, and concentrate on low-vig games like craps, baccarat and blackjack (don't play blackjack unless you've mastered "Basic Strategy"). If you've given the casino a sufficient amount of action, don't hesitate to decrease your bets or stop gambling altogether. Don't feel you have to lose money to be invited back. And most of all, don't give in to a feeling of "indebtedness" to the casino. Sure, you had a great time and it was all free. But if you played the requisite number of hours and put the requisite amount of money in action, you don't owe the casino anything more. Take your winnings home and brag to your friends about how you "killed 'em" in Vegas!

# CHAPTER NINE:

## HOW TO GET ON THE CASINO GRAVY TRAIN

In a recent year, the Trump Taj Mahal gave away more than \$100,000,000.00 in comps. Now who do you think got the lion's share of all that money? Do you think it was the high rollers? The whales? The heavy action players? The moderate bettors?

Nope.

It was the fleas. The low rollers. The little guys. The daytrippers. The bus crowd.

Surprised? You shouldn't be. Abraham Lincoln once said, "God must love the common man, because he made so many of them." And casino promotions managers don't need the sixteenth president to tell them this is true. They know the bulk of their gross revenue comes from small gamblers, most of whom are 25¢ slot-machine players.

But you can't very well give free room, food and beverage to a 25¢ slot player, can you? You can't put free limousines at their beck and call, or give them first-class airfare to Las Vegas. A casino would go broke if it did that. So instead they encourage this kind of business with coupons, fun books, vouchers, match-play script, and discounts -- everything from the famous \$2 ham-and-eggs breakfast at the Horseshoe to the 95¢ shrimp cocktail at the Golden Gate.

In addition to all those goodies that are handed out on Fremont Street in Las Vegas or the Boardwalk in Atlantic City, casinos also mail out millions of dollars worth of promotions each month to their regular customers. Any comp card holder who's gambling action meets a certain criteria will receive special offers on room discounts, show tickets, and meal deals. Whenever the casino plans a special event -- like a championship boxing match, a slot tournament, lottery drawings, or a golf outing -- card holders are usually the first to hear about it. I estimate that I get something in my mail from my "home base" casino about once a week. Then I hear from a dozen other casinos at least three or four times a year.

Exactly what kind of goodies are available? Here's a partial list:

**COIN VOUCHERS OR REBATES:** Almost every casino offers some kind of coin voucher for slot-machine players. Sometimes you get them as you step off the bus. Other times, they are mailed to you after you leave and are designed to be redeemed on your next trip. Occasionally, you will get both -- \$10 in coins to play with today, \$10 in coins to play with when and if you come back. Some casinos will give you a cash voucher equal to precise percentage of your estimated loss on a previous trip, like a cash rebate. If you're a devoted slot player, you should make consistent and regular use of coin vouchers. It is, after all, the closest thing you'll ever find to free money.

**GUARANTEED COMPS FOR TABLE PLAYERS:** When it comes to “cash back,” table players get the short end of the stick from slot machine players. But some casinos, notably Harrah’s in Atlantic City, are experimenting with “guaranteed” comp programs. Play at a table for two hours and you will be guaranteed a comp equal in value to the minimum bet at that table.

**MATCH PLAY SCRIPT OR MICKEY MOUSE CHIPS:** Match play script must be used in combination with an actual bet. For example, you bet a \$5 chip on a hand of blackjack and put a \$5 match-play coupon under your chip. If you lose, the dealer takes your chip and your coupon. But if you win, the dealer takes your coupon and gives you \$15 (your original \$5 chip plus \$10 in winnings).

**FREE SLOT PULLS:** Some casinos (especially in Las Vegas) offer you a free pull of a slot handle, or let you play at a “guaranteed win” slot machine. The jackpots on these machines can be enormous, but rest assured, the chances of winning are low. Nevertheless, a free bet is always worth at least what you paid for it.

**MEAL COUPONS AND DISCOUNTS:** Mid-level table game players and \$1+ slot players can expect to get a number of comped meal coupons from their favorite casino over the course of a year. Even if you’re not a regular player, meal discounts are quite common in both Las Vegas and Atlantic City. The Sands food court in Atlantic City, for example, offers a wealth of discounts at all of its restaurants. Las Vegas is a veritable paradise of cheap food deals. In Las Vegas, even full-price meals don’t cost very much. But if you keep your eyes (and your hands) open, you’ll get dozens of coupons for amazing discounts on lunch, dinner, and snacks.

**FUN BOOKS:** A “fun book” is simply a compilation of all the discounts, coupons, and vouchers offered by one casino bound in a single booklet. The fun book is still primarily a Las Vegas phenomenon, and primarily a downtown Vegas phenomenon at that. Funbooks are passed out in the street, or made available in your hotel room or hotel lobby. Don’t ignore fun books or think of them as “advertising junk.” Many of them can be worth hundreds of dollars in savings and giveaways.

**ROOM DISCOUNTS/CASINO RATES:** One of the most valuable comps you can get in the mail is a discounted rate on your hotel room. Such rates are usually half the price that regular customers pay, and the rooms are often located in the best part of the hotel. When you’re a regular customer of the casino, it’s not unusual to get a suite for half of what most people pay for an ordinary room.

So how do you qualify for all these freebies, discounts, and giveaways? It’s simple. Get a club card at every single casino you visit. There are twelve casinos in Atlantic City, for example, and you should have a comp card for each one of them -- even the ones you rarely visit. Although the amount of giveaways you get will be determined in part by how much you bet, you’ll probably get something from every casino that has your name and address on file. Meanwhile, your “home base” casino will shower you with comps on a regular basis.

When in Las Vegas, keep your hand out on the streets! I used to live in New York City, and over the years I got in the habit of ignoring people who passed out circulars on the streets. Most of it was strictly advertising, and if there were coupons and discounts involved, they were usually for products that I didn't want or need. Taking all the circulars offered to you on a stroll through New York City meant either cramming your pockets with worthless paper or littering the city streets. So I just got into the habit of brushing off anyone who tried to hand me anything.

But don't, I repeat, don't pass up these circulars in Las Vegas. Because most of what you get there are terrific deals. Huge discounts on food. Free gambling money. Free shrimp cocktails. Free shows. The works. I might even go so far as to suggest that you take a little briefcase or leather portfolio with you when you visit Las Vegas so you'll have a place to put all these papers and keep them. But don't look for them on the Strip. Almost all the giveaways -- even for the Strip hotels, ironically enough -- are handed out downtown on Fremont Street.

Never get to Las Vegas? Don't worry. To a lesser extent, the same is true on the Boardwalk in Atlantic City. But if you want a good package of casino comps for Atlantic City, I suggest you subscribe to Casino Player Magazine. Now chances are, you saw the ad for this book in Casino Player. But you probably don't subscribe to the magazine ... you simply picked up a copy in your hotel room or at a newsstand. Big mistake. Because subscribers get a huge pack of free vouchers, match-play coupons, giveaways and discounts (for both Las Vegas and Atlantic City). In fact, the actual dollar value of the package comes to nearly \$1,000. So I would urge you to subscribe to Casino Player by sending a check for \$24 to: CASINO PLAYER, Bayport One, Suite 470, 8025 Blackhorse Pike, W. Atlantic City, NJ 08232. How often have you turned \$24 into \$1,000 at the casino?

An even better deal is available for Las Vegas visitors if they subscribe to Anthony Curtis's terrific monthly newsletter, The Las Vegas Advisor. Contact them at 3687 South Procyon Avenue, Las Vegas, NV 89103 or call (702)252-0655, or on the web at: [www.lasvegasadvisor.com](http://www.lasvegasadvisor.com). The funbook they give out free to their subscribers every year is worth literally thousands of dollars.

To get on the casino "gravy train," you must pick a casino that has an aggressive direct-mail promotion program. As I said before, join the slot club at every casino you visit, then examine your mailbox for the next few months to see who is sending you the most stuff. Comp policies vary by season, management shifts, marketing changes, etc., so there is no way that I can recommend a particular hotel. My guess is, however, that you'll find TropWorld and Showboat to be among the most aggressive casinos in Atlantic City for slot players, Harrah's for table players. In Las Vegas, check out the Lady Luck and Four Queens downtown, or Circus Circus, Riviera, and the Stardust on the strip.

# CHAPTER TEN:

## USING COMPS AS PART OF YOUR OVERALL GAMBLING STRATEGY

Now that you know how to get the maximum amount of comps for your level of casino play, a few words must be said about keeping comps in perspective -- or the “philosophy” of comps, if you will.

Casino comps should be considered as part of your overall gambling strategy. If you save \$1,000 on a casino junket, for example, or even \$10 on a buffet lunch, this is money you can use to win even more money at the tables or the slot machines. Casino comps help to reduce your overhead and expenses. They enable you to get to your gambling destination, keep you there and keep you comfortable for a period of time, and ultimately, they allow you to put more of your gambling winnings into the bank. Of course, they also help cushion the financial blow of a gambling loss.

To play the “comp game” well, you must treat it like any other game in the casino. What is gambling all about anyway? It’s about getting something for nothing, right? Or, more accurately, it’s about getting a lot for a little. Well, that’s also what comps are all about. Your strategy is to put up a comparatively small amount of money in bets, and get back a comparatively large amount of money in comps. In this regard, it is just like blackjack, craps, or baccarat. The only difference is, there is no table, no dealer, and no hard-and-fast rules.

The one thing you don’t want to do in this game, however, is to lose money at gambling in order to win money in comps. Many so-called high rollers and “whales,” are really nothing more than extremely wealthy suckers. They brag to their friends about how the casino gave them a free dinner, a free room, a free limousine ... and they rarely, if ever, mention that those “freebies” cost them \$50,000 in losses.

I’m not worried that you’ll lose \$50,000 the next time you go to a casino. But if you let the pursuit of comps get out of perspective, you may indeed wind up paying \$200 or \$300 for a pastrami sandwich. Your primary goal any time you visit a casino should be to win money. Only after you have achieved this goal should you start worrying about getting a comp.

In his book *Las Vegas Behind the Tables*, Barney Vinson tells a story about a young man who goes to visit his uncle in Las Vegas. After seeing the sights, the nephew asks if it’s really true, as he had heard, that almost everything in Las Vegas is free.

“Yes, there are lots of free things in this town,” replied the older man. “But son,” he added, “you can’t afford them.”