



THE TOP 10 MOST COSTLY MISTAKES IN POKER AND HOW TO AVOID THEM!



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The 10 most costly mistakes in poker and how to avoid them:

1: Choosing the wrong buy-inPoker mistakes

2: Distraction

3: Tilt

4: Playing weak starting hands

5: Playing hands out of position

6: Calling raises (including all-ins) without value

7: Bluffing too often

8: Postflop weaknesses



1: Choosing the wrong buy-in

The most costly mistake by far. In fact, this mistake costs more money than all the other mistakes put together. You could be the second best player in the world and go bankrupt if you choose to play headsup against the best player for huge amounts. Similarly you could be the worst player in the world, but you won't lose a penny if you practice in play money games. There are several reasons why people choose the wrong buy-in:

- the simple desire to gamble and win big money
- a lack of understanding of what bankroll management is
- playing for fun with no structured plan
- going on a hot streak/overconfidence
- going on a losing streak/attempting to recover losses

Ask yourself whether you have ever fallen into this trap before and what was the root cause. Acknowledging past mistakes is an important step towards avoiding future ones. I have had a lot of experience helping people who persistently choose buy-ins above their skill level and these are the things I recommend to them:

- treat poker like a business
- set SMART objectives (if possible with the help of a mentor or coach)
- stick to one poker discipline and buy-in at a time (where possible)
- be disciplined in your approach
- use HM2 (ideally) or another tool to help with your accounting



2: Distraction

There are many reasons why a player might not always play his best poker. I have personally spoken to hundreds of poker players about this issue and I could probably write a whole chapter on causes for distraction. They can perhaps be condensed into some broader categories:

- Internet distractions eg email, instant chat
- Phone calls
- Other people in the room
- TV
- Multi-tasking eg playing poker whilst working
- Tiredness

Most people underestimate the impact of these types of mistakes. The fact is that most people are very lazy in the amount of time they spend thinking about each poker decision. A lot of my coaching revolves around making good thought processes a habit. This requires 100% concentration and anything less than that is simply not good enough. To avoid becoming distracted I recommend the following:

- Timetable your poker and include regular breaks (some people have longer attention spans than others – know yourself)
- Eat, drink and sleep sensibly
- Close down unnecessary applications before playing
- Exercise your brain even away from the tables eg puzzles, playing chess, reading or simply participating in lively discussion
- Avoid playing when tired, drunk or anxious about something
- Avoid the mistakes above



3: Tilt

Tilt takes place whenever an emotion causes you to play anything less than your A-game. There are many different types of emotions which we experience as poker players and it is a mistake to ignore them. We need to acknowledge them and manage them. I'll list a few of them:

- Frustration
- Feeling ahead
- Focusing on one opponent
- Anger
- It's my lucky day / not my lucky day

Remember that although emotions may be pleasant or unpleasant, none of them are useful to a poker player. I have a huge amount of advice for players wanting to avoid tilt. Note that avoiding tilt is not the same as the antidote for tilt.

The cure for tilt is time, whether that means a deep breath, a 15-minute break, quitting for the day or a 2-week holiday. Let me briefly offer some advice on how to avoid tilt in the first place:

- Acknowledge any emotions
- Think mathematically, factually
- Ask questions (have a questioning drill)
- Avoid too much focus on past hands
- Think actively not passively (try commentating)
- Avoid emotional responses to winning and losing

There is a lot to say on this subject and unless you are a robot, I suggest you take it seriously. None of the first three costly mistakes are technical poker mistakes; they all pertain to human weaknesses so make sure you guard yourself against them.



4: Playing weak starting hands

There are a few reasons why beginners tend to play too many starting hands and these are the main categories:

- It is more fun to be involved often
- Been watching / reading / discussing too much "glamour poker"
- It is exciting to chase wins with draws or bad cards
- Belief that it is a game of luck and not skill
- Unwilling / afraid to learn about odds / mathematics
- Misunderstanding the odds / mathematics

The bad news is that this is a very common and very costly mistake. The good news is that this is a mistake which is easy to fix with some preflop tuition:

- use online resources to form a solid preflop strategy
- read a poker book on preflop strategy
- get some preflop instruction from a coach
- in all cases make sure the preflop strategy you adopt is appropriate for the game type you are playing (cash games or tournaments?)
- learn the real strength of each starting hand in poker and don't rely on your perception of its strength

As a poker coach, I won't begin work on any other area of the game until a student has adequately demonstrated an ability to select sensible starting hands. It simply requires discipline and the ability to follow simple instructions. There's really no excuse for getting this wrong.



5: Playing hands out of position

Position is one of the most important factors in any preflop poker decision, so understanding position is vital. Beginners to the game tend to play poker with little or no positional awareness and as a result those players tend to lose money. The reasons for this include those for playing weak hands, but also:

- a complete lack of understanding of the concept “position”
- undervaluing the importance of position
- wanting to be involved in lots of hands
- focusing too much on hand strength

Winning hands played in position on average win more money than when played out of position and similarly losing hands played in position will tend to lose less money than when played out of position. As a result, I recommend the following actions:

- learn a preflop strategy (which will include sensible card ranges for the different positions on the table)
- in general try to play small pots out of position and bigger pots in position
- in general look to end your betting action early in hands when playing out of position (you can achieve this by folding, or sometimes by making an aggressive raise, perhaps as a re-raise or a check-raise)
- in general you should be happy to see a flop when you are playing in position as you have the advantage of betting last



6: Calling raises (including all-ins) without value

Most students of the game tend to like to focus on hands where they are trying to win chips. The truth is, that a large part of becoming a winning poker player lies not in the chips that you win, but rather in the chips that you don't lose. When an opponent raises your normal response should be to fold. Only call or re-raise if you have the right value. The thought process you need to go through to determine whether you have the right value is complex and I teach it to my students. Most beginners call raises far too often and as a result, they lose money. These are the reasons why:

- Desire to gamble
- Overvaluing hand value over other factors
- Not understanding the gap concept (you need a stronger hand to call a raise than you do to make a raise)
- Often not taking position into account
- Not understanding pot odds or implied odds
- Not respecting opponent's raise and likely raising range
- Not respecting 3-bets / not respecting check-raises

The most common situation when beginners call a raise without value is preflop when they are sat on the big blind facing a raise and they cannot bear the thought of giving up their big blind. The truth is that it is usually correct to fold or reraise rather than to call. Steps you can take to avoid calling raises without value:

- If you're unsure, stick to pocket pairs and AK
- Try to respect your opponent(s)' bets
- Avoid calling with "trash" hands eg QTo, KTo are typical examples
- Learn about pot odds and implied odds
- Have a questioning drill to help your decision-making
- Think in terms of ranges ie your opponent(s)' raising range(s)

Odds, implied odds, ranges, equity, positive EV – these are all examples of concepts which many people struggle to understand. They're important though, so don't be afraid of seeking out some help.



7: Bluffing too often

It is absolutely possible to beat some low limit poker games without ever doing any bluffing. Beginners often believe that it is a far greater part of the game than it actually is. It is certainly not the starting point for someone learning the game. In fact, all forms of aggressive poker are best learned after having learned a solid, conservative game as a foundation. Reasons why beginners like to bluff include:

- Belief that bluffing makes them a good player
- Watching too much edited TV or movies
- Impatience and lack of discipline
- Playing too many weak hands and feeling the need to chase losing situations
- Bluffing is fun

Don't even think about bluffing until you have learned the basics. If you learn the skill properly and that takes a lot of time, eventually you won't even consider it to be bluffing as it will simply be a mathematical analysis that leads you to the conclusion that an $x\%$ pot-bet is profitable as you believe you will secure a fold $x\%$ of the time. My advice is as follows:

- Try to avoid bluffing until you are an experienced player
- Try to avoid bluffing against more than one active opponent
- Try to avoid bluffing unless you know your opponent is a tight / good player



8: Postflop weaknesses

Learning to play good postflop poker takes time, but there are ways to speed up the process. This is without doubt the hardest of the 10 costly errors to fix, but as a poker coach I pride myself in offering postflop tuition using generic hands from my database and I have a great deal of advice for anyone struggling with this part of the game. I'll list a few of the most common types of postflop errors:

- Failing to protect strong hands
- Overbetting
- Misplaying draws
- Donk betting or overplaying out of position
- C-betting too infrequently (or frequently)
- Failing to listen to opponents' bets

There are of course many other categories and sub-categories which I won't go into now, but most players struggle with some aspects of postflop play because it is simply not easy. To improve your postflop game I recommend the following:

- Take some coaching
- Play some headsup poker games (this is the rawest form of the game and will constantly expose you to tricky postflop situations)
- Have a questioning drill (a list of questions to ask yourself)
- If in doubt simply try to represent accurately the strength of your hand rather than try to be deceptive
- Read my book "Postflop"



9: Playing too many tables simultaneously

There are a few different reasons why players choose to play more than one game at the same time. There is only one good reason though and that is if it increases your earnings per hour. An increase in quantity inevitably leads to a decrease in quality. Beginners really should stick to one game at a time in order to form good thinking habits. Otherwise bad habits are formed and reinforced on multiple tables at the same time. Lets look at the other reasons why players like to multi-table:

- It's more exciting / less boring
- Belief that it will help them play fewer starting hands
- Want to build up more player points to achieve a certain status

I can't stress enough the importance of quality over quantity. You have the rest of your life to build up quantity once you are confident you are playing great poker. Playing multiple tables is a skill in itself, but it is hugely counter-productive for a student to the game. My advice is simple:

- Set SMART objectives and stick to your business plan. This should include how many tables you play simultaneously.



10: Failing to take advantage of promotions and rakeback

To this day I know of many players who miss out on thousands of dollars of rakeback every year for a wide variety of reasons. For some players, including many professional players, rakeback can be the difference between being profitable and making a loss. Choosing where you play and with what deal is an important decision. These are some of the common reasons I get given for players foregoing the offer of free money:

- Can't be bothered signing up
- Bankroll tied up on one site
- Loyal to one site (sometimes for justifiable reasons)
- Problems signing up
- Lack of confidence in new site (since Black Friday)

A lot of these reasons are fairly petty and in the long run could be extremely expensive mistakes. Sometimes there are legitimate reasons for sticking with one site, but are they good enough reasons to pass up an amazing rakeback deal? My advice is once again very simple:

- Contact 3 rakeback companies and ask them what their best deals are currently for the sites you are interested in
- Contact me for VIP deals or take advice from someone you know / trust
- Also factor in any other promotions offered
- Consider legal issues in your country, ease of depositing / withdrawing, traffic for the game type you prefer, software and support

