



Conversations w/Tino

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Tino Magnatta: Hello and welcome to another episode of GT Radio Conversations with moi, Tino Magnatta. Hope you're having a great week, and I have a good friend on our show tonight. I've known her for years. She's an incredible human being, and she's got some incredible stories. Welcome Anika Howard. How are 'ya?

Anika Howard: Hi Tino. Good afternoon. It's a pleasure to be here. Thank you for inviting me.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah, can you believe that you and I started our careers almost at the same time so long ago?

Anika Howard: I know. No, it's been ... I would say, I was trying to think and do the calculation. It's been at least 15 years.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And you had just started, and I had a small digital ad agency that was first of its kind and on the strip, and there we were.

Anika Howard: [inaudible 00:01:20] creative.

Tino Magnatta: It's a special moment in time.

Anika Howard: Yeah.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah. A special moment in time. Just when the internet was starting. It was amazing.

So your family was living in New Orleans, it might have been around the time, I believe, when your mother was pregnant. But in 1972, there was an incident at Southern University that changed the trajectory of your family because you're originally from New Orleans. Can you explain a little bit about that incident at Southern University and give us the backdrop?

Anika Howard: Yeah. This is always very interesting because I've never told this story in a forum like this, and in some respects, I don't even think I can do it justice, but I'm going to do my best. And so, actually an account of what I'm going to talk about, which is this 1972 protest at Southern University, is actually highlighted in a documentary and on PBS special called Tell Them We Are Rising. I believe it's the story of black colleges and universities.

My father was- [crosstalk 00:02:23].

Tino Magnatta: Yeah, I saw this. It's an incredible piece and there's a number of articles, and also it's mentioned in another long-form piece from PBS, and it's some pretty powerful stuff. And it was basically at the heated moment in that time when all this was happening.

Anika Howard: Yeah, no, absolutely. And my father was approached to participate in a lot of the documentaries, and he declined. And so I always feel kind of this pain telling

his story, but especially since there's so many vantage points, and experiences, and view points from people that were part of what happened. But I'll start at the beginning as it was relayed to me by my parents.

Both my parents attended Southern University In Baton Rouge, and at that time it was the largest historically black university in the country. And it was right after segregation at that time, and many of the students were unhappy with the separate but unequal quality of education. So they had done their research ... kind of the student leaders, and they saw that over half as much money per pupil were being spent on students at Southern vs. the predominantly white university LSU, and so they just really were protesting separate but unequal educational practices.

And so they began to organize and protest, and my father was an active part of the student group that did this. And it was very simple. Students wanted improvements in the curriculum. They had discussions with the University President to say, "Here's what we wanted." And once those discussions broke down, students decided to boycott.

And once again, not doing this justice because there are full books and articles on it-

Tino Magnatta: Yeah. Absolutely. But you're doing great. You're doing great. And then there was an anonymous phone call, right?

Anika Howard: Yes. Yes. And so it's an anonymous phone call and everything escalated. Everything escalated. So the governor at the time basically sent law enforcement officers and state police and armed personnel carriers to the campus.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah, over 300 people. Over 300 armed people.

Anika Howard: Yes, and it's hundreds of law enforcement officers. Yes. So yeah, you did kind of read the story, and-

Tino Magnatta: Yeah, yeah. I read the whole thing. Yeah.

Anika Howard: Yeah, my father was arrested with several other students, and two students were actually murdered in the protest and kind of the riots that pursued. And my mother often tells the story that my father was one of the ... they thought my father was one of the victims until they saw him being arrested on TV.

Tino Magnatta: [inaudible 00:05:21].

Anika Howard: So at the time, my father was a sophomore in college, my mother was a freshman. And he was banned from Southern University for life after that incident. They actually-

Tino Magnatta: Wow.

Anika Howard: Yup. ... went back and helped ...

Tino Magnatta: Incredible.

Anika Howard: Yeah, he was a ... I mean well into his career with the Federal Government, and they sent him there to ... on a recruitment trip, and that was the first time that he ever stepped foot on campus since that day.

Tino Magnatta: Wow. That's amazing. What an incredible story.

Anika Howard: So that's the [inaudible 00:05:49] of my parents moving to ... from New Orleans to Washington, DC, my parents were later married. I was born, and at that time, student leaders were being targeted and safety became the priority. So with the help of their families, communities, professors, they moved with very little money and no family to some place that they've never even visited, with a young baby, me.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah, they had to flee basically, for their lives.

Anika Howard: Yes.

Tino Magnatta: It's unbelievable. Just what ... This is a first for this show to hear a story like that. It's such, such powerful stuff.

So, that was obviously the right move because your growing up in DC was amazing for you. I've heard some of the stories. Tell us a little bit about that, the Smithsonian and the Presidents. Talk a little bit about that.

Anika Howard: I always enjoyed this part of it. I'm the oldest of eight children so I have four sisters and three brothers, and I don't think I even really fully appreciated how unique my experiences were growing up in DC until after I left and I started talking to people about it because in that environment, for me, it just seemed normal.

So my parents, when we left New Orleans, we settled in Adams Morgan and that was very much a melting pot of people. I remember my best friend growing up was from Turkey, and I just thought that was the coolest name for a country ever.

Tino Magnatta: Wow.

Anika Howard: So I took classes at the Smithsonian. I was part of a special program with NASA that required a student to plan a mission to Mars. And so I had a chance to go to NASA headquarters once a week for a semester.

I also participated in a program called the Mayor's Youth Leadership Institute, and I was elected to the Youth City Council.

Beyond that, I was pretty much ... I'm realizing now, I was basically a socially awkward band geek. I played flute and saxophone. I built computers. I, in high school I was focused on-

Tino Magnatta: Ring!

Anika Howard: [crosstalk 00:07:59] ring. So I was that quintessential nerd in every ... you know, high school movie ever.

Tino Magnatta: In every sense of the word, yes, of course. You were way ahead of your time. Way ahead of your time.

Anika Howard: Right. No, I wasn't cool until I saw those movies, then I was like, "Hey, that's me."

Tino Magnatta: That's me. I'm pretty cool too.

Anika Howard: Yeah. So-

Tino Magnatta: Now you met every president since Carter, right?

Anika Howard: Yeah.

Tino Magnatta: That's what you were telling me.

Anika Howard: [crosstalk 00:08:24].

Tino Magnatta: How did that happen?

Anika Howard: [crosstalk 00:08:25] a little bit, so I'll start at the beginning. The first president I met was, that I don't remember, was President Carter. I was a baby. My parents said I met him so I trust them.

Tino Magnatta: Okay. Cool. Yeah. [inaudible 00:08:38].

Anika Howard: And from there, and this is something that I didn't tell you about, so my elementary school at that point was Adams Elementary School. It backed up to the Washington Hilton. So I was in school, elementary school, when President Reagan was shot and three ... President Reagan and three others, and it was John Hinckley, so the assassination attempt on the President.

Tino Magnatta: Wow.

Anika Howard: I was in elementary school and I just remember a lot of men with suits coming into the building and not letting us go.

Tino Magnatta: Wow. Must have been terrible.

Anika Howard: [crosstalk 00:09:13] that's why that he was ... there was an assassination attempt made, and we could see the Hilton from the playground.

Tino Magnatta: That was Reagan, right?

Anika Howard: Yeah, That was Reagan. That was in 1981.

Tino Magnatta: Unbelievable.

Anika Howard: March 30, 1981.

Tino Magnatta: Unbelievable.

Anika Howard: But-

Tino Magnatta: Being in DC ... Yeah, go ahead.

Anika Howard: No, no. Go ahead.

Tino Magnatta: No, no. Go ahead.

Anika Howard: Okay. Like I said, I did have opportunities to meet all the sitting presidents. So after, later once he recovered, I did meet Ronald Reagan, but I remember meeting President George Bush senior and him being very kind and super focused. We had an opportunity to go to an event and he was speaking, and so we had a chance to hear him speak and then he came and he was very gracious, and he talked to every single student that was there.

Ironically his son, George W. Bush, was even then very funny and very approachable, and so it's interesting because we never ... I mean all this was before I was even able to vote. And you never saw them as, okay this is the President, or what is his politics, or did I ... You just saw them as people, and it was just a very interesting dynamic now that I look back and see being able to do that.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah, yeah. You were exposed to a lot of very interesting things.

Anika Howard: Yes. President Clinton, now he was ... he was extremely charismatic. I remember still to this day believing that he was one of the most fascinating people I've ever met. And on the first time I met him was during MTV. So they had a forum on youth violence and they invited 200 college and high school students to attend. I was, once again, in high school at the time. And that whole session was

infamous because one of the teenagers that attended, and you can probably still go find clips of this, she asked the craziest question that you would think to ask the President. She stood up and said, "The world is dying to know, boxers or briefs?"

Tino Magnatta: I think I remember that. That was televised, wasn't it? Yeah.

Anika Howard: And then, you could see that he was really embarrassed and he shook his head, and he was like-

Tino Magnatta: That was great.

Anika Howard: ... [crosstalk 00:11:47] that. And everyone got a kick-

Tino Magnatta: Oh man.

Anika Howard: ... at his expense.

Tino Magnatta: I love that stuff.

Anika Howard: But-

Tino Magnatta: Tell me a little bit about your first job in the business and how that came about. Yeah, that's a very exciting moment in your life. Tell us how you fell into it.

Anika Howard: Yeah, so no, absolutely. I was attending Arizona State University. I was doing a double-degree program to get my Masters of Science and Information Technology and also my MBA. And Harrah's came on campus to recruit, and at that time ... I went, and I learned, and it was interesting, and I had those conversations. But once I did the interview, I almost knew immediately that I wasn't going to get it because while I understood and did all my research on Harrah's, I had very, very little visibility and understanding about the casino industry. But lucky for me, that's what they wanted. They wanted to find people who thought differently and could bring different perspectives.

And so I started as an intern, summer intern, and then later was accepted into the President's Associate Program, and I started my career with Harrah's New Orleans.

Tino Magnatta: So yes, you opened ... you were-

Anika Howard: I was-

Tino Magnatta: ... You opened that property. Wow.

Anika Howard: ... opening up New Orleans. And it's great because-

Tino Magnatta: And you were back home.

Anika Howard: Yes. I was back home. And that was the first time. And I remember getting that offer and immediately knowing that it didn't matter what it was. That was gonna be the opportunity that I was gonna take because it just kind of felt like that full circle, coming back home.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah, that's amazing.

Anika Howard: It was an incredible team-

Tino Magnatta: You must have been loving that, right?

Anika Howard: I did. I did. I had a chance to reconnect with my family, my grandmother, both of my grandmothers-

Tino Magnatta: And you were opening a major casino in a major city, like a major city.

Anika Howard: And that gave me lots of exposure early on in my career because that was such a project for Harrah's at the time, and it was very, very important. And now it's commonplace, but then there were very, very few new casino openings outside of Las Vegas. And so, at the time all eyes were on New Orleans.

Tino Magnatta: You talked about ... You told me in a conversation before you had some great mentors, Marilyn Spiegel, and all the people that you worked with through the years. Talk a little bit about them and how important that is for other people to create those relationships.

Anika Howard: I think I've been fortunate to have so many great people who have guided my path, pushed me forward, and set me straight, helped me grow professionally and personally. And so, I remember very early on in my career as a President's Associate, I had a conversation with Marilyn Winn, now Marilyn Spiegel, about what I wanted to do, what I thought my vision was for, at that time, interactive because even that I was always passionate about that. And just really having a very honest and candid conversation with her. And then, forgetting about it and going back to my daily life, and a week later getting a call for an opportunity in Las Vegas.

And she never took credit for it. But I always knew that she was the source behind that because there was no one else that I had shared that vision with of what I wanted to do, and the opportunities that led me to meet you. Actually that was the opportunity in Vegas to lead an interactive marketing team and be the first interactive employee for Harrah's to get a lot of that work done, and then build a team.

I think overall, I've had mentors who have been my teachers, my champions of kind of supporting me and grounding me, and I feel like for me, a lot of that has

been a very organic process. There are the concept of formalized mentors, but I felt like I earned my mentors by being present and speaking my truth.

And I think for everyone it's different, but the most important thing are to find people that you authentically connect with, and that want to see you grow, and want to see you succeed, and essentially your tribe. Those people that get you, and can lift you up, and challenge you. And so, I think a lot that has been very positive for me is having that strong circle and building that circle with each experience, and finding people that push me to be the best version of myself.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah, it's pretty incredible. And so now, a lot of people won't know this but this is a fact. So at that time, you were not only one of the only women in the organization, but definitely the only African American woman in the entire organization, and a pioneer not only in what you were doing in terms of the interactive, but also as a woman in that position that had never done that before. How did that feel? Talk a little bit about that.

Anika Howard: It was very much a culture shock. I remember growing up in Washington, DC, which is a very, very diverse city, and then after graduate school coming to New Orleans which was the same, kind of a diverse city, very, very diverse property and executive team, and then coming into the corporate office at the time and just feeling completely out of place and out of sorts. And it reminded me of a quote that "Life will only change when you become more committed to your dreams than your comfort zone."

Tino Magnatta: Yes.

Anika Howard: And I pushed and said, that, "Okay. This is beyond beyond outside of my comfort zone." But I held onto that feeling of initially being isolated, and very quickly found my network of people that got me through. And most of those people don't look like me, but are still friends to this day.

And the one thing I learned about that experience, it empowered me to become an advocate for diversity and inclusion, and to have the tough conversation with HR and with a lot of my kind of, the management on how I felt when I came in. And then just being part of the change. And so, I'm happy to say that in having those conversations, I did help change the culture and process of recruiting to help it be more diverse. To say, "Here are some of the places that you can go. Here are the things that are important if you're trying to retain-"

Tino Magnatta: And let's put some money into it so we actually attract people.

Anika Howard: Yes. Yes. And it's not just about African American women. It's not about women. But it's kind of any group that feels like they're coming into a space where they're not necessarily ... They just, you know, it's just foreign to them.

And I think the bigger conversation is it's not just about me. It's about diversity is good for business. Diversity inclusion is good for business. It shows time and time again, that you get higher employee engagement and improved hiring results because when you have people that you come into an organization and you feel welcome and included, and not only that you see people like you, but you have a voice and seat at the table. That makes people bring their perspectives, bring that creativity, that innovation, and the company benefits from that. You get faster problem solving, better decisions, better collaboration, more innovative ideas, and all that translates into profit, that bottom line. All those things roll down to the bottom line.

And I think sometimes you think of it in terms of purely race, and all of that's important, but it's diversity of thought, diversity of ideas, diversity of socio-economic backgrounds, of sexual orientation, gender, and so all of those dynamics help you build just kind of a more inclusive environment, and gives you more ideas to bring to the table.

Because we live in a world all the different people live in, and so to be able to have that in your company, that's kind of a mini version of the world that can help guide you down a path, or guide you away from decisions that could get you in hot water. And I think we've seen time and time again, organizations that have been culturally insensitive. I used to think, probably they didn't have anyone sitting at the table to say, "Maybe that's not a good idea."

Tino Magnatta: Absolutely. Tell us a little bit about the qualities you need to excel in this business, but also to maintain the nature of the times, especially in your field where the technology is changing so rapidly. Tell us a little bit about those qualities.

Anika Howard: For me, even a lot of the qualities that I think of aren't even technical qualities. What comes to most to mind, is managerial courage. So the courage to be able to face the truth and express it. The courage to be able to rely on others and work outside of your comfort zone. And the one that was most difficult to me to do because I am always a little bit of a control freak and feel like I have to do everything myself, is to efficiently delegate work. And so really just having that managerial courage, and then being authentic. Embracing who you are, your originality, your creativity, your passions, making sure that you are ... you're true to who you are.

And I think a lot of times when you're a young executive, and even when you're going into a new space, you have this imposter syndrome where, you know, "Do I belong here? Am I good enough?" And it sometimes makes you want to retreat or assimilate or be something different than what you are. And I've learned a little bit the hard way that being authentic, and being who you are, and having people accept that and see that and embrace that, really is something that at the end of the day helps get you ahead far farther than not.

And then the last two for me I feel like is just lighten up. Don't take yourself too seriously. And have fun. Laugh. And put things into perspective because life is too short and a lot of times when you internalize things and you let them fester, it doesn't do you any good and it doesn't do your team or your coworkers any good because it infects everyone.

And my favorite final is from the late Steve Jobs, and I actually have it engraved on my iPad, "Stay hungry and stay foolish." Really just strive to be better and follow your aspirations.

Tino Magnatta: Absolutely.

Anika Howard: That's for me, that's just such a good mantra.

Tino Magnatta: Here's another one for you. Never lose your hacker roots.

Anika Howard: Yes. Absolutely not.

Tino Magnatta: Never lose your hacker roots, stay angry. Right. That's a great Steve Jobs. What an amazing guy and influenced so many people.

You're working in a space that's rapidly changing and you've had such a rounded career working at the lotteries, and then with IGT, and all the different aspects you have, and you've been a pioneer in this space for so many years, and now you've come full circle working at a major casino. What does the future hold in your space for the casino business? Where will you be taking us in the next five years?

Anika Howard: That's a great question, Tino. The market and technology is constantly changing, and for me, it's a very exciting time for the industry. I think at a very, very baseline, customer-first mentality has become even more important because customers are becoming so much more powerful. And it's very easy to see and tell and measure what customers want.

For me, I think there are three things that are most interesting. So I feel like more integrated experiences are going to take the lead. So we see this already in Las Vegas where now amenities and experiences are a bigger portion of the casino experience than actually the gaming. And when it's a [inaudible 00:25:35] market in some other places, I feel like you're seeing a trend towards that because now the casino industry are competing against so many things. They're not competing against other casinos, you're competing against other experiences. And so you have to do something that's compelling.

And so with that, more integrated experiences and wearable technologies. For example, CES just left Las Vegas, and the cruise industries are doing an amazing job with some of their wearable tech and things that they are doing to improve

that customer experience. So once again, that very, very focused attention to detail with that customer and what the customer wants.

And I also think, kind of with that, kind of these immersive experiences, you know advances in augmented reality, virtual reality, mixed reality, are all these types of things that once again, casinos are going to start taking a more strategic look at how to incorporate that into some of the experiences that they offer.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah, it's evolving pretty quickly. What impact does the digital age have on the overall picture at the casino? Are we going to see people gravitating more towards digital? Or is that just going to be part of the whole experience?

Anika Howard: I think it's going to be part of more the experience. I think my role is an example of that, so in addition to the marketing, I'm responsible for the social casino, all of the online efforts, and sports betting because all of these things, and customers don't look at ... I'm only going to go to the casino, or I'm only going to play online, or I'm only going to use my mobile device. They're using all these things at the same time.

And so ... and it's really about trying to understand how customers are using specific channels and devices at each part of that process. So how a customer engages with mobile on property is very different than when they're not on property, or when they're en route. So how do you build those experiences so you capitalize on that?

And the same thing with making it a vision. So it's not that a customer is going to see a commercial then, you know, automatically they're going to decide, "I'm going to come to your property." What are all of those touch points that you have to weave together to help guide customers through that experience? So it really, I feel, is a convergence of all of these different things.

We're seeing, for example, for social, for online, for sports betting, you need to have all these different things because different customers interact with you in different ways. And way back from my Harrah's days, when we did social casino before it was coined social casino, which is played for fun, we saw those trends even then that you have a subset of customers that are multichannel, and that doesn't impact ... What they're doing in one channel very rarely impacts what they're doing in another. You're growing that to your wallet. It's not necessarily shrinking it.

Tino Magnatta: It's amazing what's going on right now. What's your advice to people coming up in the business?

Anika Howard: So when my ... I say so a lot. When I graduated from college, my mom gave me this pocket-sized book of The Four Agreements, and this is way before it was an internet meme. And I actually gave this to my team too when I started here at Foxwoods, but over the years I've adopted it and committed ... and made that

my commitment to myself and others. And The Four Agreements, be impeccable with your word, don't take anything personally, don't make assumptions, and always do your best.

And those are four very simple concepts in theory, but very hard to live by and practice because when you make a commitment to yourself that you're going to speak with integrity but you're only going to say what you mean, that you're not going to internalize what someone else is saying, and so you don't take it personally, and you don't think, "Okay ... "

A lot of those things are hard to do, and what I've found is that when I've kind of got sideways on a project, or when I feel like I'm faltering, I go back and it's because of one of those things. It's because either I'm making an assumption or I am taking something personally. And so for me, those four agreements, being impeccable with your word, not taking anything personally, not making assumptions, and always doing your best. And are kind of very, kind of the cornerstones for me.

Then beyond that, learning to fail forward and adjust and keep it moving. I think early on in your career, when you have missteps you just kind of let them fester and admire the problem instead of say, "You know, sometimes these things happen and I'm gonna learn from that and move forward." And the sooner you can learn to just kind of adapt and take the lesson and keep it moving, I think the better.

That's all I have.

Tino Magnatta: How 'bout your network? The network of people that you know. How important is that, and how do you achieve that?

Anika Howard: So the network absolutely is more important. And I think you achieve that by a lot of things we talked about. About being authentic, and stepping outside of your comfort zone, and not just sitting at your desk, and going out, and being active, and finding the things that you're passionate about, and connecting ... like I said, connecting authentically with people. I think before there was always this concept of networking and collecting as many business cards as you can, and that doesn't work. But actually having conversations, and getting to know people, and building those relationships over time, I don't think there's any shortcut to do it. It's really about building those relationships over time.

Tino Magnatta: You have to invest the time to get the benefit.

Anika Howard: Yes. Absolutely.

Tino Magnatta: That's basically how it is.

Well this is great. Should we take some calls?

Anika Howard: Sure.

Tino Magnatta: Okay. Good stuff. This is Tino Magnatta and Anika Howard. Do you have a question for her?

Adriana: Hello?

Tino Magnatta: Hello. How are you?

Adriana: I'm good. How are you?

Tino Magnatta: Good. This is Tino Magnatta from GT Radio.

Adriana: Hi, Tino. This is-

Tino Magnatta: Do you have a question for ... Hello?

Adriana: Yes. This is Adriana. I'm calling from Las Vegas, and I was wondering about getting Anika's opinion given the changing dynamics in the industry of sports betting, and how she thinks that might effect roles for herself and all the East Coast players out there?

Anika Howard: Well, I think there are so many different views on sports betting. Thank you, Adriana. I think there's so many different views on sports betting right now. For me, I see that sports betting is a way to enhance the overall property experience, but it really, really has to be part of your overall strategy of how ... what is the purpose and why are you doing it, and how do you think it could help.

And we've seen over a time and in Las Vegas, for example, that having sports betting helps with table games, with poker. It's a way to create an additional amenity for players. But also we see when you add mobile and you have all of the elements to be able to do in-play betting, that it's a very, very interesting ... I guess interesting way to increase your overall revenue opportunities.

So for me, and especially after looking at it and looking at legislation, what we want to do is just make sure that we create this great experience, and it's not just, once again, a single-channel opportunity, but how do you create experience within the casino that allows customers to very, very easily make a bet from anywhere on property. And also, how do you make sure that you have that complementary mobile experience too so that you can get those new types of in-play bets.

[crosstalk 00:34:38] answer your question?

Adriana: Yes, yes, yes.

Tino Magnatta: Adriana, do you have another question?

Adriana: Actually I do. I was wondering-

Tino Magnatta: Great!

Adriana: ... you know, there's been all this conversation in recent years about skill-base gaming, and I think we've had some different companies that have tried some things, and I think all the big vendors have tried something as well, and nothing really kind of seems to have clicked just yet. And I think one of the things is there's a whole generation of gamers out there that are not your typical casino gamers. They're the generation that grew up with Nintendo and Xbox and all that sort of stuff. So there's a whole group of potential players out there, but they're not really attracted to the games that are being played right now.

But you do hear a lot going on with some eSports and competitions going on there, and teams being built, and I'm wondering if you've given any thought, or if you see anything like that, that could potentially tie into maybe it's not the typical slot player or table game player, but it's a different type of player that could create a different element in the casino?

Anika Howard: No, absolutely. I've looked at this and I believe it's like the D and Downtown Grand have done a very good job with parading eSports experience. And I've always, even when I was with IGT, that we've struggled. We struggled there with skill-base gaming.

I feel like there are two issues. One, and Adriana you hit the nail on the head, that the customers that we are trying to attract to the skill-base gaming aren't the customers that are coming into the casino. And so I've always looked at ... I think two or three opportunities for skill-base gaming. And so one, I feel like when you look at the overlay of what you can do with mobile on premise, what you can do with some of the social gaming and online gaming, I actually feel like maybe the model for some of the skill-base gaming is not necessarily on-property play. It very, very may be that some of those types of skill-base gaming will be more effective in other channels. So no one's tested that to prove it out, but I feel that that type of customer would be more inclined to do that.

And with eSports, I feel like it's the same way. I think as we look at sports betting and as we look at some of these other types of gaming that are coming into the market, eSports is a nice complement of that. But once again, it's finding what that sweet spot is and what type of game and what league to align yourself that makes the most sense for your brand, and that is what is attractive to your core customer.

So some of it is doing the customer research and doing a little bit of the ... just test and learn, and kind of once again that idea of failing forwards, figuring out what works, test a little bit, and adjust. Because I feel a lot of that is going to be

more around just being diligent and testing out some hypotheses and seeing what works. But I think it's not going to be one size fits all. It's going to be market by market, and casino by casino, what fits into your specific strategy.

Adriana: Great. Thank you.

Tino Magnatta: Adriana, thank you for calling in. Those were amazing questions.

Anika Howard: And actually, Adriana Zirpoli, I actually know her quite well. So Adriana is great at slots consulting, slot consulting.

Tino Magnatta: Have you guys worked together ever?

Anika Howard: Yes, so when I talked about one of the people that when I first moved to Vegas, and was just getting my bearings, and I found people that were part of my circle, definitely someone that was very important. So I appreciate her ringing in.

Tino Magnatta: So great. Adriana, you have any funny stories about Anika you can share with us?

Adriana: Oh no. Maybe some other time. Thank you.

Tino Magnatta: We'll all have to have a beer over that one.

Adriana: That sounds good.

Anika Howard: Thanks, Adriana.

Tino Magnatta: Thanks, Adriana. I really appreciate it.

Adriana: Thank you.

Tino Magnatta: You ... great questions. [inaudible 00:39:01].

Adriana: Thank you for taking my call. Yup. Bye bye.

Tino Magnatta: No problem. Goodbye. That was great.

This is Tino Magnatta at GT Radio.

Anika Howard: I cannot believe it [inaudible 00:39:11].

Tino Magnatta: I know. This is Tino Magnatta at GT Radio. I've got Anika Howard. Do you have a question for her?

Mike: Aloha. How are you today, Tino? It's Mike [Kalahanui 00:39:23].

Tino Magnatta: Mike, how are you? Good to hear you buddy.

Mike: Good. Good. Anika, how are you today?

Anika Howard: I am wonderful. What about you?

Mike: Good, thank you. I love your story. It's one of my favorite things in meeting anybody in the business is kind of hear that start story and how they came up, and ... You mentioned about having the circle that really helps you get through a lot of the challenges when you're a young exec coming up and kind of learning the ins and outs of different situational issues, or just problems that arise. Can you talk to a specific challenge that you faced, that maybe you felt a little overwhelming, and what you did to do to get that network of friends and help you kind of find that solution, and move forward and grow beyond it.

Anika Howard: Yeah, no, absolutely. I think there are two examples that I can show. My first was, I had been at corporate for some time, and at that time we were in the process of building a new group. So it was moving from a corporate role to a regional role that was a little bit different than what I was traditionally doing. And so I had traditionally worked in corporate in building up the strategy for interactive, and the opportunity for the Las Vegas region was much, much more hands-on, and it was working with all of the individual properties.

In so really just talking to my network of people and talking through, "Do I feel confident that I can do that? What are the skills that I need to do to be successful? What is the support system that I need? How do I position myself so that I can take advantage of that opportunity?" And really just work-shopping it with me so that when I was ready for that interview and ready for that process, I had people to go through that with. People that would basically do mock interviews and help me through that process.

And so that was a very positive thing because that was ... I did get that opportunity, and that for me was one of the more amazing points in my career in terms of the things that we're able to do 'cause I really enjoyed my time with that group and some of the things that we're able to accomplish.

And I think the second part was I ... Later when I left Caesars and I decided to go out on my own, so I started my own company, AHA Management and Consulting. And at that time that was a very scary thing to do, and I was able to call upon a lot of my network to actually give me my first opportunity. So I remember even then, and that was probably 10, 11 years ago, Jeff Hook reaching out to me and wanting a POV on online gaming and doing that for Seminole, and all these other opportunities starting to come basically once again because I had that network and I had that reputation, and I built that portfolio of what I could do. But I also invested in those relationships, and I was good at what I did.

And so, I think one, being able to have people that help you and guide you through the process, but also people that are willing to take a chance and give you an opportunity. And I think that's the value of ... two examples of how I built my network has served me well. I hope that answers your question.

Mike: It certainly does, and I think that really goes back to you talking about really making those authentic and genuine relationships. That really helped you sustain throughout your career.

You know, we all have it, and you know, we're all working hard, and there's always those challenges that come up, and sometimes it can be a little stressful. What do you like to do to detox? What's your go-to way to make sure that you can stay level and on an even keel when you're handling your day-to-day challenges?

Anika Howard: I love music. One of the things that even Tino and I were talking about, I have a very artistic side so photography, creative [inaudible 00:43:44], a lot of those things are things that I do. And then now, it really is that human connection, so spending time with friends and family, laughing a lot. Laughter is, for me, definitely the best medicine and I do it often and very easily.

Mike: That's certainly [inaudible 00:44:07] crazy for a lot of [inaudible 00:44:09], and I agree with that.

Tino Magnatta: We love that.

Mike: One more. You've been fortunate to have that circle to help you along. How do you now create for the generation behind you, for the next, you know, direct succession plan. How do you help them? What do you look for in your applicants for roles in your teams, and how do you mentor them or mold them into the idea that you're looking for?

Anika Howard: Oh man, that is an excellent question. So one of the things I've done from the very, very beginning of my career is that, is give back because I know, especially, I would not have some of the opportunities I had if it was not for someone taking the time to help. And so I can boast that ... I think I look back at the number of people that I've helped mentor into director and vice president roles, so a lot of it is just one-on-one, and once again, those relationships, being ... that managerial courage to be able to give constructive feedback in a way that is not offensive but that allows people to recognize that and grow, and take the next level.

One of the things that I participate in is Global Gaming Women, and even with, throughout my career, I've always been an advocate in terms of building those types of programs that, once again, help people to do that.

So to answer your question, I think there's two things that I've done. One is, whether it's with helping in terms of creating policies or programs, and then two, kind of very individual ... I think if you talk to any one of my direct reports, I'm very, very hands-on and I'm very much about empowering and education and having that conversation to understand one, what is your passion? What are the goals? What are things that you want to do? And then two, do you need help? How do we build that plan together to help you get from where you are right now to where you want to be.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah, that's great.

Mike: Sounds great.

Tino Magnatta: Mike, thanks a lot. I really appreciate you calling in.

Mike: No, thank you. It was a pleasure. You guys have a good one. I appreciate your time.

Anika Howard: All right. Thank you.

Tino Magnatta: Thank you very much. Have a great night.

This is Tino Magnatta and Anika Howard. You have a question for her?

Brian Bork: I do. Hi, Anika. This is Brian from Chicago.

Anika Howard: Hi Brian from Chicago.

Brian Bork: How are you? This is Brian Bork. How you doing?

Anika Howard: Oh my God, Brian!

Brian Bork: I was just wanting to direct [inaudible 00:46:54].

Tino Magnatta: Good, Brian. How are 'ya?

Brian Bork: I'm good, Tino. How are you doing?

Anika Howard: Oh my goodness.

Tino Magnatta: Good, good. Good to have you on the show.

Brian Bork: We'll have to catch up after this some time.

Anika Howard: Definitely.

Brian Bork: We'll have to catch up.

Anika Howard: Absolutely.

Brian Bork: Yeah, so I just love ... My God, we go way, way back to our Harrah's days, so ... to the big [inaudible 00:47:13].

Tino Magnatta: So you guys lived together, right?

Anika Howard: Yes, we did. For a long time.

Tino Magnatta: Was it at the beginning, right at the beginning?

Anika Howard: It was at the beginning, yeah, when I was at corporate, when we were first doing all of the internet marketing and the strategy for Harrah's, we [inaudible 00:47:26].

Tino Magnatta: Wow. That's amazing.

So Brian, do you have any funny stories of Anika?

Brian Bork: You know what, she's ... I don't really have any funny stories. I just remember Anika being just like way ahead of the game when it came to interactive and online, and being a pioneer, and I think at the time Harrah's didn't quite know what to do with it. And Anika was, "Well, let me show you," and like, "Oh, okay. Well this is my guess for the 70-year-old AEP player that you know, sits at the slots.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah, exactly. Yeah.

Brian Bork: Yeah, yeah.

So question, Anika. With everything going on, sports betting, online gaming, social gaming, obviously still slots and tables, someone mentioned skill-base gaming. How do you now think about the design or loyalty program, and what's most important? Is it still the idea of comps and cashback, or not cashback, but free play? Right now, if you were to build a loyalty program, what are the pillars that you build it around?

Anika Howard: Wow. I think ... It's interesting because I feel like the loyalty program is ... You see this in other industries. I feel like you build it around experiences. And so you have to look at ... I think one, you have to look at the entire customer experience because they have all these customer touchpoints. And so one of the things we're seeing is that, I think traditionally when we were with Total Rewards, we were really just evaluating a customer based on their gaming value. And what we've seen over time is that that's just one pillar of how you look at the way a customer interacts with the brand.

And so I think a big part of it is understanding all those customer touchpoints and what customers are doing. And so I think you have to build it across all of those things, and then create almost a Chinese menu of here are some things that you can do. So I feel like loyalty programs now have to be a little bit more flexible and smarter about how we evaluate customers, and how we rank customers, and then also how we allow customers to redeem and earn offers and rewards.

When you look at programs like American Express, or even when you look at ... A lot of the credit cards are doing very interesting things in terms of allowing customers to create some of those experiences. And I feel like over time I think the casinos are going to have to do the same thing because of what's going to be valuable to a sports better or someone that's a loyalist on the social-casino side. It's not necessarily going to be the same person that like you said, is that core gamer.

And so I feel like what we're going to have to do are look at some of those models a little bit more carefully and identify ways that we can personalize those experiences a bit. Does that make sense?

Tino Magnatta: Absolutely.

Anika Howard: Does that answer the question?

Brian Bork: Yeah. Thank you. And when you're done with this interview, what's the first shot you're going to take to drink?

Anika Howard: [inaudible 00:50:59] me. I don't know. We were out yesterday and people [inaudible 00:51:03] it, and I heard about a new shot that I never heard of, a pickleback. Jameson and pickle juice. I know I won't be doing that one, but ...

Tino Magnatta: Oh my God. That sounds incredible. Jesus.

Anika Howard: Not incredible.

Tino Magnatta: Jameson and pickle juice. Oh my God. That's like ... whoo! Nasty. How 'bout you, Brian? What kinds of shots you like?

Brian Bork: Oh my God. The kind that probably you can't do a second one of, so ...

Anika Howard: Okay. One of those.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah, I'm a tequila man, so I can do a few shots of those.

Anika Howard: [inaudible 00:51:44] that one. I kind of figured that one. Oh my God, Brian, this is so good to hear from you. It's definitely a treat.

Brian Bork: Well [inaudible 00:51:51].

Tino Magnatta: We'll do a shot of Patron, okay?

Anika Howard: Okay. Yeah. I can handle that.

Tino Magnatta: Brian, thanks so much for calling in. We really appreciate it.

Brian Bork: You're welcome. Thank you.

Tino Magnatta: Have a great night. That's great. A lot of old friends. It's amazing. It's really cool, man.

Hello. This is Tino Magnatta. I have Anika Howard. Do you have a question for her?

Sheila B: Yes, hi. I do. This is Sheila Bangalore. And this has been a really fascinating interview, Anika. Thank you so much for sharing all these wonderful details about yourself and your life.

Anika Howard: Thank you, Sheila.

Sheila B: I'm curious ... Oh of course, of course. As you kind of began your journey, what's one thing that you wished you would have known going into your first real executive role, either about yourself or about your environment that served you well having learnt it after the fact? I don't know if I asked the question correctly, but what's something you learned about yourself I guess, as you progressed through this journey? Or a few things.

Anika Howard: I think that's ... it's a simple concept, but I'm enough. I think we all go through these phases of self doubt. I know there's so many times that I, early in my career, where I knew the answer, but I was scared to speak up. And I didn't speak up. And I was silent in meetings because of it. And I feel that as I've become more seasoned, and I realized that no, I am enough. I do know and I'm capable, and so sometimes just kind of stepping into that and having that confidence up front to do some of those things. I think some of that comes with time, but I wish I would have learned that lesson a little bit earlier.

Sheila B: And kind of relatedly, as you've grown, how have you learned to take on or embrace, I suppose, risk taking?

Anika Howard: I think very carefully. I think early on I was very risk-averse. I found my comfort zone and I held onto it for dear life. I really did. And anything that made me uncomfortable, I immediately shied away from it. But now, I'm able to embrace kind of being uncomfortable and stepping out because that's where the fun stuff happens. That's where you push yourself and you get to that next level, and where you grow. And being okay with being in that [inaudible 00:54:29]

spot because that's forcing you to get out of that uncomfortable spot to the next level that's pushing you to grow, and realizing that's what that is as opposed to being afraid of it.

Tino Magnatta:

Great stuff.

Sheila B:

If you had, If you could suggest resources and things like that for others that are coming up through the ranks now, are there things that you would ... you mentioned the book that your mom gave you that you've now ... The Four Principles, rather, that you've now passed on. Are there other resources or guides that you would advise to folks like mentees or others?

Anika Howard:

Yeah. No, so there are three things. One, there was a leadership retreat that I took, and I think finding a leadership retreat or a career coach. I think both of those are very, very helpful to do, and sometimes you can find that through your job. Sometimes you can find them through organizations like Global Gaming Women. Sheila Bangalore is on the Board of Directors there as well, and have the opportunity to do lean-in circles, or those types of things, or mentorship programs. So I really feel that a lot of it is finding some of those things that you can actually create meaningful connections with people.

You can go online and there are a number of books, etc., that you can read, but I really do feel [inaudible 00:56:01] that I've read a lot of books but it's not as much as having that interaction with a person, whether it's building that relationship, and it's a peer relationship where that person is pushing you and supporting you and you're learning together. Or if it's a more formalized mentorship or structured coaching that requires you to meet these milestones, and journal, and do these specific things to be accountable to yourself.

Sheila B:

That's awesome.

Tino Magnatta:

Great stuff.

Sheila B:

Thanks so much, Anika.

Anika Howard:

You're welcome.

Tino Magnatta:

Thank you so much for calling in. You have a great night.

Sheila B:

Thanks, Tino. You too.

Tino Magnatta:

Some really great questions tonight.

This is Tino Magnatta. Do you have a question for Anika Howard?

Kathy:

Hi, Anika. This is Kathy in Las Vegas.

Anika Howard: Hi, Kathy.

Kathy: Thank you so much for sharing all this information tonight. This has been really informative, and obviously all us listening can tell that you're extremely knowledgeable but also have gotten a good flavor of what a warm person you are. So it's been fun to listen.

Anika Howard: Thank you.

Kathy: So getting to my question, sort of two companion questions. Obviously you've done a ton of things in the industry and you've been involved in the industry from all angles. What's curious, given all of that vast experience, is there one single accomplishment or achievement that sticks out to you as one that you're proudest of?

Anika Howard: Let me think. I think I go back to ... I think launching my business. I think it was 2009, 2010. I stepped out and I went to business school, and even before I always wanted to ... I always had the belief that I was going to be an entrepreneur, and that I was going to have the opportunity to do that. And then when I started with Harrah's, I put that on the back burner. But then when I actually did it, I had this immense sense of pride. And it was hard. It was the hardest thing that I've ever done, but I was very proud of one, stepping outside of my comfort zone to do it, and two, that body of work that I was able to produce, and the service I was able to provide while I had my consultancy. That's one of the things that I think just because I know that personally it was something that was outside of my initial comfort zone, but also something that I really wanted to do. I'm very proud of what I was able to do for that.

Kathy: That's amazing. That's really inspirational. Thank you for sharing that. One other thing that's sort of a related question. So obviously you've already reached this amazing point in your career where you've done a lot of amazing things, stepped out of your comfort zone, reached an executive-level position. Even though you're already there, are there specific things you're continuing to do to make sure that you're continuing to grow your leadership skills, develop as a leader and not just ... a thought leader in the marketing and technology space, but sort of the leadership stuff soft skills as well?

Anika Howard: There are a couple of things too, I've started to one, just kind of developing a reading list. I haven't sunk my teeth into it yet. I've just kind of read the first part of *Becoming* by Michelle Obama. And I really just kind of finding those books that are going to resonate with me to help with that.

And then I think beyond that, conferences. Conferences and finding opportunities to learn. So whether it's CES, whether it's ICE, whether it's G2E, really balancing out having that knowledge base with also finding opportunities to still learn and sharpen those skills. Because one of the things I've learned is you never stop learning. You always have to maintain. And also being humble

and recognizing that you don't know what you don't know, and there's so many things even starting a new role, a new position, where you defer to people and you recognize and learn from the people around you.

Kathy: Amazing. That's really good advice.

Tino Magnatta: Great stuff.

Kathy: Thanks again for sharing all this information tonight. It's been super fun to listen.

Anika Howard: Thank you, Kathy.

Tino Magnatta: Kathy, thanks so much. We'll talk soon.

Kathy: Thank you.

Anika Howard: Oh my goodness.

Kathy: Okay. Thanks.

Tino Magnatta: Bye bye. Bye. Yeah, some really great questions. Let's see if we've got time for one more.

This is Tino Magnatta. Do you have a question for Anika Howard?

Bobby: Hi, this is Bobby in Las Vegas.

Tino Magnatta: Bobby, how are 'ya?

Bobby: I'm good. I'm good. Great show as always, Tino. It's a real pleasure to listen, Anika.

Anika Howard: Thank you.

Bobby: I think that, obviously your resume is amazing. You've worked for some of the premiere gaming companies on the planet. And you've also had the guts to go build your own business. And I'm just wondering if you can provide any insight having worked for those firms, and then consulted to them from the vendor side, do you have any insight on what vendors should know more about operators and vice versa?

Anika Howard: Well I think one of the things that helps it, and I feel that it has been good, is that I felt like you have to ... It's a little bit of both. I feel like from a vendor perspective, you have to take the time to listen and know and understand your client's business. And so whether it's when I was on the IGT side, when I was on the supplier side, for as a consultant, part of it is having a true partnership and it

not being just about checking off a checklist. But really, I guess the best thing is listening between the lines. And so not necessarily saying, "Here. You told me you wanted these five things," and just give them those five things if you already know that those are the wrong things to do.

So part of it is being a thought leader and learning how to understand that customer, and also making sure that you are giving them sound advice and you're not just kind of taking that order. And that doesn't mean challenging or being combative, but it means offering your recommendation based on your knowledge, and asking the right questions to understand what someone says they want vs. what they need.

And I think there is always this kind of nuance and gap between what a customer, whether it's a player, or whether [inaudible 01:04:01] casino, says what they want vs. what they need. And so a lot of times as a vendor and a consultant, it's your responsibility to get to that ... to really understand that gray area and to be able to hear what they're saying, and then make recommendations to get them to that solution vs. just being an order taker and not necessarily meeting the expectations.

I don't know if that makes sense. Does that make sense to you?

Bobby: No, it does very much. I appreciate it.

Anika Howard: Yep.

Tino Magnatta: Thank you so much, Bobby. Thank you for calling in.

Bobby: Sure.

Anika Howard: Thank you, Bobby.

Tino Magnatta: Have a good night.

So that was amazing, Anika. Thanks so much. A lot of great question. A lot of insight. And thank you so much for being on the show.

Anika Howard: Well I appreciate you having me. This has been great.

Tino Magnatta: I really loved it. Will you come back on soon?

Anika Howard: Any time you want to have me.

Tino Magnatta: Thank you so much. You have a great night.

Anika Howard: All right. You too, Tino.

Tino Magnatta: Bye bye now.

Anika Howard: Bye.

Tino Magnatta: Well, just great interview tonight. Great stories. Anika's truly a pioneer, a good friend.

And so on Monday, January 21st, I have Scott Eldredge on the show. Great guy. Great stories about some amazing people he worked with, George Maloof of the Palms, the Siesta. Pioneer in his industry. Ray [Sanchini 01:05:49] who took the PT brand and brought it to a different level. Don't miss it. Remember, everyone has a story to tell, you just have to have time to listen.

You have a great evening and see you Monday at 5:30. Ciao for now.