

# Bill Zender's *Casino-ology*

**“Whether a man is burdened by power or enjoys power; whether he is trapped by responsibility or made free by it; whether he is moved by other people and outer forces or moves them -- this is of the essence of leadership.” -Theodore H. White, *The Making of the President*, 1960**

**January 2009**

Many years ago, when I was in my teens, my Dad was over burdening me with different household tasks. The problem was that if I approached him with my dilemma I would immediately be labeled a shirker, and in serious trouble. In his mind, any tasks he gave me for which I became responsible, were just and should be accomplished without question. In the end I failed to properly take care of several of the tasks, and got in much more trouble than I would have by talking it over with my Dad in the first place.

Sometimes when we get overloaded in duties, we fail to analyze our situation and request a reduction in assigned tasks. The reason we fail to object to this extreme burden is due to our desire not to appear as a person who is afraid to accept responsibilities. This is a huge concern when we are involved in a management, and are in a position where positive leadership performance will lead to promotions, while poor leadership qualities will quickly curtail our future with that company.

The following e-mail inquiry has come from a Director of Surveillance who has been saddled with a very time consuming function that he feels has restricted the performance of his department. He seems to be quite desperate as to the direction he needs to take to correct the situation without bringing unnecessary negativity by upper management. In an effort to correctly offer this person direction, both my Casino Guys Online partner Willy Allison and I reply to the inquiry.

Please sit back, grab a steaming cup of coffee, and I hope you enjoy 2009's first article for Casino-ology.

## **E-mail Inquiry from an overburdened Surveillance Director:**

*I have some concerns regarding what I feel may be a very damaging aspect of surveillance life here at my casino. We recently purchased reporting software for our daily logs. One of the functions of the software is the ability to compile various statistics. I have always felt that our department spent way too much time logging activities and not enough time watching activities. With this software I have been able to quantify our logging.*

*We have been using the software for 83-days now and have logged over 29,000 entries. When I break it down, we are averaging as a department, over 12 hours of every single day spent on*

*logging instead of watching. I was taught, right or wrong, to log everything! Every phone call, regardless of overt significance, gets logged. We've logged nearly 12,000 phone calls in those 83 days.*

*Is there some super secret rule I never learned about deciding what to log and what not to log? Furthermore, is there a simple rule about when surveillance should be called and for what? Is there a simple rule or suggestion on convincing other departments that they do not need to call surveillance for everything; or am I wrong all together, should surveillance be called for everything? Obviously any advice you can offer would be sincerely appreciated.*

### **Zender's Reply to the Inquiry:**

Since I have never managed a surveillance room, I'm not sure exactly how much you should log; however, logging 29,000 events in an 83-day period seems excessive (349 per day, 14.6 per hour). Here's my opinion from an operations standpoint.

Usually, when there is a lot of log entries, this procedure stems from heavy involvement from security. Security is very sensitive to recording every phone call, radio calls, incidents, contact with non-security personnel, and other standard security situations. Since most organizations like to have one standard point for reporting, it sounds like surveillance has taken over that duty. Personally, I wouldn't place this function with the surveillance department, but it might have arisen because surveillance has the staff and the "perceived" time to handle this laborious function.

What you need to do is determine whether or not your department is in a position to log all incidents while covering the casino adequately. You need to look at this question logically and as unbiased as possible. Maybe surveillance becoming "logging central" is optimal without reducing the effectiveness of actual surveillance observations. Then again, you might discover that your hunch that logging all information puts a strain on your primary function of protecting the casino's assets.

With an 83-day record under your belt, you should have enough information to make the determination. Have you been able to view all incidents on the casino floor in a quick and adequate manner? If not, then explain why you haven't been able to using examples. Do you have enough time to do proactive observations such as dealer specials, game pace audits, and internal control verifications? Again, what can't you accomplish adequately and "why?" How large is your staff? If the GM wants you to handle both logging incidents/calls and required surveillance functions, then be in a position where you can advise him or her as to the increase in manpower you will need to get the job done. Maybe the GM will see what your department's functions and responsibilities actually are, and decide to transfer the logging function (other than surveillance's standard requirements) to another department like security, the switchboard operators, or light duty personnel.

There's my two cents. You have the data, now you have to do your own investigation into whether or not the logging function can be handled by your department, or whether it puts a strain on your primary function of game and asset protection. Then, if the established logging

function reduces your department's effectiveness, you have data and information to back up your analysis, and you can offer your GM alternative to correct the problem.

I'm also passing this e-mail along to my partner Willy Allison who is a surveillance guru. If Willy sees something I missed, I'll have him e-mail you.

### **Willy Allison's Reply to the Inquiry:**

*This seems to be a problem most Surveillance Managers go through at some stage especially when they are "resource challenged". The good news is that the software has helped you recognize a big problem and now you can fix it.*

*Twelve hours logging a day sounds like a lot, but I would be interested to hear what percentage of total surveillance time that is? Regardless, let's assume your guys get \$20 an hour. That's \$87,600 a year (or two full time people employed just to log calls). That's a fair amount of loot. I hope there's a good R.O.I..*

*I'd be interested to hear what reporting software system you are using. It might be interesting to get an 83-day comparison with someone else that uses the system. If you are using iTrak I could have one of the guys here in Las Vegas do a comparison. I've already spoken to one of our brothers and he would be happy to share information. I'd also be interested to see where all the calls from i.e. table games, cage, slots.*

*I went through this myself in the late 90's. I was concerned my people were being ping-ponged around so much they didn't have time to do real surveillance. I did three things:*

*1. We sat down and determined what calls we received were "calls to action" or "calls of compliance". Calls to action meaning surveillance was needed by management to resolve or investigate an issue. Calls for compliance meaning the call was mandated by regulation or written internal controls that it would be made. In both cases the calls prompted either live monitoring or investigation. All other calls were eliminated (almost all). Hard & fast rule which I will explain a little more later.*

*2. We had developed our own reporting software (something I highly recommend if you have a geek in your department). We analyzed the calls we were getting and found that a lot of the calls were for the same thing. We developed a coding system. Instead of writing a story about how a \$25 push was paid on BJ, we simply gave it a code (ex code17) and entered the location, time, amount, staff and outcome from a drop down box set-up i.e. retrieved, not retrieved. We developed codes for everything i.e. dealer errors, cheating, advantage play, hookers. This cut down the logging time and actually improved the ease it which we could generate analysis and reports.*

*3. I was lucky enough to work for a technologically led company. We developed surveillance interfaces to the table tracking systems on the floor, the slot system and the cage system. Each table had a touch screen computer for player/table tracking. We gave IT our wish list i.e. large*

*bets, big players, stuff we wanted to know so that when the dealer entered the info in the system we were given an alert in surveillance. We even developed a special "cheat" icon. If the dealer suspected anything was up on the table they would discretely hit the surveillance icon on the touch screen (players just thought they were doing accounting) and we get a red alert. We had great success with this although at the beginning there was a lot of pissed off floor supervisors and pit managers. They seemed to be threatened by dealer/surveillance direct communication. Thankfully, results shut them up over time. The bottom line with this is that it saved a phone call, it was prioritized and it was automatically logged on our interface log.*

*You may not be able to do any of the above but I suspect the issue is more about other departments using surveillance as a crutch or a way to shift responsibility. I have found a lot of gaming managers suffer from CYA syndrome (cover your ass). Instead of holding their staff accountable they get surveillance to babysit them. You know, if it's video recorded it's easier for HR to deal with down the track. This has been a common trend over the last decade or so.*

*I guess what you got to ask yourself is whose idea was it to call surveillance - yours or some other guy? Does the call help you achieve your department goals? What are your monitoring priorities? If you decide you need these calls to help your department then maybe you are understaffed. If you think a large portion are unnecessary and are putting a strain on resources, get rid of them. To do that, I would simply have coffee with the department manager of the area and tell him the truth. Resources were tight, we were overburdened with calls and I had concerns that stuff was not being picked up. I suggested we trial a period of no calls and see how it went. If there was a problem we would go back to the status quo. I think in your case, you have pretty good evidence (the 83 days of stats) to suggest to your organization that something has to be done.*

*I don't mean to over simplify the problem and would be happy to talk to you about it (call me on 702 407 9900 - I'm a quicker talker than typer) but one word of advice I will give is don't fall into the "dummy camera" trap. That is if you are getting calls under the premise that it will initiate surveillance attention but you aren't really. That can be a dangerous and slippery slope. I have known some surveillance guys to take the "let them think we're watching everything" strategy even though they weren't. It caught up with them.*

*Regards*

*Willy*

[Please direct all comments and questions to [wzender@lastresortconsulting.com](mailto:wzender@lastresortconsulting.com). Your comments and questions may be used in Bill's monthly Casino-logy column.]

