



NEW HORIZONS
IN RESPONSIBLE GAMBLING

Session: The Most Game-Changing Practices Globally in Player Health Today

Follow Up Q&A

Q: How does the panel see the future role of frontline workers in the gambling industry? How do we better leverage their experiences and expertise?

Janine: Frontline workers are critical points of contact with customers and are indispensable in *doing* RG. They usually have the most knowledge and rapport with customers and are ideally situated to support healthy play habits by using their skills and training. In my experience, frontline workers are often under-utilized when it comes to developing training and protocols related to interacting with customers around RG. Some jurisdictions I have worked in involve frontline staff in informing these practices, but most jurisdictions do not. Frontline staff have critical and valuable insights into how RG happens, in gaming settings. I would like to encourage operators to engage them more purposefully when developing programs, such as training. They can also help identify performance metrics that should be used to assess if employees are engaging with customers appropriately.

Thomas: I think frontline workers should be among the best trained staff on the issue of safe play. Frontline workers know the players; they interact with them in many ways via chat, email, and phone; they know the player's account and when money is going in and out; they also know what type of games the players prefer. What frontline workers need is a mandate from the owners to act. That is crucial. There needs to be a statement about when, on what grounds, and how to act. Frontline workers are generally good with communication, but there is no harm in practicing more. If you are a frontline worker, I think it should be mandatory to visit self help meetings for problem gamblers and their relatives. That kind of inside information from those affected negatively by gambling is a rich source of information. Lastly, the knowledge of frontline workers needs to be listened to; there needs to be an internal feedback system from frontline workers back to the organisation, especially to marketing. My view is that if player safety is taken seriously, frontline workers will do a better job and they will be more proud of their job.

Many ideas about safer play features come from talking with frontline workers. PAF, an operator located on an island between Sweden and Finland, has come up with some smart ideas. One is that when a player hits a big win, I think it is 8000 euros, they close the account. Within 15 minutes they call the player up and say congratulations and tell them they have closed the account. Then they say, "We know that when someone wins so much money they usually start to gamble more. They raise their bets and

play more intensely. We do not need your money, but maybe you have something urgent to spend it on? A bill, your rent, or trip with your family? If you agree we can keep your account closed for 24 hours while you think of your options. What about that?" If the player agree the account is closed for 24 hours. If the player says no the account opens up again. This is one example of using frontline workers experience and skills.

Q: Is there any solution to someone who has been identified as having a gambling problem, but you talk to them and they do not acknowledge it or say the opposite?

Janine: People who have gambling problems are often not prepared to share details or acknowledge harms to staff. Typically, this is because they feel shame or stigma. It is important for employees to know that they can only operate in the scope of their role and training: they are not counsellors. They can, however, plant a seed about how counselling or other services can be helpful, reassure the customer that the services can help, and direct them appropriately. When I was working with PG clients, those who had compassionate interactions with gaming staff never told those staff later they went to counselling, but they told ME, their counsellor, that the employee provided them with the right information, at the right time, in a kind way and it made a difference months later.

Thomas: I know first hand that a call from the gambling company means a lot. If BCLC contacts me and starts to talk about my gambling behaviour, then it is serious. That means that a BCLC employee who makes that contact needs to be trained, needs to understand the importance of what they are doing. For the player, they need to know that their gambling has little to do with money, it has to do with emotions. That player is playing for various reasons and probably it is all about escape. Gambling fills a function. It could be a way of dealing with stress, anxiety or depression. So when we contact them and start to talk about their gambling, we are on thin ice. We need to tread carefully because we are talking about what the player considers to be his/her lifeboat. We can't expect that all the players we contact suddenly change their behaviour, but we are starting something that the player already knows: the negative consequences of gambling.

What we do is we give the player a chance to talk. Many players confirm that this is the first time they have spoken about their play. We can give them advice on how to reduce their gambling if they want. We can offer them advice for where to turn if they want to talk more about their gambling (remember, frontline workers are not therapists). We can give them hope that it is possible to change things. So to conclude, to communicate with players is important. It starts a process of change and that process is hidden from us. We don't know what the players do with that information we give, but trust me, it makes a difference.

Q: Thomas, what was the final straw that broke the camel's back, that key moment that finally prompted Norsk Tipping to start calling players?

Thomas: That is a long story but, in short, it took guts, public opinion, research, and regulation. In the framework, all the things Norsk Tipping (NT) and others like Svenska Spel (SvS) are doing under the umbrella of safer play suddenly happened. Myself and my colleague Jakob Jonsson have talked about how operators should call players up and talk to players. They just decided to make a project and investigate what it took to make it happen – so guts.

Both NT and SvS are State-owned companies. In both of these countries gambling and problem gambling have been on top of the agenda for years. The public opinion is that gambling operators don't do enough to protect the safety of gamblers. They are under pressure to do better and be better at protecting the players.

Research is important. Over the last 15 years research on gambling has broadened.

We know a lot more about gambling, gambling behaviour, and the negative consequences of gambling for the individual, families, and society. We can't ignore the findings that research gives us. The fact that 10% of players equates to +50% of the consumption can't be ignored. We need to work with prevention, regulation and treatment. One piece of that puzzle is to approach gamblers where we can reach them and offer them support, help, tools, and advice. What better place to do it than where they gamble.

In terms of regulation, Sweden changed the gambling market in 2018 into a licensing system. That also meant that the regulation was upgraded and research came in handy. One thing that changed under the umbrella of duty of care was that operators should communicate with players. Easy as that. I understand that it is a tough decision as an operator; it has to do with things like anonymity, handling of data, and security for the operator and the player. To actually consider to do this was a big step. You never know what response you could get or what to say when you communicate with the player. There needs to be some guts and a lot of preparation and training before you start calling players up.

Q: Thomas could you please share little more about what Norsk Tipping is doing for its players? Do you feel that the world is ready for more of this approach? Is this making an impact?

Thomas: NT and others like SvS have a lot of tools at the ready for their players. First, you need a player card to gamble both online and via a retail store; you don't have to register to buy a scratch card at a retailer store, but for any other game you need to register before you buy. The player's card is connected to their personal social security number. Via the player card everything you do is registered and NT and SvS, as an example, use an AI system called Playscan (there are other AI systems out there and many operators have their own).

Playscan keeps track of their gambling behaviour and gives the player, and the operator, feedback on what they do. The feedback system gives the player an update, via their account, on their past play and provides feedback to the player about their gambling. Connected to Playscan is a self-test and the players are encouraged to do the self-test now and again. The self-test gives important knowledge about the player's own views about their gambling. Remember, players can have multiple accounts and a self-test can give a completely different result than the algorithm in Playscan.

Of course, as a player you have the opportunity to set limits for time, money, to self-exclude, and to find information about where you can seek help. What NT and SvS has done is that they have trained staff to communicate with players at risk. The staff has knowledge about problem gambling and they are trained in motivational interviewing. Playscan alerts the team about players at risk and they then review that player's account. When that is done a decision is made about whether to get in contact or not. The main way to communicate is via phone. They simply call them up. My suggestion is that you read my friend Jakob Jonsson's thesis here: <http://su.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1347137&dswid=-912>

And yes, I think the players are ready. My view is that the player is expecting operators to be transparent with them and communicate with them. I think that people close to the player – the family – expect it. So let's do it.