



Conversations w/Tino

Guest	Sam Cocharo
	General Manager
	Robinson Rancheria Resort Casino
Airdate	Thursday, March 7, 2019

Tino Magnatta: Hello. Welcome to another episode of GT Radio. I got a good friend and a great guy who's had a lot of great chance. And he's also a paesan. Welcome Sam Cocharo. How are you buddy?

Sam Cocharo: Good. How you doing, Tino? Great to hear from you.

Tino Magnatta: I'm doing great. I heard you guys had a lot of rain out there. You said you can hardly even get to your boat, right?

Sam Cocharo: Oh boy. The rain up here, up north, Northern California, has been pretty heavy this year. I think southern too as well but our lake is like eight feet over flood level. I live on the lake. It's right up to the house. But it's manageable right now.

Tino Magnatta: You were telling me that's like the number one for bass fishing, right? In the state of California?

Sam Cocharo: Yeah. Clear Lake, up here in Lake County, is the largest natural lake, I was told, in the state of California. Natural lake. Doesn't have a dam. I believe it's over 100 miles to drive around it. So it's a big lake. [crosstalk 00:01:05]

Tino Magnatta: Must be beautiful.

Sam Cocharo: It is.

Tino Magnatta: So Sam, we had talked about the interview and then we met at a conference and we were sitting there and you told me something that almost made me fall off my chair. I've never told anybody that but I'm okay. You said you were born in prison, right?

Sam Cocharo: That's right. Let me start with the word luck. From birth I've also been a lucky guy. Luck is part of the game in business, at least everybody believes so. Of course I do too.

I was born in jail and taken away and put up adoption at birth. I was adopted by a wonderful family. Italian Americans. Hardworking people adopted me. I was six months old. So pretty much at birth. Raised in Pueblo, Colorado.

Fantastic people. Just being adopted and into that loving family and what they did for me throughout my life is just priceless.

Tino Magnatta: That's amazing. What a story.

They took care of you in the jail. They had a nursery there or something, right? You were there for a couple weeks?

Sam Cocharo: I have no idea but I'm sure they did. All I know is my paperwork is Denver General and I know it was under incarceration circumstance. I found this out

from my parents. My parents told me later in life, when I was a little older about it. I was like, "Wow."

They never told me that I was born in jail. I found that out on my own investigation, way later in life. But they told me I was adopted. I didn't know what that meant. But I'm very thankful.

You reflect on things like that when you look back. You look at how your life has passed. I'm 58 years old now. Fairly young. But I still go back through my cycles and it all began right there. I started out in the lucky business. I have family who were in the casino business already, at a young age, in Vegas. Their influence was everything.

Tino Magnatta: So you had an uncle. One night you left the tooth under the pillow and your uncle was in the casino business, right? What did he do? He left you like a C-note or something? Tell us the story.

Sam Cocharo: I love to the story. It was a C-note. I know it was a big number. I have no recollection. It was more money than I'd ever seen. I got that money when I was young. I was like, "Man, I want to be like this guy."

I was close to him. He lived in Vegas. I saw him three or four times a year when he'd come in and spend time with family. I grew up idolizing him and what he did. Hell, when I was in grade school I was matching coins, were they odd, even? We were already gambling then. Playing poker in high school and middle school. It was already in my blood.

I knew that was the career path I wanted to enter into but I needed to make some choices. When I finished high school, because I had such wonderful parents, I have the opportunity to go to college. My parents were willing to help me, to be able to pay for it. That's priceless.

Here I went from being born in a circumstance where no chance. I was educated. I did well. I grew up. I have a chance to go to college. First college I applied to was UNLV for hotel and casino management school. I was [crosstalk 00:05:35] about casinos when I was in high school.

Started to plan. It was all good. Took a few detours along the way though. At the time when I was getting ready to go to school, I had applied to a couple local colleges. I was accepted to UNLV in the hotel and casino management school.

I decided to stay in state, in Colorado. I went to Western State University in Gunnison, Colorado, and got my degree there in business marketing.

Tino Magnatta: Now your uncle was a real character, right? He was pretty high up at the Sands, right?

Sam Cocharo: Go to Vegas a lot when I was a kid. I remember when I was real little we'd stay at their house. When I got ... I'm maybe, I don't know, eight or nine years old. We actually got to stay at the Sands a couple times. He was one of the big bosses in the table teams there.

I got to meet some interesting people. I was a little kid. I was born in 1960. This is like 1968, 1969. I met Dean Martin and got a chance to actually have dinner with him when I was a young child.

He knew everybody. Especially at the Sands. It was the hotspot back then. He knew everybody. I didn't know atom. But I knew who Dean Martin was because I remember Dean and Jerry and all their great movies when I was a little kid. Jerry Lewis and Dean Martin movies were the best. So I recognized him right away.

All I can remember of the whole event, because it was so many years ago, I had a big steak in front of me and I tried to cut with my knife and the whole steak went flying on my lap. Dean told the waiter right there, he said, "Get that kid another steak."

[inaudible 00:07:47]

Tino Magnatta: Your parents had dinner with Elvis too, right?

Sam Cocharo: In those days, and especially the Sands, those people were in there all the time. I've got an autograph my mom got from Elvis. I have it framed in a picture frame at my home in Phoenix that I've had. It's dated too. It actually has the date on it. It's pretty cool.

Tino Magnatta: Your uncle had a very big influence on you. Tell us what kind of a guy he was. I know he wore very expensive suits. Was he a VP? Was he a host? What did he do?

Sam Cocharo: In his early years he was in the gaming side. Table games all the early years. When I started to really understand what he did more, when I got a little older, he was over at the Desert Inn and he was an executive host there.

At the DI, I know he was there about 11 years or so. He just grew that. Then he opened the new Mirage. When they redid the Golden Nugget downtown, he opened it. I was there. He opened the Bellagio. I was there at that opening as well.

Then he retired at like 83 years old. He lasted six months. Then he went back to work again because he loved being with people. He's one of those guys that walks in the room and everybody wants [crosstalk 00:09:27] I learned a lot from him.

Tino Magnatta: That's great. Great stuff. That's some great stuff.

You went to UNLV. You ended up in a different kind of business, right? The old and gas industry, right?

Sam Cocharo: Yeah. When I got out of college. I didn't go to UNLV. I was planning on going to UNLV. I decided to a college in Colorado. I got my degree. Then I ended up not going into the casino business right away.

I was working in the oil and gas industry. It was back in 1990. South Dakota, I believe, just passed and just getting ready to open their casinos there. It was the first expansion of gaming outside of, I believe, Atlantic City. I think it was even before ... Mississippi was right after us in Colorado.

Anyway, Colorado resolved to put it on their ballot, and I was living in Colorado, to expand gaming into three mining towns. I was at a golf tournament with my uncle and my dad and a bunch of us that I played at many years.

After the tournament we decided, "That gaming thing passed. Maybe we should go see if we could get involved in this business. Maybe we'll just look at some land. Let's go see what the town is looking like."

So that's what we did.

Tino Magnatta: You decided to open a casino, right?

Sam Cocharo: Yeah. Long way around the story is we ended up finding a little piece of property. We had a bunch of real estate people showing us stuff we could never afford. But we found something. We could maybe get a group of guys together, raise some money, and maybe buy a piece of land.

Actually, our first intention was maybe buy a piece of land or a building or something. Maybe flip it for some profit. But once we found something, we bought. Then we started thinking about it. We had people that were involved in gaming. We started talking about, "Maybe we can open a little casino here."

My uncle knew enough about the business. I was all eager to jump in head first and do everything I could do. We decided to tear down an old building there. We built a brand new small building. We started building in the fall of '91. Gaming started in the fall of '91 in Colorado. We opened our doors in May of '92. 160 slot machines and three tables and a small restaurant.

I'll tell you, back in the early days, everybody is packed. I learned it by fire. That's for sure.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah. That was sort of the training route.

Then you made a transition into Penn, right? Tell us a little bit about the training program and how that worked.

Sam Cocharo: After being there for many years and running our own company, I sold my interest and left the business. I went to work for Bullwhackers Casino in Black Hawk, Colorado. Penn National Gaming acquired them while I was there. I became the assistant general manager there.

I was in a real strong program with them. Learned a lot about the whole business. I was in [Wyomissing, 00:13:25] Pennsylvania many times at different conferences, being trained by Penn National in the business.

Once I learned the beginning of the business from the ground up. [Backed 00:13:40] the coin. I wrapped coin. I did the count. I bartended. I fixed slot machines. Whatever needed to be done. Cashiering. We learned it from the ground up in the small one.

Penn, I took it to the next level. I started to learn how a corporation operates and how we work with huge budgets and how we handle large groups of employees.

It was priceless, my years with Penn. I really learned a lot.

Tino Magnatta: You had some great mentors too, right? On the way up? Talk to us a little about that, how important the mentors are.

Sam Cocharo: Mentors, just like my uncle. Same thing. Kevin DeSanctis was our COO at Penn National Gaming back there. When he came into town, he lit the room the same way. His programs and his methodology. His first question to me was, "Sam, every time I walk into this property, it better feel like it's brand new."

I took that to heart. I've carried that with me for 25 years. Understanding how important cleanliness is and how important that look and that first impression when people walk in.

My GM was Tom Burke at the time. I was the AGM. Tom went on to become the regional VP of the whole western region for Penn. Both of them taught me a lot. It was a great experience.

Tino Magnatta: That's great. Fantastic.

Then you did a little stint at Desert Diamond, right?

Sam Cocharo: I did. Desert Diamond was very little stint because ... Actually, Gila River Casinos-

Tino Magnatta: That was the next big thing. What did you learn there?

Sam Cocharo: I went down to Arizona as the director of operations. I was basically the AGM. They didn't have that title but the GM there had never been a GM. Great guy. He knew a lot about the business. But I had more experience. As a team, we worked together. I got to mentor him. Of course I learned tons on the way from him as well through the years.

We worked well together. I learned a lot with him. Like everything ... I was there seven, eight years. Things changed. New CEOs. You know how this business is. Somebody's got a new plan and a new direction. They came in and released probably 70% of the directors over a period of six months.

Everybody scattered. Probably was one of the best things to ever happen to me though. I enjoyed the mentor but I was kind of dwelling it. I kind of carried a little long. Because I got hungry again. I wanted to get out and find me a property that I could really sink my teeth in and really try to put all my skills that I know in this business and try to revive it.

And that's what I've done. That's what I've been working on [crosstalk 00:17:15]

Tino Magnatta: Sam, let me ask you something. You got the drive. You got the passion. Where does that come from? How do you keep on top of your game like that? How do you keep it going?

Sam Cocharo: I think more than anything it's my family. I've been married for 35 years. Love my wife more than anything in this world. I have three lovely children. Six grandchildren. I just always wanted to be a good provider.

It's not just that. I take a lot of pride in making things very positive, where it affects everybody. With this tribal gaming, when you turn a property around like we've done here, it affects the whole community. It's one of their main livelihoods, the revenues from the casinos.

It moves me a lot to be able to build a business, make it strong, and keep it strong. It's just a good feeling. I think it's good to be good to other people. I think that's really important.

Tino Magnatta: You're giving back to the community.

Sam Cocharo: Yeah. It's everything. It really is.

But my personal drive is always family. I've been bred from a very young age. We worked hard. We studied hard. We paid attention to things. That's just the way I learned it.

I've taught my children the same thing. My three children are all very successful. My daughter is director of food and beverage in one of the casino properties as well.

Tino Magnatta: Oh wow. That's cool.

Sam Cocharo: My son is general manager of a huge hotel chain.

Tino Magnatta: That's fantastic.

Sam Cocharo: Yeah. Thank you.

Tino Magnatta: When you have to differentiate yourself from your competitors, what are those qualities that you need to have at your casino or your business? How do you make people come to your place?

Sam Cocharo: I always reach back to the solid basics of our business. First impressions are everything. If you don't have a clean, safe, comfortable environment, people will not visit your establishment.

When they walk in, I need a wow factor. I want people's eyes to light up. "This is not what I expected. This is better than I expected."

That impression is everything. Then of course they're in a casino. A lot of money flying around in their hands. I want to make sure that there's no worry that there's trouble around or anything. Being safe and knowing that they can enjoy themselves and not worry about it, that's really important.

Then having fun. If the employees aren't having the fun, the guests aren't having fun. I'm really a big supporter of keep those employees happy. They keep those customers happy and those slot machines stay busy.

Tino Magnatta: When you think about the young generation coming up, what are some of the things that you can say to them moving forward?

Sam Cocharo: It's kind of like what everybody says now. We were just at that conference together. We were talking about millennials. Everybody wants instant satisfaction. I think patience is probably one of the biggest virtues people have lost.

Everything doesn't happen in five minutes, especially in our business. It takes a while to learn customer's behavior. How your market is behaving. Everything little thing around you.

People want to move up from a valet attendant to the president of the company in two years and don't understand that there's a lot of work involved and then understanding how things work first and be patient. People need to work hard, pay attention, but be patient.

Let things evolve. You got plant a seed and put some sunshine or water on it and make it grow. You can't just pick it in five minutes. It's not going to survive.

Tino Magnatta: You need to play the long game.

Sam Cocharo: Yes. You do.

Tino Magnatta: As you came up through the ranks of the business, what were some of the things that you liked to do and what were some of the things that you didn't like to do but had to do anyway?

Sam Cocharo: I love that question. It sounds like a question on an interview panel. Anyway, this is an interview. I'm not apply for a job here, you know?

Tino Magnatta: I know.

Sam Cocharo: The positive side is always, when we work on something really hard and you walk out on the casino floor and it's packed and everybody is in tune like an orchestra and the staff is doing exactly what they know how to do, I love that feeling. There's nothing better than seeing a packed joint. It excites me. It really does.

On the other sub-note, it may come across that I have a fairly big personality, which I do, but I don't like some of that social interaction where you get all the adversity. Like when you host a party with a bunch of VIP guests and they know you have the final decision for everything. They know, if you give them an answer, it's going to be the answer.

I don't like to be put in that position. That answer can be many times a no. I like to filter it through. I don't like being put in that position a lot. It's not that I don't do it. I do it all the time but you asked me what I do and I don't like.

Tino Magnatta: That's true. Do you think that native casinos have anything to fear from the commercial gaming that's happening or could it be the other way around? Where are we now? What's going on?

Sam Cocharo: I don't think there's anything to fear. I see the growth. The growth continues. It's just like any other business. When the market gets saturated, it's saturated.

Up here in my area, in Northern California where I'm at here, it's very saturated. There's a lot of small casinos that have been having some very difficult times. That's one of the reasons why I chose to come here. I love to take that on.

On the other hand, there's other areas in the state you don't have that. They're building two big ones not even far from me. They're far enough, over near Sacramento area, that there's still plenty of competition and plenty of room to grow.

In my market there's four casinos feeding off 65,000 people. It's very difficult. You got to learn to be on your game. I learned that in Black Hawk. We had 27

casinos all touching each other in a tiny little mountain town. It was the same kind of very competitive market.

Like anything in our democracy, the way we handle our business in the United States, the market is going to level off. It'll grow when it can grow and it'll shrink when it has to shrink. All based on what the economy is doing. What politics are happening around us. Who is president.

Overall, I think gaming is here to stay. I think it's broken through. It's driving a lot of great revenue for many communities. It's just another good opportunity for a lot of good people.

Tino Magnatta: It really is. It's an amazing business.

When you got to Jackson Rancheria there was a lot to be done. How did you get the people back? I know they had a lot of issue with people coming in. What was your strategy? What did you do?

Sam Cocharo: First thing I did was clean up the place. We fixed every piece of equipment. We started an internal remodel. Paint. Carpeting. Everything. Every little knob. Every little handle. Every little piece.

I don't want to see a scratch on a wall. It's that critical. Like Kevin DeSantis told me, "Always make sure your property looks new, Sam."

I never forget that. I do make sure it looked new. I fixed all the equipment. But I did not market it. Not until it was done. Until we were ready. Then I started pouring the marketing on. Started slowly getting the customers back in. They started seeing what was happening in here.

When they walked in, they saw that wow factor. Their eyes lit up. "It smells good in here. It's clean. Look. They got new machines."

All of those kinds of things started building back that business. It'll be three years this June. We've more than doubled the business.

Tino Magnatta: Congratulations.

Sam Cocharo: Thank you. It feels good.

The problem is I know my competitors are right around me. I've taken their market share. But that's the name of the game. I have to do what I have to do. That's what we [crosstalk 00:27:48] There's a lot of casinos. Sometimes there's too many. But it'll level out.

We had a big fire here this summer. It was the largest fire in California history. The Mendocino Complex fire was 400,000 acres. We were closed for 19 days.

Tino Magnatta: Oh my god.

Sam Cocharo: That affected everybody. One of those four casinos around me never reopened because of the fire. They couldn't reopen. They didn't have the right insurance. They didn't [burn 00:28:22] but they couldn't recover from the loss of the business because they were at the edge and business is tough. It's very competitive.

I think it's really just always keeping your eyes on the ball. That's what it's about, keeping your eyes on the ball. What's the competitor doing? Making sure you're better than everybody else at what you do.

Tino Magnatta: Tell me, what do you see in the next 20, 30 years? If you were to predict in the casino business, how is it going to evolve? Is it going to be the same, where we're enjoying the margins and the carved out territories? Is it going to be different? Saturated. Competitive.

Sam Cocharo: What's nice, Vegas keeps reinventing itself. It's been through so many recoveries. It's still the greatest place on earth. If you're going to have fun, you go to Las Vegas. Simple as that. It always continues. I don't see why anything is going to stop us now.

Tino Magnatta: It's a very, special, unique business. It's entertainment, right? It's the best thing.

Sam Cocharo: That's right. That's one thing. Entertainment keeps growing.

Tino Magnatta: Who doesn't like to have a good time, right?

Sam Cocharo: Right. It's instant gratification, right?

Tino Magnatta: Yep.

Sam, should we take some calls?

Sam Cocharo: You bet.

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

Vince: Hi. Can you hear me now?

Tino Magnatta: Yes. We can. How are you?

Vince: Hi. I'm well. How are you?

Tino Magnatta: Good, good.

Vince: I was listening. Some of the things about cleaning house ... I think you referenced or may not have used that term. I've been in this industry for a long time also. Just want to talk a little bit about your thoughts about changing staff.

Certainly, if there's gross negligence or impropriety that involves something illegal, a termination needs to happen. But I've seen too many time cleaning house where management comes in and they have their own people so perfectly good people are eliminated. That's one scenario that we see.

Another one that really confuses me even more is immediate termination because a manager makes a mistake.

I was lucky enough to work with Circus Circus Enterprises back in the day. They created an environment where trying something was encouraged. If it didn't work, you stop it and you try something else. It seems like we move further and further away from that kind of environment.

I'm just wondering if you have any thoughts about that.

Sam Cocharo: I do. I notice it. When I talked about cleaning house, it was definitely at a much larger property with three big properties and lots of structure and not much personal touch. They cleaned house. That's what happened.

My small house, when I got here, I didn't clean house on anybody. Matter of fact, I did the opposite. I wanted to see what each person's value was and help them along. See what their strengths are and see if they were in the right places.

On that same note, with a smaller operation and not too many that you have to report up to, you can do those kind of things. I had my managers meeting yesterday with my management team here. That was one of things I went through with them. I was like, "You guys need to make decisions. Don't be afraid to take a chance. Make a decision. Base it on some good quality data. If you fail, it's going to be okay. I'm not going to fire you over it. We're going to talk about it and see how we can modify it. Readjust it. Use it."

But I like to see people with courage. Be [ascended. 00:33:16] Go after things. Assertive. I'm sorry. "See if you can better our business."

I see it all the time.

Vince: It's probably like shooting yourself in the foot when you follow that sort of prescription. I think you shoot yourself in the foot. You create employee body that is fearful instead of-

Sam Cocharo: I think so too. I agree with you 100%.

Vince: I could tell you a quick story. I worked as senior marketing person at a Native American casino a few years ago. We were working on guest service. We were coming out of the economic downturn.

There's nothing new so I borrowed the Ritz-Carlton idea of empowering the team members to correct a service error. We issued, I think it was, \$10 or \$20 free-play cards that they could actually use in the restaurant and things like that.

Obviously I had approval to make that happen. My secretary was crying because she was sure I was going to get fired, to speak to the environment. I wish I was exaggerating.

Tino Magnatta: That's hilarious. That's great. I love that story.

What were you thinking when she was crying, Vince? What were you thinking?

Vince: I was trying to tell her that I had approval. I had all my ducks in a row and that wasn't going to happen. When I got back in the office, I think she was still crying.

Tino Magnatta: That's a great story. Oh man. Thanks for calling, Vince.

Vince: You bet. I've enjoyed listening to you talk. Thank you very much.

Tino Magnatta: Thanks so much. You have a great night.

What a great story. You got to love it. We got great callers tonight. I can tell.

Hello. This is Tino Magnatta. I have Sam on the line. Do you have a question for him?

Rojelio Rubio: Can you hear me?

Tino Magnatta: Yeah. We can now.

Rojelio Rubio: There you go. Sorry about that.

Tino Magnatta: Now we can. That's okay.

Rojelio Rubio: Sorry. It's Ro.

Tino Magnatta: Ro, how you doing, buddy?

This is Rojelio Rubio. He's director of marketing up at Dakota Magic. He's also been on the show.

Thanks for calling in, buddy. Really appreciate it.

Rojelio Rubio: No problem.

Hello, Sam. How you doing?

Sam Cocharo: Good. How are you? Nice to meet you.

Rojelio Rubio: Good. Doing good.

You mentioned your passion and your motivation and your desire as you go through different properties and fixing up the places and doing what you can at each property.

Here's the million dollar question. I'm sure a lot of people go through this and want to know the same answer. What can you find in your passion and your desire to motivate you managers or other executives to give as equal passion and desire you have to making the property a better place? How do you get them motivated?

Sam Cocharo: You can't promise but you've got insure them, as success proceeds, they will be successful as well. You can grow financially but you can also grow in experience and knowledge of what you're doing.

As you grow your business, and as we recuperated like this property, the promise I had to them was, "I'm here to make you guys stronger. We can grow this together and build this. We got some simple strategies. You have to trust me and believe in me. If you don't then maybe you're at the wrong position. Wrong place. But I have a plan. I'm going to explain it to you. I'm going to set the expectations. At the end of the road, if we hit our goals, we're going to make sure we all succeed together and we're all going to receive the rewards for that."

This property actually, here, I have very strong, long-term people. This property opened in '94. These people [crosstalk 00:38:05] they knew their customers. They knew their business. But they were beaten down so bad for many years of competition and everything else that's been around.

They were bright-eyed and eager to grow. I wanted to try it, even though they had done it over and over again with other places.

In my market here, a lot of the people, they don't want to relocate to the big cities. It's a different market. That's what it's about. There's a different way to do it for each kind of process, each kind of different property.

One thing I know, when you tell people that you appreciate them and that you respect and understand all their efforts they put forward and their part of the success and achievement, the acknowledgement alone is more value to them

than the money. People want to be thanked and patted on the back for what they do.

Understand that it ain't you. It's all of them. That's what I try to do. I try to install that into everybody's minds. "Every piece you put into this is coming from you. It's a group effort. It's your part. You're going to be rewarded for it at the end.

Rojelio Rubio: They got to have a thing to look forward to also, right?

Sam Cocharo: Yeah. Honestly, financial reward is a great promise at the end but it's not the only promise. The biggest promise is that I'm going to acknowledge you in front of everybody and tell the whole company and the whole world, "This management team here and this group of all these employees did this. They're the ones who made this happen. I know how to steer the ship and get us on the right path but they're the ones who stepped forward and put the action in and make it happen."

That's really what works for me.

Rojelio Rubio: That's great. That is.

I have one more question I'm kind of interested in. You said you had great mentors. Sounds like you had some really good ones. Then you had the opportunity to mentor someone yourself after that.

What is your main focus on when mentoring someone? Is it more the characteristics of being a good leader? Is it numbers? What is your main focus you want to teach someone when you're a mentor and now when you're teaching others?

Sam Cocharo: First thing you got to say is you got to encompass all of it. There's no question. They got to learn the numbers side. They got to learn the employee communication side.

My main focus is to make sure they're ... I can grow them as an individual, building self-confidence. What do I want to call it? I want to build them so, when I'm mentoring them, they can build their own self-confidence, where they know they're making decisions that they're confident in.

Don't be afraid to make decisions. Don't be afraid to take chances. Don't be afraid to make mistakes. You're going to make them. Everybody makes them. It's how you deal with them and how you move on with them.

It's real important to me that those mentors understand that there's a pattern and flow of it that you got to understand to make it happen.

Rojelio Rubio: A lot of the time they're just reacting on their [lows 00:42:36] because they're afraid to make decisions and take risks. That slows the business down.

Sam Cocharo: Yeah. It's building that confidence. I was a mentor. I was in my learning process. Once you're done being mentored, you shouldn't even say, "I graduated as a mentor."

They've earned that position. They know that position. It's their position. They know how to deliver it and act with it.

I won't release them from their mentor program. I do mentor programs here for tribal members, for management. I'm on my second group of people right now. What I do is I really want to make sure that they can build that confidence level.

Once they're in control, they know how to carry themselves and deal with other crisis. Don't panic. Teach them patience. How to listen. Don't talk until you know all the facts. The basics of understand communication, information, and how to put it all together to make good decisions.

Rojelio Rubio: How to listen first and then be patient. Exactly.

Tino Magnatta: You got to know how to listen. Let them see the enjoyment-

Sam Cocharo: [crosstalk 00:44:07] to listen. It takes them a while.

Tino Magnatta: They don't want to listen, right?

Sam Cocharo: That's the hardest part. You get the know-it-all. You always get those. You got to break them down and tell them, "I'm sorry you think you know everything but you don't. Because I don't know everything. I learn every day just like everybody else."

Besides the know-it-all's, the ones that don't know, you need to take those ones the other way. "You got to start asking questions. You got to be able to deal with this, otherwise you're not going to be ready to manage people, processes."

I tell them one thing. In any business that I've been in, a manager, two things they manage, people and processes. The processes are about 10 to 15% of it. The rest of it is people. You've got to learn people skills.

People skills in management, that's the goal. How do you deal with your employees? How do you deal with customers? How do you deal with vendors? Everything is communication level. How do you represent yourself? I want to make sure they're representing themselves and our business properly.

Tino Magnatta: Well said. Thank you. Thank you, Rojelio. Really appreciate it.

Rojelio Rubio: Thank you.

Tino Magnatta: Have a good evening.

Rojelio Rubio: You too.

Tino Magnatta: Great questions.

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

Mike: Aloha, Tino. Sam. How's it going tonight?

Sam Cocharo: Good.

Tino Magnatta: Hey. How you doing?

Mike: Good, good. I'm actually here in Margaritaville in Bossier City, Louisiana. Definitely wanted to take time to listen to the call.

Sam, great story. I always love to hear it. You've had a great career. You got to grow up in the business and have great mentorship and learn from a corporate level and from the ground up.

What was something that was probably the biggest challenge for you in your career? You had an opportunity to have that lesson learned and you've always taken it with you going forward?

Sam Cocharo: Good question. Let me think about it one second.

I go back to that patience. I guess I have to scold myself on patience. I left Penn National Gaming at a very high point, when I was right up to become a GM with them and probably could have been running a very big property for them for a long time.

At that moment I was too eager and impatient and decided to take a GM job at a smaller property because I didn't want to wait any longer again. I wasn't patient enough. I made a career decision that took my career in a little different path.

I guess I'm trying to teach things that I've done wrong myself.

Tino Magnatta: The patience thing is a big thing.

Mike: [crosstalk 00:47:31] perspective about the decisions in front of them, right? Trying to give the ones behind you perspective about the decisions in front of them.

Sam Cocharo: Right. Exactly.

Mike: Which is fantastic. Again, with such a great background ... Everyone's got those kind of stories that you don't necessarily put on the radio. Which are probably the more fun ones sometimes.

We talk about team member growth but it's really about succession planning. Are we developing talented team members? From the ground up. Managerial. Director. VP. AGM. Are we preparing them for the succession?

How do you do that when you go into a new property? What's the process you take to evaluate and then implement something for that type of succession plan?

Sam Cocharo: It's like everything else. First you got to measure everybody. Observe. Listen. Watch. Then start formulating a plan. Which person needs this help? Which people need this help? Make sure you're delivering the right message to the right people.

Each person is an individual. They have different quirks and needs. One thing I'm a big believe, everybody is just as smart as I am. There's no stupid people in this world. The ones that are are just being ignorant on purpose.

I think you give them the tools. You see if they want to do it, if they're willing to do it, then you do it. That's about it.

Mike: Having that decisive plan of action. That's fantastic.

Just finally, has there ever been a situation in your career where you have been working with somebody and maybe your gut-check was, "I don't know if this is going to work out"?

Then they just turned around and surprised you and they really ended up being a star?

Sam Cocharo: Yes. It has happened. It's rare but it has happened. When you say a star, yeah. Maybe once. I don't want to say first impressions are everything. You start to read people and understand. It does happen but it doesn't happen often.

Like you said, succession planning and bringing people ... That is the key to everything. It really is. Making sure from the very front line that everybody understands their next step. Where they're going. What opportunities are there. How they get there. How they deliver and what they do. It's always a challenge.

There's a few out there that can turn and become a star but it's difficult.

Mike: The diamond in the rough, right?

Sam Cocharo: Right.

Mike: I appreciate your time. I just wanted to say thank you. Great job tonight. Have a good one.

Tino Magnatta: Thanks, Mike. Appreciate it. Take care. Bye.

Great stuff.

Hello. This is Tino Magnatta. Do you have a question for Sam?

Speaker 6: I certainly do. Good evening, gentlemen. This is Haydee Antezana from Temecula. How are you guys?

Tino Magnatta: How are you?

Speaker 6: I'm great.

Mr Sam Cocharo, how are you today?

Sam Cocharo: I'm good, Haydee. Pleasure meeting you.

Speaker 6: Absolutely. So Sam, you keep talking about this first impression. I absolutely love you because that's what I have studied, researched, for the last 20 years. It's all about first impressions.

What I want to ask you is, if someone had to walk into Robinson Rancheria for the first time, what would their first impressions be?

Sam Cocharo: I think their first impression would be shock about how nice this place is. They really would. Right when you walk in the door ... I just changed my front doors. Put in new auto doors. Did some stuff.

It's like, "Ah!" when the door opens. The light shines in your face and everything is good. Smells good. Feels good. I try to set up all the senses right when they walk in the door.

Speaker 6: That's what I was going to say. If I had to close my eyes, what would I smell? Feel? You know? The five senses.

Sam Cocharo: Because of our industry, there's smoking. I have a lovely scent in the air to mask it. It works very well. It's got to look good, smell good. Every sense is going off. The music. I just put in an all new sound system. All new Bose system. Speakers. Nice crisp, clean music.

All of those things, to me, determine that feeling of that guest right when they walk in the door. Where are they going to go? What are they going to do? If they're happy and they get a good feeling from minute one, we're in business.

Speaker 6: Absolutely. Secondly, you mentioned, if employees aren't having fun, the guests aren't having fun. You mentioned that earlier on. As management, leadership, how do you make sure that your employees have fun? What type of things do you do? How do you empower and engage them to have that fun? To come to work with a smile on their face?

Sam Cocharo: Right. First of all, I love to walk the floor. I love to smile and talk to them myself, the employees. I like to crack a joke with them. Make sure they're all in the right mood. Make sure we're all in the same kilter. If everybody is in the same mood, we're good.

Then I tell them, if somebody's having an issue that day or whatever, "Hey, man. Can you just let it go till the end of the day? I just need eight happy hours. After here, it's your time. Remember, we're here to deliver a service. This is where we work. We want to make sure our guests comes back so we all have jobs tomorrow."

They get that. They understand. You say it in the right way, the right passion, you get the buy-in. You need them to buy in and believe in to what you're doing.

Speaker 6: Awesome. Thank you, Sam. I hope you enjoy my book.

Sam Cocharo: I look forward to reading it. I'll be in touch.

Speaker 6: Alright. Thank you. Thank you, Tino. Have a good evening.

Tino Magnatta: Thank you, Haydee. Appreciate it.

Great stuff. Great questions.

Hello. This is Tino Magnatta. Do you have a question for Sam?

Oz: Tino, hi. Good evening. It's Oz. Can you hear me okay?

Tino Magnatta: Yeah. We can.

Oz: Hi. Good show tonight by the way. Great questions. I feel like I'm coming at the end of it and I'm under pressure. It's been very [crosstalk 00:55:02] Seriously.

Sam, it's the first time kind of I'm listening and checked in on this about you and who you are genuinely. Very inspirational. A real stand-up guy. Just your approach to management and leadership. Everything. I'm just [loving it 00:55:22] here. I'm sitting here and I'm like, "That's amazing."

[inaudible 00:55:24] As a leader. As a mentor as well. So hats off to you, my friend.

Sam Cocharo: Thank you.

Oz: The second thing I thought of was ... When you was talking about how you got into the casinos in California and fixing it up and taking it a look at it to bringing the customers back in here.

As you rightly said about cleaning up and making the place, [A-1, 00:55:45] mint condition, I'm thinking there's a TV programming opportunity here. You've got Gordon Ramsay. You've got [inaudible 00:55:52] Let's get Sam on TV. We'd like to show you off because you've got the personality for this.

Sam Cocharo: I thought of that. [Seriously. 00:56:02] I was like, "Maybe I could flip casinos for a living."

Oz: [inaudible 00:56:06] great idea. Start on that plan.

Sam Cocharo: I'm pretty sure [crosstalk 00:56:11] Believe me. It's crossed my mind.

Oz: If you need an agent by the way, here you go.

It was something that Tino asked in the opening segment. It kind of leads to where you've been throughout this whole Q&A session, about leadership and staff and keeping everyone happy and the motivation behind all of those things.

You must have come into the industry at a point when you're looking at the old school guys and you're thinking, "Wow. They've got some ways about them."

Now you're obviously three decades down the line and you've got the millennials coming in as your employees that want to learn and grow. Of course they come up like we did. But they come up with Twitter. Social media. All that kind of stuff.

Now that you're that kind of old school guy, what do you see that kind of impresses you maybe? I don't want to be on the negative side but do you also wish, "Come on, guys. I wish you had been a little bit more old school."

Things like their general work ethic. The entrepreneurial spirit I think is really strong with millennials. In general, that enthusiasm to be from the ground up.

You talked about something really important about not trying to get from this point to that point in seconds or in a year or two. Really lean the industry as you've done. Grassroots. Go through the various jobs, roles, and understand all aspects.

How do feel about the millennials? How do you coach those guys? [If you pick them. 00:57:44]

Sam Cocharo: It took me a little while. As I started identifying a few of the younger supervisors and the upcoming potentials, I started identifying them a little bit then I started to hire a few more. Now I call them my young guns.

I'm an old school guy but I'm definitely a new school guy, social media guru, with my young guns. I really believe one thing that works well with my young people that have worked well for me is, once I know I can trust them and I've built a good relation, empowering them to take risks. Make decisions. Come up with some new great ideas. Especially in the marketing field. It's huge.

I think a lot of my success here has been tapping into that and making sure. I've completely moved 100% off of radio. Moved all that money into social media. I put five or six of my top marketing young guns in there. That's all we focus on. It definitely makes a major impact.

Honestly, I never thought I would say, "You can work from home today," but I do because they're delivering. You know? They're delivering what I need. They're paying attention. They get it. I can't grow and be bigger and better without their perception of the world as well.

Oz: That's amazing. The fact that you have that trust in them, that just says it all, to be able to work from home. Something I read about recently, about getting that balance, even employees say, "It's great to work from home but I don't want to do that all the time. I want to be in my environment, around my people as well."

To stride that balance is a great thing. So that is great with the social media side of it as well. So you've seen a massive leap in terms of attracting new customers and clientele?

Sam Cocharo: I'm running a couple programs here that I'm using to draw younger customers and new players in. I call it "back-filling all the people that have left us."

As time goes on, we're going to have to have new players. I want to make sure they know what a casino looks like. So I'll get them in here to do other things just to walk by a slot machine. Once they see it, they're going to play it. They're hard to resist.

It's bringing them in any way I can, especially the young ones. We're not getting a revenue off of them. If you don't build that market for the future, you don't have a chance. I want to make sure they know this is the place to come and have fun.

Oz: [inaudible 01:00:52]

You've only got yourself to blame for this next question. I've just thought of it on the spot. You talked about social media. It's my final question for you.

If you could describe Sam Cocharo in 120 characters, leadership style, go for it. In one tweet.

That's a horrible question. I know. That put you on the spot.

Sam Cocharo: That's a horrible question!

Oz: It's just a [inaudible 01:01:16]

Sam Cocharo: I know. Thank you for the [inaudible 01:01:17]

Oz: Alright. Thank you for speaking to me.

Sam Cocharo: Thank you.

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

Oz: [inaudible 01:01:32]

Tino Magnatta: Okay. Great. Thanks.

That was great. Let's see here. We got one or two more we can take.

Hello This is Tino Magnatta. Do you have question for Sam?

Nick: Hey, Tino. Can you hear me?

Tino Magnatta: Yes. We can. Loud and clear.

Nick: Alright. Sorry. I was on the call before the last one. I didn't even know that I was on mute.

Tino Magnatta: No problem.

Nick: I have a couple comments first and then a question. The first comment I have is I think of us have had millennial, generational moments in our career. You were talking about when you were young you took a smaller GM job instead of staying with Penn. I think we've all done that, right?

The second comment I have is when you were talking about cleanliness it reminded me of my general manager, [Jeff Andrews, 01:02:29] who might know down in [inaudible 01:02:31] back in the day, who would take to the woodshed his leadership team if they were walked past trash and not pick it up, keep the property clean.

I think that will out-survive you. The people that [crosstalk 01:02:46] Yeah. Absolutely. It's been a decade plus since I learned that from him. Sometimes the hard way. It's definitely been a lifelong type of thing.

The question I had is, because you work in large and small sized casinos, what are the things you like about wearing multiple hats in the current environment you're in? Maybe what things you would you wish you would have that a larger environment ... That you don't have being in a smaller one?

Sam Cocharo: The problem with the larger environment, it's just the time it takes to do things, to get things done. One thing I learned from another guy, John James ... I don't know if you know who he is. He was our CEO at Gila River. John, his [logo 01:03:37] is do it right and do right now. I just love that.

It's so important in our business to be urgent. If something needs to be done, especially if your competition is doing it, if you don't react right away and make it happen, you're going to be behind the eightball.

Doing it right is also important. Make sure it's done right. That's just as important to me as anything else. Doing it right and doing it right now.

Sorry. I lost my train of thought. Where was I at? Repeat the end of that question again. I'm sorry.

Nick: Essentially the things that you really like about the smaller environment. Wearing multiple hats.

Sam Cocharo: Oh yeah. That's where I was leading.

In bigger properties you have to go through bureaucracy to get anything done. In a smaller property make the decision. Let's go. Let's move. The repercussion is always less.

You can always get things more done. Let's change the command to go through. Less bureaucracy. Less everything.

That doesn't mean that it's any better. I learned a lot from both of them. It's just the time thing. Smaller properties move faster. You can get things done. What took me a month at a big property can take me a day here.

Tino Magnatta: Right. It's a big difference.

Sam Cocharo: Because everybody wants to put their two sense in a big property. I think they want a piece of the success if it's good. They want the name on it somewhere. You get a lot of that in big properties.

Tino Magnatta: That's great. Thank you so much, Nick. We appreciate it.

Nick: Thank you. Appreciate it. Have a great night.

Sam Cocharo: Thanks, Nick.

Tino Magnatta: I think we have room for one more here. Let me see what we got. Here we go.
Hello. This is Tino Magnatta. Do you have a question for Sam?

Speaker 9: Hey, Tino. As always, great show. Absolutely fantastic.

Sam, I also loved your place of birth story. It's funny. No one believes I was born in a manger in Bethlehem on a cold December evening either. We both can say one of those two stories is true, right?

I realize you're wrapping up. I heard a goofy rumor. It's out there that Indian gaming properties are going to start getting taxes. Hard for me to imagine that because it's Native American land, a sovereign nation. Is that safe to say? Have you heard anything about that having taxes?

Sam Cocharo: You mean in state and counties?

Speaker 9: Yeah. Regular tax-

Sam Cocharo: I haven't heard any additional taxes. No. Other than our regular fees to the state in California.

Speaker 9: Sure, sure. So my final question is what do you think people in general who have not visited Indian gaming properties don't understand or maybe don't appreciate about Indian gaming properties themselves?

Sam Cocharo: I don't think they understand how nice they are, how beautiful they are. Most of them spend a lot of money. Beautiful. Great entertainment. You know? I don't know what the fear is to go visit them but sometimes it happens.

Speaker 9: Again, Tino, I appreciate your show and I appreciate your time, Sam.

Sam Cocharo: Can I make one comment?

Tino Magnatta: Yeah. Absolutely.

Sam Cocharo: The reason I have the story about my birth is adoption is very important to me. I'm really proactive and want to make sure people understand how important it is that we don't forget adopted children out there. There's a lot of them and how important that is.

Speaker 9: Absolutely. It's a great story.

Sam Cocharo: That's a [crosstalk 01:08:05] Thank you.

Tino Magnatta: Thanks, Sam. Appreciate that.

Alright. That's great.

So Sam, as we've been talking there's been some texts coming in, some texts that Sam did a great job at Robinson Rancheria. "He put the place back on the map."

Just so you know people are out there praising you. Sam, it's been a great show. I really appreciate you coming on. Some great stuff came out of it. I'm sure a lot of people got inspired. We'll have you on again. Thanks for coming on, buddy. I really appreciate it.

Sam Cocharo: I appreciate it. You take care. Stay dry.

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

Sam Cocharo: Bye.

Tino Magnatta: Bye.

Alright. Great story. The guy was born in a prison and ends up on top of his game with some great people. It's the same thing. The harder you work, [inaudible 01:09:05] you get.

Monday, I have Dominic Orozco. He's the DP of marketing at Gila River. Great guy. Known him for a long time. Interesting stories about how he intertwines his fate with what he does and the decisions he makes in business.

Remember, everybody's got a story to tell. You just have to have time to listen. Have a great evening and God bless.

END