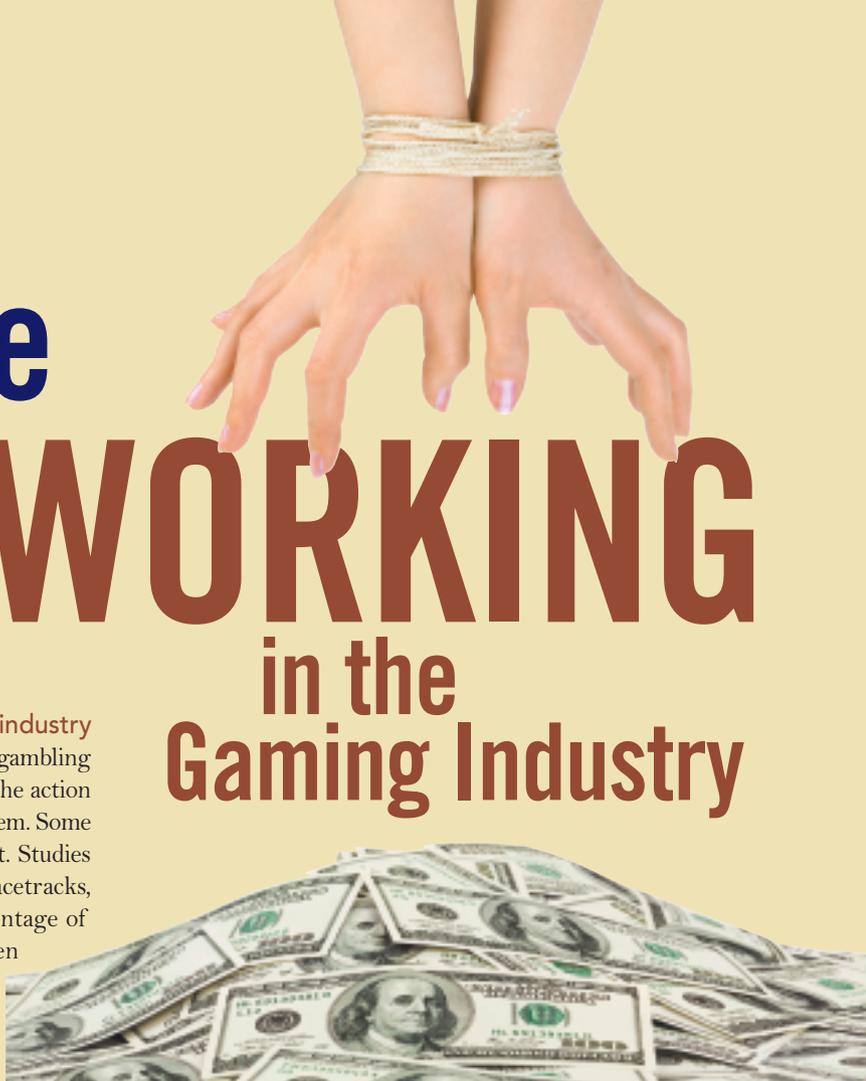


The Compulsive Gambler **WORKING** in the Gaming Industry

By Arnie and Sheila Wexler

Many people who work in the gaming industry are vulnerable to problems with their own gambling behaviors. Some are naturally attracted to the action because they already have a gambling problem. Some develop a problem after being exposed to the environment. Studies have shown that employees in gaming establishments (racetracks, casinos, lottery vendors, and so on.) have a higher percentage of gambling problems than the general population. When Mickey Brown was the president of Foxwoods Casino, he urged his staff not to “become one of the people you’ve seen across the table.” Mr. Brown estimated that “5-10 percent of Foxwoods employees have gambled more than they probably should and more than just recreational.”



It is difficult to spot a compulsive gambler, because, unlike other addictions, compulsive gambling is a hidden and invisible disease. For millions of people, gambling offers a harmless and entertaining diversion from everyday life. Whether playing bingo or baccarat, these people are participating in a legitimate and time-honored recreational activity by taking a chance on an unpredictable event in the hope of winning. For others, however, the simple act of placing a bet is a vastly different experience. What seems a moment of elation or excitement for some gamblers is in reality a moment of overwhelming compulsion—a moment in which these people have lost the ability to control their gambling behavior. These individuals cannot resist the impulse to gamble—they are compulsive gamblers.

It is important to note that compulsive gambling is a treatable illness, and a person can lead a productive life after finding help and recovery.

The American Medical Association adopted a resolution (Resolution 430 in 1995) citing “the addictive potential of gambling,” suggesting that their member physicians “advise their patients of the addictive potential of gambling.”

When I was the Executive Director of the Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey, eight percent of our calls to the hot line came from casino employees. Since 1994, we have trained over forty thousand casino workers nationwide. Raising the awareness of employees through training on the subject of compulsive gambling is sometimes the catalyst for the employee to seek help. Every time we do training, some workers, who have a gambling problem or have a family member with the problem, approach us for help. Often we receive phone calls from employees several

months after they hear our presentation. Many of these people find it difficult to come forward with the problem, fearing that exposure will affect their chances for advancement with the company. Supervisors who recognize an employee who has a serious gambling problem also often approach us.

The problem exists at all levels of employment. Workers have approached us- from housekeepers to executives of casino companies. The range of calls from gamblers seeking help includes a housekeeper who revealed that she stole items from guest rooms in order to support her gambling addiction; a casino limousine driver who was planning to kill himself as the result of his gambling problem; a pit boss that let dead-beat gamblers sign markers and then received a payoff from the gambler. A racetrack announcer called me for help after trying to fix races in order to get money to gamble. We received a call for help from an employee on the hotel side, who was using customers' credit cards to access money for his gambling. A legal counsel to a casino company asked for our help in getting him excluded from gambling in casinos in his state. A woman who worked in credit came forward to ask for help as she was in jeopardy of losing her marriage and children. The range of employees is huge.

As problem or compulsive gamblers become more and more pre-occupied with their gambling, their gambling will eventually affect their company and their job performance. Some areas include erratic work performance, inconsiderate treatment of customers, borrowing money from coworkers or customers, absenteeism, tardiness, theft, embezzlement - all affecting the integrity of the game they are dealing. The compulsive gambler may be coerced to fix games by bookmakers or loan sharks to whom they may owe money. Finally, there are increased health care costs for them and their affected families.

It would be beneficial and prudent business judgment if gaming companies helped their employees who have a gambling problem rather than terminating them. Employees are a company's most valuable asset as they are often in the front line with the customers. Employers and supervisors need to realize that compulsive gambling is an addiction, not unlike alcoholism and drug addiction.

Many companies already have health benefits that include treatment for other addictions. These benefits should also include treatment for compulsive gambling for employees and their families, paid for by the employer. Employers can also make available a room for an in-house Gamblers Anonymous meeting. Human Resource and Employee Assistance Program personnel should have training on the subject of compulsive gambling. Brochures and information regarding help for a gambling problem should be made available to all employees.

Another area that employers may want to consider is the legal ramifications of not taking action if they recognize that their employee has a gambling problem. They may be held accountable by the regulatory body in their state for continuing to employ someone who has a compulsive gambling problem and is currently gambling. On the other hand, employers should have documented information before approaching a worker who is suspected of having a gambling problem.

Early detection of this hidden illness may result in the employee getting help before he or she reaches the desperation phase of compulsive gambling. With recovery, both the employee and the employer will benefit.

We are encouraged to see that some gaming companies have come a long way in the last few years in addressing this sensitive issue. They have developed training programs and responsible gaming programs and policies that have helped their employees who have a gambling problem. ♣

Pathological Gambling: KNOW THE SIGNS

Diagnostic criteria for 312.31 Pathological Gambling DSM-IV

The American Psychiatric Association (since 1980) has defined the disorder using the following criteria.



Persistent and recurrent maladaptive gambling behavior as indicated by at least five of the following:

- 1)** Is preoccupied with gambling (e.g., preoccupied with reliving past gambling experiences, handicapping or planning the next venture, or thinking of ways to get money with which to gamble).
- 2)** Needs to gamble with increasing amounts of money in order to achieve the desired excitement.
- 3)** Has repeated unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back, or stop gambling.
- 4)** Is restless or irritable when attempting to cut down or stop gambling.
- 5)** Gambles as a way of escaping from problems or of relieving a dysphoric mood (e.g., feelings of helplessness, guilt, anxiety, and depression).
- 6)** After losing money gambling, often returns another day in order to get even ("chasing" one's losses).
- 7)** Lies to family members, therapists, or others to conceal the extent of involvement with gambling.
- 8)** Has committed illegal acts, such as forgery, fraud, theft, or embezzlement, in order to finance gambling.
- 9)** Has jeopardized or lost a significant relationship, job, or educational or career opportunity because of gambling.
- 10)** Relies on others to provide money to relieve a desperate financial situation caused by gambling.