



Conversations w/Tino

Guests	Kari Stout Smith
	General Manager/CEO
	Cache Creek Casino Resort
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Tino Magnatta: And welcome to another episode of GT Radio. I have, boy, do we have a fantastic show for you tonight. I mean, this woman is extraordinary. She's done extraordinary things, and she's at an extraordinary spot in her life right now and we're going to hear all about it. Welcome to the show, Kari. Once again, welcome to the show.

Kari Smith: Thank you, Tino. I'm so happy to be here.

Tino Magnatta: That's great. So you just celebrated one year at this job, right? It just flew by. It seems like yesterday you were just starting it.

Kari Smith: Yes, it has been a bit of a blur and it is officially one year into my tenure here at Cache Creek Casino Resort in Brooks, California.

Tino Magnatta: That's great, fantastic, and I hear nothing but great things. So let's talk a little bit about that, because the last interview we talked about a lot of your history and your background. Tell me a little bit about how this all came to fruition, the transition from Spa Resort to Cache Creek. Talk a little bit about that.

Kari Smith: Sure, well maybe I can start even a little bit before, because I have been tracking Cache Creek for a number of years, actually since my first foray into northern California. There's a lot of reasons why this property was always at the top of the list of properties that I was watching, both in terms of what they were doing competitively but also in terms of opportunities to work at the property. And so Cache Creek has long been on my radar, but quite honestly at the time that I was originally contacted about the job, no one was on my radar. I was at Agua Caliente in the greater Palm Springs area. I had worked with the tribe at both of their properties, at the Agua Caliente Casino Resort Spa in Rancho Mirage, and also the Spa Resort Casino, which is now the Agua Caliente Casino in Palm Springs.

I was really quite happy there. The tribe had been excellent to me. I worked with a fantastic team, and I wasn't looking to make any moves. As happens in our industry, I received a call from a recruiter that I had worked with in the past and held in very high regard. He contacted me and he said that there was a significant property in California that was seeking a general manager, and would I be interested in putting my hat in the ring for it? I thought about it and I said to him, "Well, I'm not sure. Can you tell me what property it is?" He said, "I can't right now. It's a confidential search at this time, but if you can give me some time, I can come back to you in a week or so and I think by then I can share with you which property it is, and I think you'll be interested." I said, "Okay."

I remember going home and talking to my husband that night, because we had been tracking Cache Creek. I said, "You know, I think it might be Cache Creek. I think that position may be opening up." We said, "Okay, well, let's wait and see." And sure enough, the recruiter came back to me in I think it was a week or two later. He said, "It's Cache Creek, and are you interested?" I said, "Yes, I'm

interested." And I thought to myself at the time, "Boy, it's not often that you get an opportunity to interview for a dream job." And when you do, I think you recognize it for exactly what it is. You know that that's the dream and something that you've been striving for, and you don't know if that dream is ready to be realized yet or not, but how do you not go after it with everything that you have?

And so I did, and it was an elongated process, as it can be. And so that led to the anticipation of what ultimately was going to happen, and there was some ebb and flow in the process, but ultimately I was awarded the job and I couldn't be happier. I've loved this position from the first day I interviewed with the tribe.

Tino Magnatta: So there's a whole history behind the way you got this job and how you prepped for it. I thought that was very unique when you were talking to me about it. Can you tell me a little bit about what you did and what the methodology was there?

Kari Smith: Yeah, I think when you and I were chatting about this, Tino, I shared with you that one of my first jobs before I got into the casino industry was in travel and tourism. What I loved about that particular job was the research aspect of it. Many, many years ago I drove the Old Town Trolley Tour in San Diego, and part of driving for that was you had to develop a two-hour, fully narrated historical accurate story of San Diego, so that you would provide that to your passengers as you were driving. I kind of consider myself both a lifelong student and also an avid traveler and tourist by nature, and so that process that I went through back when I was, gosh, 21 years old I think at the time, really lends itself to becoming a researcher when I apply for a job.

I think some of it also goes back to my marketing roots, because I have to be excited about whatever job it is that I am applying for and interviewing for, so I start by researching. I start by studying. I hit the Google, and I try to find as much information as I can that helps me to have a deeper understanding, other than just looking at the casino's website. I've had plenty of interviews where I have interviewed candidates, and you can tell that they've looked at the website. They reference the website. Maybe they've hit a press release or two, but I think the more information that you can assimilate, the better prepared you'll be to go into the interview process both with questions and ideas, both of which I think are really critical for a position like mine, or even a senior level position.

Quite honestly, I'm impressed if I interview supervisor or manager candidates who come into the interview process with ideas, suggestions and questions about the operation, and so that was what I did. I spent as much time as I could researching the Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation, researching Cache Creek Casino Resort, researching the area, going back to my northern California roots from when I worked here before and kind of reassessing the market in general so that when I sat down at the table to interview with the tribal council, I was as informed and prepared as possible.

Tino Magnatta: Now, you actually went to the casino, right? And kind of absorbed it and experienced it, is that correct?

Kari Smith: I did, yeah, and I think that's fairly common, especially when you are from outside the area and you're interviewing for a gig at a new property. They were good enough to bring me in the day before, and that affords an opportunity unto itself to experience the property somewhat anonymously. So you can be a secret shopper, and that was what I did. I arrived to the property, and of course one of my first touchpoints was driving in, the arrival experience, being greeted by valet, taking my bags to the front desk and asking a few questions there and trying to be casual about it, but trying to get information about these employees, and do they enjoy their job, and what do they enjoy about it, and how long have they worked here? What's going on on property today? Because it gives you a lot of insights into how that property is operating.

After that, I got into my hotel room. I came back downstairs. I spent some time walking around the casino, kind of refamiliarizing myself. I had been to Cache Creek before but it had been several years and things had changed, so I wanted to make sure that I was up to date. I made sure I stopped to see Sweets to get a coffee. I made sure that I made a reservation for myself so that I could dine in the steakhouse. I think I actually may have stopped and had a light snack at Chang Shou, our Asian restaurant, before then. I'm a good eater, so fortunately that works to my benefit, that I get a lot of insights about eating at the organization.

I had a fantastic dinner in our C2 Steakhouse, and it was funny. I actually was chuckling about this with the server who served me that night just recently, because I must have been asking him so many questions. He actually stopped and he said, "Excuse me if I ask, but do you come from the food and beverage industry?" I said, "No, not really. Not really. Why do you ask?" He said, "Well, you seem really knowledgeable about food and beverage, and I just thought maybe you worked in a restaurant or something like that." I said, "No, I work in the hospitality industry." He said, "Oh, okay, well that makes sense." He and I still joke about that, because I think it was not long after that that they started to put the pieces together of who I was and why I was here, and maybe why I was asking so many questions.

After dinner, I spent some time on the gaming floor. I had some really valuable insights that came out of that experience, and I think I wrapped it up and I went to my room so that I could finish doing my research and prepare myself with some questions for the tribal council in case they allowed me the opportunity to ask those, which they did. I tucked myself into bed so that I would be prepared the next morning to go to the tribal offices and have my interview.

Tino Magnatta: Now, when you went to dinner you noticed something that stood out, and that was something about the food that they make, the tribe makes, right?

Kari Smith: Yeah, our tribal owners, the Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation, has a line of specialty products that was one of the things that I had found in my research. When I dined in the C2 Steakhouse, I saw that Seka Hills Wines, which is one of their brands, was listed on the menu. So I made sure, good student that I am, that I ordered a glass of wine with my dinner, never mind the fact that I also enjoy a glass of wine with my dinner. It was really a sacrifice to make, but I enjoyed the Seka Hills Wine. I asked the server quite a bit about that wine, and how long the tribe had been producing it, and kind of tested his knowledge.

What I had also seen in my research was that the tribe had a significant herd of cattle that they also were involved in raising and producing beef products. I actually found out after I started my job that they had a beef club that was available through one of their other business enterprises. But that led me to bring up in the interview, when they asked me for ideas of what I had seen at the organization and what recommendations I would make, what I would do differently if I got the job, one of the things I was able to talk about was profiling more of their specialty products at the property, and even going beyond that and also making sure we had an emphasis on local agriculture. Not everyone knows this, but the Capay Valley in which we are located is really the heart and home of the farm-to-fork movement in California.

We have a tremendous assortment of farms all around us that are raising organic produce and other food products that we could consider putting on our menu. Since then, I've learned a lot more about scale and some of the opportunities and challenges that come along with it, but it led to a really productive conversation with the tribe about what they liked and what they didn't like about their food and beverage operation as a property, and what they saw the opportunities were. So that was just one example where research and enjoying a nice glass of wine with dinner really paid off.

Tino Magnatta: You said to me, "The day I sit in front of you with no ideas is the day I fire myself." Expand a little bit on that.

Kari Smith: I said that to my chairman. I can't remember now, Tino. My memory's getting a little bit fuzzy. I can't remember if that was during the interview process or after I had been hired on. But they made a comment to me about the number of ideas that I brought to that interview, and how that had really been one of the key components that had told them that I was the right person for the job, was all of that research I had done and all of those ideas that I brought to the table with regards to how we could continue improving our business. I sincerely believe that, because for me it's two things. One, I see that as my role. I see that as a big part of my job is me together with my team, my entire team, continuing to find new opportunities and new ideas that can expand their business enterprise.

But two, and equally important to me is if I'm not generating ideas, if I'm not excited and passionate about the business, it's time for me to move on and find something else that I can be as passionate about. So that is just a credo that I

really live by. The day that I don't have any fresh ideas, then it's time for me to move on.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah, and you said it's 24/7, 365 days a year you have to be passionate.

Kari Smith: Yeah, I mean I do sleep and I don't know that I'm always passionate when I'm taking a nap. Every once in a while you have to disconnect and revitalize, and that's something else that I've learned the hard way in my career. I was just having a conversation with a colleague yesterday about the importance of work/life balance. I've worked in operations where it was expected that you worked six days a week, 10 and 12 hours a day, and not even taking into consideration those fabulous little smart phones that we all have that keep us working whenever they're in our hands.

Quite honestly, I found that working in that organization, although I've learned a lot, it was counterproductive because at some point there is a burnout factor. It goes back to that, how can I be passionate and excited if I'm exhausted? How can I be looking for new opportunities and for new ways to continue expanding and growing the business if I'm overwhelmed by everything that's on my plate, and I haven't had a day off to get any perspective on what we're doing well and what we're not doing well? So that really was a lesson [inaudible 00:16:29] about seven, eight years ago. I think I continue to try to reinforce that, because I do have a tendency to, because I'm passionate about the work, I tend to live it and breathe it maybe sometimes more than I should. But I think I've achieved a better balance with it at this stage in my career, and it's something that I continue to maintain awareness of so that I don't backslide into a point where that burnout factor occurs.

Tino Magnatta: Now, you said that you have to have an endless desire and curiosity.

Kari Smith: Yes.

Tino Magnatta: Tell me a little bit about that.

Kari Smith: So I think that goes back to being a student, and just being endlessly curious about the world around us. Quite honestly, I think it's the premise that drove me to become a general manager. There was something about that word general that was just so seductive to me, because I don't know that I ever saw myself being just one thing. I could probably go back to when I first [inaudible 00:17:44], when I first went to college and how many times I changed my major, because I just couldn't make up my mind because there were so many exciting subjects to study. That's one of the things I love most about my job and love most about my team that I work with today, is that opportunity to not only continue expanding my horizons, but to spend time learning from them as subject matter experts in their field.

You know, I came up through the marketing vertical. I'm passionate about marketing. I'm always going to be a marketing girl at heart, but I love learning about our engineering operation. Sometimes my eyes glaze over, but most of the time when I'm sitting in construction meetings I'm learning something new every sentence. I'm having to make notes about what different terms mean, and that just gives me endless opportunities to continue educating myself. I feel like through that I grow as a professional, but I also grow as a person. That's a thing that I enjoy in my life.

Tino Magnatta: Now, you have a background in public speaking and performance and theater, and you talk about nervous energy before going into an interview, just like a performance.

Kari Smith: Yeah, I remember we talked about this in the first round, Tino. We talked about it with your son too, and his performances this year. I don't think people always correlate what you learn in the performing arts as a child or young adult, and how those skills can benefit you in business and other career verticals. I grew up doing dance and theater and public speaking. I had some [inaudible 00:19:45] that afforded me the opportunity to try those subjects, and I was hooked, definitely. I think it spoke to me as an oldest child, and someone who grew up with a lot of attention and liked that attention. But I didn't really ever correlate it as a youngster. I always kind of thought, "Well, this will be the thing that I'll do until I figure out what I really want to do with my life."

Tino Magnatta: Yeah, of course.

Kari Smith: "This is fun for now." I may have had a short window of time in my life when I thought, "Maybe I'll turn this into something professional," but I think there was always part of me that said, "No, this isn't for me long term, and at some point I'll have to hang up the costumes, hang up the dance shoes and find a real job." But I am tremendously grateful today to my parents, my teachers, to other mentors and supporters that I had that helped me do those things, because it has taught me a lot of skills that are important in your career, and particularly as you move into the executive range, to have a level of executive presence, to be prepared for public speaking opportunities. The number one fear that most people have is to be in front of a room of people and have to speak about something.

That brings me to the nervous energy piece, because I remember also when I was younger thinking, "Well, at some point I'm going to become such a professional at this that I won't be nervous anymore." I learned that those nerves are actually a powerful source of energy that can be harnessed. You don't want to be so nervous that you can't control your breathing, you can't control your thoughts, your voice is wavering or shaky, but you do want to have enough nervous energy going into an interview or a public speaking opportunity that you can come across with some dynamic energy that lends enlightenment to what you're saying, infuses enthusiasm into your words, because that's an effective way of engaging your audience. If they stay with you as you're

speaking and don't start to look at their smart phone or pay attention to what they have in front of them, or if they start doodling, you want to keep them engaged. Having a little bit of nervous energy is a great way to do that.

Tino Magnatta: So you went through all the prep. You went through all the interviews. It was nerve-racking. You got the job. Tell us about the experience of coming into a new role and some of the difficulties you had to overcome.

Kari Smith: So let me first start by saying that those of you who aren't familiar with the Cache Creek Casino Resort, and I know everyone says that, but this is truly a really special place and for reasons that I am still discovering a year into my journey, and I hope I'll be discovering more of those reasons in years to come. We have one of the most beautiful locations that I have seen for a casino throughout the state of California and beyond. But, it is not an easy location to reach. It represents, like a lot of tribal casinos do, they are often located in fairly rural areas, so that's one of the challenges of our location, so it's both. I like to say that it cuts both ways, because it's beautiful but it's out of the way. So once you get here, you appreciate it for its beauty and its wonder, but you have to make the commitment first to get here.

That also relates to our workforce. We have roughly 2,200, almost 2,300 employees and the average commute for our employees is somewhere between an hour and an hour and a half. So that's another commitment, but the beauty of this place is such and the culture of this place is such that those employees who make such a significant commitment to drive such a distance, they have worked here in many cases 14, 20, 25 years. I've got a handful of employees who are well over the 25-year mark and into almost 30 years, which dates back to when this was just a [inaudible 00:24:58] structure and we were slinging bingo balls around. That's another knife that can cut both ways, because those employees are fully invested and bought into the Cache Creek culture.

But in some ways, that culture has not changed for many, many years, and turning this ship takes a little bit longer than it does in properties that have been subject to more changes at the general manager level, executive level. We've had so much stability and so much longevity here, which is much more of a benefit than it is a negative. But the challenge that comes along with that is the education process, and the time that it takes to say, "Well, I know we've done it this way, but there are other ways of doing it and let's give those a try." I think that by and far has been the biggest challenge, but again because it comes with such a positive reason behind it, it's just something we have to work through, and we are.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah, that's really good. I mean, it's something that change is always difficult but when it happens, it can be pretty glorious. It's a thing that's hard to do, and there's no question about that. Tell me a little bit-

Kari Smith: Yeah, Tino, the other thing I would share ... Oh, go ahead.

Tino Magnatta: No, no. Go ahead, go ahead.

Kari Smith: Well, the other thing I would share, and maybe this doesn't often get talked about. It certainly was new to me in this position, but what I would say is Cache Creek is really fortunate to have a very long-time GM who was part of the startup of Cache Creek. He was here for over 20 years before he retired. His name is Randy Takemoto. He is highly regarded at the property and highly regarded throughout the industry for who he was and what he built here. That was a first experience for me too, because it was the first time that I had stepped into the shoes of someone who had been at the property for so long. Again, it's a definite benefit to the property but it does pose challenges for someone who's coming in, who's brand new to the organization and who's a woman.

I couldn't be more opposite I think from Randy in some ways, although I think we have a lot of similarities in our philosophies. But that's a unique challenge too, and I don't think that's something that you can always be prepared for when you come into a new organization. It's something that you really have to work through gently, to understand and honor who that person was and what they did for the organization, but also finding a way to be your own person and to be authentic in your role as a leader.

Tino Magnatta: Now, you actually lived on property for three or four months, right, to soak everything in. How was that phase like for you, and what did you learn?

Kari Smith: Well, it was really good training for someday when I buy a tiny home and I have to make all of my clothes fit into a hotel closet.

Tino Magnatta: A small closet, in a studio.

Kari Smith: Yes, I had to limit my shoe collection a little bit for the first four months, so those were the important considerations.

Tino Magnatta: That's funny.

Kari Smith: It does pose some challenges, but it also poses a really unique opportunity because I don't think there is any time that is more valuable than those first few months when you're in a new job and you're learning so much so fast. You're also still fresh, so you see everything with fresh eyes. Being able to be on property and experience the property at different times of day, experience the property as our guests do, those are some key takeaways that you don't really get a second chance at, so that was a benefit.

It was also a challenge, I'll be honest. I missed the dogs. I missed my husband. It's a commitment. It challenged those work/life balances that I was talking about with you earlier. But the education that you gain and the experiences, it's kind of like going to a foreign country to learn a foreign language. It's full

immersion, and I think it helps assimilate a lot of information much more quickly and really assess the guest experience.

Tino Magnatta: Got it. You said that approach every day like a tourist.

Kari Smith: Yeah, yeah. That goes back to the kind of being a perennial student, being a tourist. I try to, as I'm walking around the property every day ... I just did a property walk with my vice-president of hotel operations yesterday. We're working toward a pretty significant expansion for the property, and so he and I along with our construction team, we were walking through the portions of the expansion that are still under construction. The common areas of the foyer where our host and lobbies are will be our restaurant. Every time I walk through, I try to look at it through the eyes of someone who has never been there before, which is challenging. You have to really be mindful and be present to do that, because we all [inaudible 00:30:50] as we're walking around that even the walls of my office at some level become wallpaper.

Because I've got drawings in here from my kids that they send me every couple of months, but I haven't changed them. They've been up there for a couple of months, and I don't know that I've really looked at them for a while. So you have to take a step back and really make an effort to say, "Let me imagine this as if it was my first time coming to this property. What will it look like? Where should the signage be placed? What are the areas that are not in the traffic [inaudible 00:31:30] for hiding sight lines and back of house [inaudible 00:31:39]? What are the things that we haven't thought of yet that when coming to the property and being seen for the first time, and it's going to stand out to them, whether that's good, whether that's bad?"

So that is a continual exercise in staying in the moment and staying present as much as possible. I'll be honest. There's days that I streak through the casino just like anyone does. I'm late to my next meeting, and I don't take the time to do that, but I really do try to carve out time every week to walk the property and to take a different path than I normally take, and not get stuck in a habit of always taking the same route with the same people, looking at the same things. Try to take a step back and really look at it through fresh eyes.

Tino Magnatta: Now, do you think you had an advantage as a female candidate in this situation?

Kari Smith: Yes and no. In a way, and I think after the fact what I heard from the tribal council was it was one of the ways that I separated myself from other candidates. I do think for various reasons they were looking for something new and different to take them into the next chapter of Cache Creek's growth. Being a woman was certainly different. The other candidates that I was up against were male, at least the other candidates that came in for in-person interviews. I don't know if there were other female candidates that had phone or video interviews prior to, but by the final round I was the only ... I was the last woman standing.

But I also think that that had the potential, if I hadn't been prepared, if I hadn't done my research, and ultimately if I hadn't been the right fit for them, it wouldn't have mattered if I was man, woman, purple, red, green. It had to be the right dynamic, the right chemistry to [inaudible 00:33:48]. So yes, in some ways I think it worked for me. I think that's all that any of us can do is take what makes us different and find ways to let it work to our advantage as opposed to finding excuses to let it be a crutch, you know?

Tino Magnatta: Sure.

Kari Smith: They're either going to like me for who I am, and some of that is because I'm a woman but some of that may be because not only am I a woman, but I come from the marketing background. I don't come from a gaming background specifically. I have gaming operations experience. I was really fortunate to get that in my career, but if you look at me on paper you see a marketing background. Most GMs, if we're perfectly honest about it, they're white men and they come from [inaudible 00:34:44] finance backgrounds.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah, absolutely.

Kari Smith: So I'm different in a lot of ways, and that's not for everyone. But if it is for you, then it's going to be a great fit and we're going to work really well together. I feel like we found that synergy during the interview process, the tribal council and myself, and I think a year later we're just continuing to build off of that. We've got a really great chemistry that works well. I see their vision and they see mine and we're excited about the future, and that has nothing to do with my gender at the end of the day. It has everything to do with who we are as a team and what we all bring to the table.

Tino Magnatta: Speaking of vision, tell me a little bit about the new Cache Creek and the vision.

Kari Smith: Oh, my goodness. Oh, let me take a moment because this is a dream delayed, but so close on the horizon we can touch it. As you know, I've only been here a year. The team that has been here for many years predating me has been working on this project for many, many years. They will tell you that from the day we opened the current 200-room hotel it was too small, and they would be absolutely right. So we are taking all of the things that made Cache Creek so successful, which is the beautiful location, the fabulous team, so much longevity and passion for the business. They truly care about Cache Creek and they truly care about the community, and we are building off of that and expanding the operation, going from 200 hotel rooms to a total of 659 hotel rooms. It will be the second largest casino hotel in the state of California, second only to Pechanga down in southern California.

It's a big beast, but it will be a big casino resort that feels small when it comes to the attention to detail and the personal relationships that we're [inaudible 00:37:03]. In addition to expanding those hotel rooms, they're also adding onto

the property [inaudible 00:37:11] location for our C2 Steakhouse. We are adding an entirely new sushi restaurant. We will have a new hotel lobby part, a fantastic new pool experience that is connected to the new hotel tower. And what we really get excited about is our ability to attract and host large-scale events in our extended events conference center. The side benefit of doing that project, which sits in the hotel, is that we will double the size of our previous venue where we hosted events, and we will have a state-of-the-art facility that will also work equally well for hosting conferences, associations and other multipurpose events, and is freeing up the space that used to be our event center so that we can create a dynamic new gaming lounge attached to our existing casino floor.

That is allowing us to add a new updated casino bar experience, about 300 new gaming machines, slot machines, and a fantastic new casino entertainment stage and promotional stage. So there's a lot of moving pieces with us right now, and we don't have an exact opening date for the expansion. But rest assured, when it is done it will be done perfectly and to the standards that our owners have set forth, which are the highest of standards. They have been personally involved in selecting the most important details of the project, including all of the high-end finishes. As I shared with you, I walked it yesterday. I can't wait to unveil it to the world, I just really can't, especially on behalf of the team members who have been waiting for this for so long.

Tino Magnatta: That's great. It's really fantastic. Should we take some calls?

Kari Smith: Yes, but don't allow any of my vice-presidents to call in, because they've all said they're going to call and heckle me.

Tino Magnatta: I can see some of them on here already, but let's start with one, not a vice-president, but let's start.

Kari Smith: Okay.

Tino Magnatta: Oh, that's funny. This is Tino Magnatta. Do you have a question for Kari?

Nick Bossing: Hi, Tino. This is [Nick Bossing 00:39:46]. How are you, Kari?

Kari Smith: Hi, Nick. How are you?

Nick Bossing: Hi, Kari. Yeah, I'm doing well, doing well. I have a little bit of noise in the background you might hear, so I apologize. And Tino, I hope you're not sick. You sound like you've got a little bit of something something going on there.

Tino Magnatta: Oh, I've just been talking so much that my voice is a little groggy, but I'm good. I never stop talking. You know me.

Nick Bossing: I do have a question. I have a couple comments first. I looked your property up while you were talking, and wow, it's pretty impressive. You guys have vineyards and golf courses and it's in a great location. I can see why you wanted to go there. One question I had is, was the growth one of the reasons that you were attracted to the property?

Kari Smith: Yeah, first of all, thank you for the compliments and the observations. I would love to have you come visit. Anyone who's listening to the show, we'd love to have you come visit the property. It's our favorite thing to do is to show it off. And certainly for me, Nick, growth is always what I'm looking for. As I said, when I was with the Agua Caliente tribe in southern California, I was really happy and that tribe is continuing to [inaudible 00:40:59] their operations and to explore new and unique revenue streams for the business, and that was really what I was excited about was that opportunity. But being able to go from general manager of a single property to an operation that had two properties and step into a role where I became general manager and COO of the entire business was at the same time incredibly exciting and also just a bit intimidating.

But I have always been someone who bites off more than she can chew, and then I figure out a way to chew it. So yeah, it was definitely the opportunity to continue not only growing my career but growing my expertise and continue exposing myself to new opportunities that I might not see if I had stayed [inaudible 00:42:02].

Nick Bossing: Great, great. Another question. You've got a background back and forth between marketing and operations. Is there anything that you do that maybe we could learn that keeps you connected to VIP players?

Kari Smith: Thank you for the question. That I would say is one of the greatest opportunities and simultaneously greatest challenges that I face every day. Because it can be really difficult to, in a 9:00 to 5:00 day-to-day operation, emails, phone calls, approvals, signatures, meetings, and carve out that time to also be present and be a touchstone for our players. So I'll give you a really good example because it's happening today, right now. I had meetings and calls all day, several different construction meetings. I have not been down to the casino floor yet today, and that goes back a little bit to that life balance question that I said earlier, because this is an exception to the rule. But as soon as this call wraps up, I am going to head downstairs and spend a couple of hours on the floor, because it's [inaudible 00:43:21] and that's really significant for our Asian population here at Cache Creek.

We're doing a really significant Mercedes-AMG giveaway tonight at nine o'clock, so I try to find ways to carve out time, dedicated time in the calendar, when I know I can be a visible presence down on the floor. Last weekend was another great example. It was a Sunday night, and I don't typically work on Sundays but I vary my schedule if I need to. We had a fabulous Francis Ford Coppola wine dinner that we were hosting in our steakhouse, and I knew that we had roughly 30 VIPs on that list. It was a great opportunity for me to get some dedicate face

time to let them know that not only did we appreciate them but we hear them, and give them an opportunity to share whatever comments, suggestions, complaints they may have with me.

So it's probably the hardest balancing act I face in trying to maintain my own work/life balance, but the flip side of that is there may be a week that I work seven days and then the following week I may take a three-day off to try to balance that out, or there may be a day that I try to leave early because the night before I was here late. But it really is about making dedicated time to appreciate the different job functions, the day-to-day operations, the VIP contact. And the third category that I would put out there is making dedicated time to be a visible presence for our employees as well. It's definitely carving out time in the back of house equal to the time that you're putting in the front of house.

Nick Bossing: Yeah, I can see your employees and your customers really wanting your time, because they value that interaction with you.

Tino Magnatta: Great question.

Kari Smith: That prior GM that I'm following in the footsteps of, he was a master of maintaining those relationships with all of our players.

Nick Bossing: Can I ask one more question?

Tino Magnatta: Sure.

Nick Bossing: Okay, there's a fine line between being informed and arrogant, and some people do it really well, and some people obviously that you've seen and I've seen don't. How do you kind of balance that out, of seeming very informed but not getting to that point you see arrogant?

Kari Smith: Thank you. I don't know. I'm sure I have moments of arrogance, because I do think it takes a strong sense of self and a strong ego to do the job that I do. I don't think you can have weak personal conviction and be subject to the scrutiny and the criticism that one is subject to in a role of leadership like this, but I also think it's just kind of part of my genetic makeup, Nick. It's probably one of the things that I work on most is to maintain a healthy sense of what I do well and what I need to continue working on. Maybe in some ways it goes back to that thought of just always being a student, and never feeling like you really mastered anything, that there is always something more to be learned and someone who knows more than you do, who can educate you, and continuing to have that type of a mindset and a philosophy.

And the flip side of it is, I've worked with some of those people. I've worked for some of those people, and I don't find it attractive so it's not something that I aspire to be. I want to be polished. I want to have great executive presence. I

want to be trusted and respected by the people that I lead, but I also want them to feel like they can sit down and talk to me openly, and heck, maybe even go have a beer with me because I want to find that fine line of that.

Tino Magnatta: Great, thanks so much, Nick.

Nick Bossing: Thank you very much.

Tino Magnatta: Great questions. Have a good night, good bye. Fantastic questions. Hello, this is Tino Magnatta. Do you have a question for Kari?

Michael: Aloha, how's it going today?

Tino Magnatta: Good, how about yourself?

Kari Smith: I know that voice.

Michael: How's it going, Ms. Kari? How are you?

Kari Smith: I'm well, Michael. How are you?

Michael: Great, thank you. Hey, you know obviously I'm a big fan and you talked a great story about the transition and the kind of new environment that you walked into. Maybe I just didn't hear it, but what's the new kind of lesson you learned just taking you into this new role? I know you keep your eyes wide open in all those situations, so what's something that you've learned in this new role that maybe you didn't kind of understand as well before?

Kari Smith: Michael, that's a great question. That's Michael [inaudible 00:48:43], by the way. I don't think he said his name, but I had the pleasure of working with Michael at Thunder Valley in Sacramento. He's now since moved on and is embarking on a great new career with Penn National Gaming. Michael, I think the greatest lesson that I've learned, and I hope I will keep sight of ... Well, first of all I hope I don't have to learn this lesson again, because I'd like to be here at Cache Creek for many, many years into the future. But if and when I do make a transition again, I think it's a good reminder of the fact that there is a learning curve, and that learning curve is not just your own personal growth cycle.

I like to say that it's about six months before you start to feel like you fit in. It takes about six months before you start to kind of start to move from a walk to a jog, and then by a year, which is the mark that I just hit, you're really starting to kind of run alongside the rest of the team. But at a property like Cache Creek that has so much history and so much longevity, I think I underestimated how long it would take for them to adopt me based on the time that they had with their prior leadership. It's not to say that they're not adapting to me, but I think I'm fantastic. I think I'm really lovable, and I think it has taken them a little bit longer to get to know me than I thought it would.

It's also a significantly larger property than the one that I came from. It was a lot faster and easier for me to get to know them too, and to start using employee names regularly and for them to really be comfortable with me and me to be comfortable with them. The larger the property and the more longevity the property had, the longer that that life cycle is, the longer that learning curve is and that adoption curve is. So I think it's a reminder for me [inaudible 00:50:49] even though we've made tremendous advances and I'm so excited about the direction that my team is heading, there are still moments when I have to take a step back and say, "Kari, you're still the new girl." And that will cease with time, but you can't underestimate that. Maybe that's good for you right now Michael, too, as you're embarking on a new endeavor.

Michael: Oh, most definitely. Learning the new culture that you're getting assimilated with sometimes can take time, and especially getting used to at least my unique personality. But I'm quite positive that it's probably very easy for you to get acclimated in that environment. Being from that area and having the experience up in that market, you've got new competition now in that market. What are you thinking? What's the impact going on now?

Kari Smith: Yeah, so we've had one new property already open this year, the Harrah's Northern California property, which is located in Lone, California. It's quite a distance from us. It has had no real impact on our business or our staffing, but that will not be the case with the Hard Rock property that's going to open this fall, and the Wilton property that's going to open in Elk Grove, although the time frame for that seems to be elongating. So first and foremost, we're really protective of our staff, and in this constrained labor market that we're all dealing with, no matter where you are right now in the United States, it's hard to find great people. So that's first and foremost for us, is continuing to look at, how do we maintain the culture? How do we improve upon the culture? How do we continue to maintain a competitive benefits package?

The key word for us has been engagement. How do we make sure that we are at all levels engaged with each other? Because we want them to feel like they belong, and they do. They're part of our Cache Creek family, and I have really open and honest conversations with my team about what those opportunities may mean for them if they do decide to dip their toes into the pool. We just talk about, if you're going to make that move, make sure that you consider it really carefully and weigh out not just [inaudible 00:53:26] standpoint. Weigh out your seniority. Weigh out your benefits. Make sure that you've done your research before you make a step like that, especially for our team members who have been here for 15, 20 years. That's a significant change to make.

So I feel like by having open and honest dialogue about it we'll maintain a much more open culture. We've talked about this just recently. I've worked for companies where it's like if you leave, that's it. You can't ever come back. I tell our employees, "If you leave, do it right. Be respectful. Give us notice, and if it doesn't work out for you, come back and see us. We'll welcome you back with open arms." Because I just think creating a culture of fear is going to have the

opposite effect of what you want, which is to maintain the really fantastic staff that we have.

So I worry about that more than anything else, because I know if we continue to focus on what Cache Creek does best, and one of those things is our people and the service they provide, and how they care about our guests, and they know our guests. If we can maintain and protect that, I'm not afraid of any competition. Bring them on. Bring them on, because my team will beat your team anytime.

Tino Magnatta: Great stuff.

Michael: Oh, that's fantastic. I know they're going to be excited to have you lead them in the next steps, so congratulations again to you, Kari. I think you'll do a tremendous job, and thanks for taking the call.

Kari Smith: Thanks, Michael.

Tino Magnatta: Thanks, Mike.

Kari Smith: Good luck to you [inaudible 00:55:04] too.

Michael: Thank you so much.

Tino Magnatta: Have a good evening.

Michael: Aloha, guys.

Tino Magnatta: Okay, aloha. Mike, always a pleasure speaking with him.

Kari Smith: Mm-hmm (affirmative), he's fantastic. [crosstalk 00:55:15]

Tino Magnatta: Tino Magnatta, do you have a ... Yeah, he's a great guy.

Hady Antozana: This is-

Tino Magnatta: Hello, yeah, go ahead.

Hady Antozana: It's [Hady Antozana 00:55:23], Tino. How are you this evening, and Kari?

Tino Magnatta: Yes.

Kari Smith: Hello, Hady. How are you?

Hady Antozana: I am fantastic, and more fantastic speaking to you. I know I have a little time and I could speak to you for three hours, I have so many questions. But Kari, you know I was on your previous property a couple of weeks ago and people are still

raving about you. You know, I'm very passionate about the topic and teaching leaders and their teams about how to increase their influence and their impact. You're a perfect example of how you've done that in a positive way in everything that you've done. You're the epitome of influence and impact in the correct way. What characteristics do you feel that you have that you are able to influence and impact people in such a way?

Kari Smith: Hady, it's a great question and as you were talking I was thinking back. I can remember, I think I was pretty young. Maybe I was in fifth grade or sixth grade, but I read Dale Carnegie's How to Win Friends and Influence People. And I know that is a dog-eared copy that we all have on our bookshelves, or a lot of us have on our bookshelves, but that taught me so much. I would also say I learned at the feet of my father, who was a master conversationalist. He was a jokester. He made an impression on everyone he met. There wasn't a time that I went to the grocery store without him that the checker didn't say, "Where's your dad?"

So I grew up with a really excellent role model and someone who led by example and taught me how to interact with people. But I really think it all comes back to just being, just operating from a place of gratitude. Now, I make an effort to, like I was saying earlier, on a night like tonight when I stay late, I'm going to make sure I carve out time to be on the floor. But it's almost more important to me to take some time to go through the back of house and to stop and check in with our dish washers and our stewards, and the people who are behind the scenes that I think often become invisible by nature of their role in the organization.

I learned really poignantly when I was at Morongo. Morongo did Housekeeping Appreciation Week, and one of the things that they did there was they offered us the opportunity to either do a shift as an EDS attendant at the casino or as a rooms attendant. I chose to do EDS attendant in the casino, and complete with uniform, I stepped out on the casino floor.

Hady Antozana: Wow.

Kari Smith: Now, Hady's met me, but for those of you who don't know me, I'm blonde. I don't really blend in, and I've never figured out how to hide in a casino. But when I put that EVS uniform on, people that knew me well and would stop me on the casino floor to give me a hug didn't even see me. That was just-

Hady Antozana: Wow.

Kari Smith: A blow.

Hady Antozana: Wow.

Kari Smith: It just knocked me over that I went from being someone who was so recognizable to becoming invisible by nature of the role and the uniform that I

was wearing. That has taught me to be grateful and appreciative, and to take moments to really stop and look at people and say, "Thank you. Thank you for what you're doing." When we have a wine dinner downstairs like the one that I attended last week, I thank the servers. I stop, I go through the kitchen. I comment on how my pants are getting too small because they're cooking too much good food. It takes just a few moments, but we've all had moments in our life when we felt unappreciated and we know it just takes so little.

Hady Antozana: And Kari, you've just hit on the first principle of influence and impact, which is reciprocity. And you do it, it doesn't have to be a gift. It's a gift of time that you're putting in, so you have to give before you expect people to give back, right?

Kari Smith: Absolutely, and it takes time sometimes away from other things, but it's all about prioritization [inaudible 01:00:01] people you work with.

Hady Antozana: Wonderful, and I know you're getting on on time, Tino. I just want to know, what is the current ... Leaders are readers, as we know. What is your latest book that you are reading? What's on your bedside table, Kari?

Kari Smith: Oh, I love you for asking that because I am so into this book right now. It is called Into the Magic Shop, by James Doty. James ... I think I have the last name right there. It's a story of a little boy who grew up in [inaudible 01:00:36] California, a true story, and he learned meditation and mindfulness from a woman whose son owned a magic shop. That little boy, who came from a poor, underprivileged family, grew up to become one of the foremost neurosurgeons in the world. He lost all of his wealth, regained it, but I won't tell you how it ends because I haven't finished it yet. It is a [inaudible 01:01:01] read. I'm actually listening to it on Audible right now, on my way from work, and I highly recommend it.

Hady Antozana: Wonderful.

Kari Smith: It's been just awesome.

Hady Antozana: I've got it in front of me, James Doty.

Kari Smith: James Doty, thank you. Thank you, I knew I had that last name wrong, but it's Into the Magic Shop by James Doty, thanks.

Hady Antozana: Wonderful. Well, thank you so much, Kari. You're an absolute star, and I'm definitely coming to visit you up in northern California next.

Kari Smith: Come and see me, Hady. I'd love to see you.

Hady Antozana: Will do.

Tino Magnatta: Thank you. Have a good night.

Hady Antozana: Thank you, Tino, for a great show. You, too.

Tino Magnatta: Thank you. Okay, bye bye. Okay, we have time for one more.

Kari Smith: Okay, let's see who this is going to be.

Tino Magnatta: Hello, this is Tino Magnatta. Do you have a question for Kari? Hello?

Brandie Warr: Hi, Kari. This is Brandie Warr. I'm coming up in the marketing side of things. I'm always curious to hear about the transition from marketing to operations. I know you spoke to some of your art skills and how that translated to executive presence, but can you talk about how you took your marketing background and applied it to operations?

Kari Smith: Oh, that's great, Brandie. Thank you for asking that. So I was really fortunate. I came up through the ranks at the Barona Casino Barona Resort, San Diego. During my 13 years, the gaming industry was really growing. Long story short, I had the opportunity because of how the industry was growing to step into an operations role. Barona was really unique in that they provided me all of the training that I needed for that job, although it also required me to do a lot of homework. I had to learn all of the NICC minimum [inaudible 01:02:46] standards. I had to educate myself on all of the policies and procedures for all of the operations department.

But they put me through a casino bootcamp, and I learned a lot from that. I was able to both apply my marketing skills to understanding and kind of researching, like I had shared before, that new role. But even more importantly, having that grounding in casino operations made me an even better marketer when I came back to the marketing side of the operations, because I had spent time on the floor every day, all day, with all of the casino operating departments, and understand the pros and cons of how our marketing programs affected not only the employees, but also the guests. So things like disclaimers that were confusing, or rules that didn't make sense, or processes that made it difficult for the employees to give a good experience to the guests, I got to really experience that firsthand.

And so the advice that I would give to anyone who is on the marketing side and wanting to educate themselves is, seek out those opportunities. I don't know if your company would consider an opportunity for you to shadow some of the operations positions. I think that that's a great program to implement. But anything that gives you the opportunity to really dive in and to say, "How does this work?" It's one thing to create in concept a campaign. It's another thing to see it all the way through to execution and to learn from any pain points that you experience, and then to use that to make your next campaign even better.

Brandie Warr: That's great feedback.

Kari Smith: I'm glad I could help, Brandie. It's nice to meet you, and feel free to look me up on LinkedIn.

Brandie Warr: Yep, thank you. I will.

Kari Smith: Uh-oh, so I may be flying solo at this. Oh, there you are.

Thomas: Hey. No, hi Kari, this is Thomas, actually. I don't know what happened to Tino. Can you hear me?

Kari Smith: Well Thomas, it's our show now. How are you?

Thomas: Oh, I'm doing wonderful, thank you. I don't know why Tino ... Anyway, it's good to talk to you. Good to ... Congratulations on your-

Tino Magnatta: I'm back. I'm back. Don't worry. I haven't gone, I just fell out.

Thomas: Sorry. Anyway-

Tino Magnatta: How are you, Thomas?

Thomas: So what are some of the myths that you have discovered on your very exciting way from marketing all the way up to COO, either pertaining to leadership and management or to marketing, because that was your forte? And what are some of the myths that you run into that either help you to gain more strength as an operator and COO, or that took some energy out of you because you had to adjust to that?

Kari Smith: Oh, that's an interesting question. You're really making me think here, Thomas. I think one of the most prevailing myths that we all deal with all of the time is my least favorite phrase in the casino vernacular, "But we've always done it this way."

Thomas: All right.

Kari Smith: Or, "You can't do that. They won't let you," right?

Thomas: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Kari Smith: Those are things that you can either accept and say, "Okay, well, guess we can't do that," and we'll just put that idea away, or you can dive deeper and say, "Why? Who says we can't do it? Why have we always done it that way? Have we ever tried doing it different? What happens?" I think that with anything that comes up that either seems like it's set in stone or ... I just find, and especially when you're new maybe, that's the opportunity to be able to have those

conversations. I actually just did it this week with my tribal council. There was something that my advertising team said, "We can't do this. We've always been told we can't say this." And when I sat down with the tribal council they actually just looked at me and blinked like, "What are you talking about?"

So sometimes, we perpetuate myths unnecessarily by not challenging the premise on which they're founded and diving deeper and understanding, "Well, why is it that way?" So I think it's another example of why it's just great to be a student and great to always be willing to say, "Okay, well, why? Is there a reason why?" And even if there is a reason why, is there a way that we can work around that to find another solution?

Thomas: Wow, very profound as always, and just, you make a great leader. I think it's your authenticity, your strength in being vulnerable, and you're awareness and your humility. So you know, it's an honor to talk to you again. It's been wonderful to see your past of how you worked your way up to where you are right now. Congratulations, and you really are a role model for anybody in the younger generation.

Kari Smith: Oh, Thomas, thank you so much. You have been a definite leader and mentor in my career, and I think since you kind of touched on it, one of the things I'd like to comment on is, one of the greatest myths in my head was that I had to change who I was to become what I wanted to be, which was a general manager. And I am happy to report that that was definitely a myth. I did not have to change who I was. I just had to find the right place where I could make an impact and find the team that would support me and challenge me. So you know, most of the myths I think we come across in our lives are myths of our own making, and thank you for that reminder. I really appreciate that.

Thomas: Well, great. Thank you, Kari. Continued success to you.

Kari Smith: Thank you. You as well.

Tino Magnatta: Thank you, Thomas. Thank you for great questions. Have a good evening.

Thomas: Thank you. You, too.

Tino Magnatta: Bye. Well Kari, fantastic show, fantastic questions. For all the people who didn't get to ask any questions, I apologize. We had so many people call in tonight, it's been absolutely fantastic and we need to have you back on, because these other people have so many other questions.

Kari Smith: Well Tino, thanks to you for always making this a really thought-provoking conversation. I really value and appreciate that you provide a venue in which we can talk about professional challenges, opportunities, growth, but also be real and authentic and get personal about it, too. So I think you're doing a great job

with the show. It's grown so much, and I'm always happy to be on it so thank you for having me.

Tino Magnatta: Thanks so much, and continued success.

Kari Smith: And to you as well, my friend, and to everyone listening. Thank you.

Tino Magnatta: Have a good night. Wow, what a fantastic person and what a great interview, so much insight. So August 15th, Michael Frawley. Boy, he is a character. He is a great storyteller and GM of 29, and we're going to have fun. Remember, everybody's got a story to tell. We just have time to listen. Have a good night everybody, and enjoy the summer. I'll talk to you soon. Ciao.