

THE WINNING STREAK

Grosvenor Casinos' Dealer Skills Championship brought the entire company together for the 2012 competition, setting goals and bringing rewards for everyone involved

The G Casino Coventry played host to the finals of the 5th annual Dealer Skills Championship in November, the culmination of months of club and regional competitions within the Grosvenor Casino group. In total, all 36 casinos entered the competition, the first time that every casino in the estate has been involved, including Grosvenor's casinos in Belgium. Participation has also grown dramatically over the course of the championship, attracting 300 dealers in its first year, rising to 800 in last year's competition before reaching 915 entries for the 2012 event.

The finals brought dealers and their supporters from across the estate with interviews and scoring during the final session proving the mettle of the competitors before the stage was set for the prize giving event. Event organiser and judge, Ian Shanahan, has presided over the last three competitions and was delighted at the level of participation from across the Grosvenor estate. "It's been a terrific event and thanks goes to all those that have backed this competition, especially the company management team, who have been really encouraging the event with support and coaching," said Mr. Shanahan. "But, the most credit must also go to the teams in the clubs who have increasingly engaged with this event. Wanting to hone ones dealing skills so that our main attention can be focused on customer service is now where our culture is, and it is very encouraging to know that the dealer with the best service skills are regularly our category winners. The management team has really got behind this tournament and pushed it at every level and it's become an integral part of team development in the company and with the HR department."

The competition has undoubtedly benefited from a series of generous prizes at each stage of the event, but the biggest draw for Grosvenor has been the continued development of a fun environment in which dealers can test their skills with rewards both personal and at a much wider level. "The support we've had is terrific, with individual clubs realising the benefits in terms of training for the tournament that is actually not viewed as training by the team, but which

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is a really positive by-product of the competition," stated Mr. Shanahan. "We give the clubs three months to complete their individual in-club event and post all the score cards throughout so that dealers can see the criteria that they're aiming to achieve. We give each club a training pack, score sheets and user guides and each club is asked to nominate a designated coordinator who conducts all the judging to keep everything consistent. A lot of the judging is subjective, so it is important that we have the same person coordinating the competition within the club for a consistent approach."

Once individual club winners have been confirmed, the competition shifts to the regional heats. Prizes of £300 at the regional events and gifts, trophies and key-rings kindly supplied by sponsor, TCSJohnHuxley, add to the excitement of winning at this level. The regional finalists are judged by Mr. Shanahan and Damien Cousins, who split roulette judging and black jack between them and

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ensure they judge each of the regional events, again to maintain consistency in the scoring.

"I think there has been a shift in the attitude of the dealers as the competition has grown within the company," commented Mr. Shanahan at the finals. "We are clearly demonstrating the attributes that the company values as part of this event and our team can see what is expected of them at the very highest level. The key performance indicators are all laid out on the score sheet - with the customer service element a major part of the test. Each dealer has to show that they are capable of engaging with players at the table. It has to be something that





comes naturally, rather than something forced. We find that dealers that have been with us for under two years find this element of the test easy. It's something that sits comfortably with them as it is the culture they have always known. We are a customer obsessed company and it's good for the dealers on the tables to not only be told that, but to see it in action and be positively rewarded for engaging with this philosophy."

While the tournament remains heavily focused on the transactional skills of the individual, the focus has shifted towards an 80/20 split with customer engagement the smaller, but no less crucial element. It's also important for Grosvenor that its dealers entering the competition understand the importance placed on the service element of the scoring. Around 40 per cent of the interview part of the competition is weighted towards service. It's something that mirrors the company's obsession with customer-orientated service and is a major element in the scoring of the dealers. Being the best technical dealer in the world no longer means that an individual will win the Dealer Skills Championship.

The customer service interview is conducted with Grosvenor's HR team running competitors through a series of structured questions aimed at evaluating experiences they've had during their time dealing in clubs. Most of the questions are open-ended, asking the dealers to

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share their customer-service experiences where they are asked to evaluate their personal responses and how they relate to the company's values. Shifts in the demographics of players in the UK casino sector has meant that stoic dealers functionally conducting themselves at the tables is no longer acceptable. Dealers are being asked to perform their transactional duties and engage with players. "There's been a big shift in dealer behaviour over the last two years, whereby they are now much more comfortable with engaging with our visitors," said Mr. Shanahan. "Deal and engage' are now the prerequisites. There was the fear that mistakes would creep in and the

transactional side of the dealing would be compromised, but that's not been the case in our experience. Dealing flawlessly and engaging with the customer is a utopia that we're aiming for and it's been hugely rewarding to see dealers really understanding what we're looking to achieve."

Mr. Shanahan admits that little could have been achieved without the support of the management at both the club and the senior level. The backing of the managers within each club has meant that support for the 2012 event was universal. Every club took part and though it has been the case that dealers in the 'two-years and under' class have proved easier to engage in the challenge, the sheer numbers now taking part means that right across the age spectrum, the Dealer Skills Championship is recognised not just as a worthwhile event, but something each team member wants to win. "Some of the senior dealers were initially less inclined to enter as they felt there was nothing they had to prove," states Mr. Shanahan. "But as they've come to appreciate, this is not a measure of ability as much as it is a fun thing in which to get involved. They can see the support the competition has from the senior management, from Phil Urban (Managing Director) and the rest of his direct team fully support this as a landmark event in our calendar."

The underlying message from the management team is that the competition helps its team to perform better at the tables. Dealers are better at their job, more confident in their roles and deal better as a consequence. The customer receives a better experience at the tables, they have greater trust because of the professionalism of the dealers and the benefits impact on the business as a whole. It's a win-win scenario for all involved and something that has galvanised GMs behind the event across the Grosvenor estate. And with scores rising in the competition every year, with more achieving the top scores and more entering the event, the values of the business are being instilled in every member of the team.

A British Dealer Championship is the next major step for the competition, encouraging other groups to get involved at a national level, though for the time being, Mr. Shanahan is happy to keep expanding the numbers within the Grosvenor estate. "If we can continue to increase the numbers, that would be great," he says. "However, if we were to expand the event and incorporate external groups, we would have to agree a middle ground of scoring as our views of customer service are not universal.

Interacting with customers is something that Kevin Grahame (Head of Table Gaming) has instilled into everyone here at Grosvenor, with dramatic changes on the floor that includes removing the inspector from the pit and allowing them to interact with customers. It's something that really underpins the relationship we want to cultivate with our customers. When we first introduced the concept some of our team found it difficult to adjust, but over time the feedback shows that the involvement with players has empowered them. Interacting with players is the most important element of engaging them in the game - getting them to cross that final five feet and feel comfortable and confident to step up to the table."

The change within Grosvenor to adopt this interactive level of player engagement began over five years ago. The process started at the top, with the senior management team understanding the need to change by talking to and gathering feedback from players at all levels and ages. This has tiered down throughout the business with the dealer championships reinforcing the values that the team has sought to enact throughout the Group. "This competition is a measure of performance as to how well we've communicated our values to everyone within Grosvenor Casinos," says Mr. Shanahan. "We know that we have to

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strike a balance between what our new players want from us and what our transactional players expect from us. We know that a Friday and Saturday night will be a lively floor, with new games adding fun, but at the same time we don't wish to disenfranchise our long term customers. The goal is to cater for as many people as possible. It's a balancing act, but it's something that we feel we're getting always striving to get right."

The format of the competition is set to change next year, with Mr. Shanahan already planning ahead to revisit the group and regional finals with new ideas, with a goal to hosting more clubs in the final. There are the logistics to consider, but plans are afoot to include 10-12 clubs,

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with poker being brought much more into the competition in 2013. "We have no difficulties in getting poker dealers to enter the competition," explains Mr. Shanahan. "We're seeing huge growth in poker across the group and more profile within the clubs - and there's a specific personality that deals poker which loves showing off, and loves the idea of competition!"

Showing off is something specifically valued in competition, where it is justified confidence but not arrogance. Raising the profile of staff is often frowned upon as companies are effectively telling the world

which are their 'best' members of staff, improving their mobility and value. Even the promotion of the tournament in G3 is something that might also raise concern and fears of poaching, though it's something that quite baffles Mr. Shanahan. "I don't have an issue with putting our best dealers in the spotlight and congratulating them on their efforts," he says. "What's the point of hiding their talent from the competition. Dealers stay because they like working for Grosvenor, as much in part because we do promote and shout about their successes. I'm not nervous about the ability of our dealers - I'm delighted."

