

Loose lips sink ships

By Michael Rome & Donovan Panone

The saying “Loose lips sink ships” originated during WWII as part of the government’s concern about citizens accidentally leaking information to spies. (“Can you believe we are working double shifts at the B-2 bomber factory in the midst of winter?” “My son is on an aircraft carrier and says they are near an island called Guadalcanal.”) The full phrase was actually “Loose lips might sink ships,” and was one of the slogans used in a campaign called “Careless Talk Costs Lives.”

Poker is a game of observation in which you can profit by simply watching and listening... not unlike the informants we worried about in WWII. So what are you trying to see and hear? You could be looking for physical tells, but this article is about a less discussed area: information players give away with apparently insignificant statements. Below are some common examples overheard at the poker table. However, make sure what you are hearing is genuine and not a savvy player/double agent feeding you false information.

“I’m not getting any cards.” This player is focusing too much on his holdings and not enough on other opportunities at the table. Alternatively, he might be a decent player who is getting cold decked and frustrated. Either way he will probably get impatient and start making a move. You can often sense when this type of player might push with a marginal hand.

“I wish I had this hand on the button.” He’s just told you he isn’t a beginner and understands the importance of position. He has probably read a few books and is broadcasting this fact to the table: “Hey, I know how to play.” Unfortunately for him, it is likely to be predictable “ABC” poker play. For example, if he opens a pot from early position, it is probably with a strong hand.

“Not good enough” (when in the big blind). This opponent is responding to a raise by folding his hand, while at the same time expressing his impatience to play. More importantly he is telegraphing his playing style, which is to look for cards rather than situations. He’s told you his blinds are for the taking – unless, of course, he wakes up with a real hand.

“I swear, the next time this guy raises my blind...” Here is a player who can sense when he is being bluffed, but is not willing to reraise the bluffer. It’s safe to push him around, but if he fights back, he has a hand.

“Let me tell you about this bad beat I had.” He doesn’t understand that “bad beats” are a big part of the game, and is probably risk adverse when faced with a large post-flop bet. If a scare card comes on the river, consider making a bet at least half the size of the pot.

“Why does an ace hit the board every time I’m holding jacks?” When this player raises pre-flop with pocket jacks, he assumes anyone calling has big cards. After the flop, he may check or make only a small bet. If you represent holding the large card on the board, he will fold. It never crosses his mind that you may have called with pocket eights or suited connectors.

“Well, I had to see where I was in the hand” or “I didn’t want to give them odds to draw” or “He shouldn’t have slow played that.” These are the statements of a table nerd. As he talks through each hand, he is giving you his playbook. This type of opponent probably isn’t sophisticated enough to vary his play, so the information is gold.

So the moral of this article is that careless talk costs chips. Start listening and don’t torpedo your own ship with loose lips.

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