



Conversations w/Tino

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Tino Magnatta: And welcome to another episode of GT Radio. This is Tino Magnatta. Tonight I've got a amazing person who started a casino from the ground up, and learned a little bit of everything, but he knows a lot about marketing. Welcome to the show, Brian Uran. How are you, Brian?

Brian Uran: Hi, Tino. I'm good. Good to be here. I'm excited to join you tonight.

Tino Magnatta: Great! Thanks for coming on the show, buddy. I really appreciate it. Tell us a little bit about where you're from, where you grew up, what your family was about.

Brian Uran: Yeah, sure. It's a pretty interesting story. I've lived on both coasts now, mostly on the West Coast. I was born in New Jersey in Summer's Point, New Jersey. Moved out to Las Vegas at a young age. I was brought out there by my grandfather, who was in the industry, and the whole family sort of followed him out to Las Vegas. He started pretty early on. My early recollection of him was from the Bahamas.

But, grew up in Las Vegas from the age of two. Went to school out there, went to university out there, and ended up moving back over to Maryland, over to the East Coast eight years ago now.

Tino Magnatta: That's great. And what kind of stuff did your parents teach you? What did they do?

Brian Uran: Yeah. All my extended...

Tino Magnatta: Your dad was in construction, right?

Brian Uran: Yeah. My extended family was in the gaming industry; my immediate family, Mom and Dad, weren't. My dad was in construction out in Las Vegas. He did a lot of work for the casinos around there, but he worked for a construction company, and Mom was, for the most part, a stay-at-home mom. I'm one of five kids, so she had a full-time job just staying at home, raising us little hooligans.

But it was great. Having a huge family taught me a lot. Having a dad in construction taught me a lot about details, and being with a big family taught me a lot about teamwork, I guess. You know?

Tino Magnatta: Yeah. You said he was a hard-ass, especially on details. Made you very detail-oriented.

Brian Uran: Yeah.

Tino Magnatta: It sounds like me.

Brian Uran: He was a hard-ass, and man, we fought, man. We got along like...

Tino Magnatta: I'm sure you did.

Brian Uran: Like oil and vinegar, but it did. It taught me a lot about paying attention to details and it served me well in my career later on. I'm thanking him now. I wasn't thanking him back then.

Tino Magnatta: No, no, of course not. Back then, it was excruciating.

Brian Uran: Yeah, yeah.

Tino Magnatta: Excruciating, I know. My dad was the same way. My dad was a perfectionist, so I know exactly where you're coming from.

You worked full-time through college, right?

Brian Uran: Yeah, I did. That was tough.

Tino Magnatta: What'd you do?

Brian Uran: I structured my school to go all day for two days out of the week, and then I worked at a retail store on the other five days a week. So, seven days a week, I had a full day's of activities planned. I worked at a sporting goods store, Sports Authority. They're out of business now, but I worked there for four years, started as a cashier and ended up a sales manager over there. Until this opportunity out in Maryland came along.

Tino Magnatta: That's cool, man. Quite the schedule you had to keep up with. You were almost used to working that casino schedule from a young age, right?

Brian Uran: Yeah, that's a good point. I guess as soon as my work shift got off, I was starting to work on the homework, and as soon as my school shift got off, I was just going to bed so that I could get up in time for the six AM shift at work. It was, yeah, it was a grind back then.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah.

Brian Uran: And it continues to be. I thought it might get easier! I don't know what I was thinking.

Tino Magnatta: No, it only gets harder, trust me.

Brian Uran: Yeah.

Tino Magnatta: Hey! Tell us the story about your uncle and fishing.

Brian Uran: Yeah. That's the story about when I decided, or when I sort of realized, that I wanted to get into this industry. Like I said earlier, my extended family, they're

all in the industry, and one summer, I went out and spent the summer with my uncle, who was down in Mississippi at the time at Isle of Capri. And I was just 13 years old, and one morning, I was woken up by him at four in the morning, and he sort of woke me up, which at 13, isn't the greatest thing to do to a 13-year-old. But he woke me up at four AM and was like, "Yeah, do you want to go deep-sea fishing with some of the players that we have at our casino? We've got an extra spot."

And I was like, "Well, absolutely, I want to go deep-sea fishing."

We went out on his boat. That was the year that, actually, the men's team went pretty far in the World Cup, so we were watching that on the boat, catching big fish. It was an awesome time. And I thought to myself, "Well, who wouldn't want to do this for a living? Go out on boats all the time..."

And little did I know that that's not all the casino industry is about, is deep-sea fishing, but that's what got me into it. I knew right then that that's what I wanted to do.

Tino Magnatta: That's amazing. What a great story. Incredible. Yeah, he really inspired you to get into it.

Brian Uran: I think that's also when I got-

Tino Magnatta: How does-

Brian Uran: When I first realized I would get seasick.

Tino Magnatta: Oh, yeah?

Brian Uran: Yeah. Ever since then, I get seasick. So, I guess I'm glad that it's not all deep-sea fishing trips.

Tino Magnatta: You got seasick from the fishing?

Brian Uran: Yeah.

Tino Magnatta: Did you get seasick then also?

Brian Uran: Yeah.

Tino Magnatta: Oh, wow.

Brian Uran: That was the first time ever. First time ever.

Tino Magnatta: And you still... Oh, wow. How old were you? 13, right?

Brian Uran: 13, yeah. 13 years old.

Tino Magnatta: That's amazing, man. Your grandfather must have been a special guy.

Brian Uran: Yeah, he still is.

Tino Magnatta: Definitely loves you, that's for sure.

Brian Uran: He's still in... I think my grandfather searched the entire internet every single day, and sends me an article about everything that he sees.

Tino Magnatta: Wow!

Brian Uran: But he's [inaudible 00:06:59] a lot about the gaming industry.

Tino Magnatta: That's incredible.

Brian Uran: East Coast to coast, [inaudible 00:07:03], anywhere that there's gaming news, he finds it and sends it out to all the people on his list.

Tino Magnatta: Unbelievable. Wow! That's incredible. What a way to keep the mind rolling, right? Without having to stop.

Brian Uran: Yeah.

Tino Magnatta: Working all the time, yeah, it's good.

Brian Uran: It is impressive. I don't know how he does it. It is impressive.

Tino Magnatta: Yep. How did you get... You got an internship at Live!, right?

Brian Uran: Yeah, I started as an intern. I was, like I said, I went to school in Las Vegas. I studied gaming management, what my degree was in. And as I was nearing the end of my sort of schooling there, I needed an internship to finish the degree, otherwise the degree wouldn't be complete. And it just so happened that I knew some people involved with the project out here in Maryland, and it's a big place to get open and a little bit of time to do it, and they needed somebody that could come out here and sort of just jump in, be cheap labor, do whatever they didn't want to do or didn't have time to do.

And so, I ended up coming out. I'm team member number four. I think I could have been team member number three, but it took some convincing, oddly enough, to come out here on a minimum-wage salary, coming from a sales manager at a retail shop. But all in all, I was convinced and I came out, team member number four, and helped build the place from the ground up, which I'm really proud of.

Tino Magnatta: That's great! Now, you had said to me that when you start on the bottom like you did, and just getting everything done, and the enormity of such a project, what does it take to get through that?

Brian Uran: It takes a lot of perseverance, of being able to ride the downward rollercoasters of, "Oh, my gosh. We're not going to be able to finish this on time." The real key, I think, in all of it, is that all of the group that was there when I got there, and then everybody that was subsequently hired before opening, we were all just decision-makers, and could just get to a point where we felt comfortable making a decision in the face of ambiguity, and just move on and go to the next decision that had to be made. Because in a project like the one we had...

And I had a special view of it all, because I was in charge of the project timeline, and I didn't know what 50% of the things on the project timeline meant, but I knew that they had to get done on that particular day, otherwise we weren't going to open. So, you make a decision about something, it's probably the right decision but it's possible that it's wrong, and you just go on to the next one, and you just keep making a series of small decisions until the project is over. And then, go back and fix the ones you messed up.

Tino Magnatta: So, you were involved in everything. Give us a little bit of an idea of some of those decisions that you needed to make right away. Because most people, they come through the business, they never experience anything like you've experienced. Give us typical stuff that was going on.

Brian Uran: Yeah, sure.

Tino Magnatta: That you had to decide or learn about, yeah.

Brian Uran: When I was hired, when I first came on and I first did my first site visit, which might have been two or three weeks after my first day... Our offices were downtown Baltimore, which is about a 20-minute drive away from the actual casino ended up being. We took my first day trip out there, and there was one pole in the ground of this massive, 300-yard-long, seven-story empty lot.

I sat in a lot of construction meetings. Learned a lot about HVAC. Learned a lot about plumbing, which, very interesting stuff, for those of you who have not gone through that yet.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah.

Brian Uran: But then, you know, we had to purchase 4,750 slot machines and install them, and I learned a lot about the slot file, how to help make decisions on where to put slot machines on the floor, as the layout was changing every day. I was managing the slot file. I helped configure the games. And that was just in slots. I did a lot of work with key security systems, writing SOP's for all the different

departments, and I can't highlight enough that I quite literally had no idea what I was doing half the time.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah.

Brian Uran: But, you know, the group around me was solid, and I was confident enough in my ability to figure stuff out that I couldn't have asked for a better way to enter the business.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah, I mean, if you think about it, it's the ability to absorb information and interpret it very quickly, almost in realtime, sometimes. Because there's so much going on.

Brian Uran: Yeah! I did all kinds of crazy things.

Tino Magnatta: And obviously, you had the ability to do that.

Yeah!

Brian Uran: I was a model for the cocktail outfits, the male cocktail outfit. They had a fashion show.

Tino Magnatta: That's great! I love that.

Brian Uran: Yeah, it was wild. It was wild.

Tino Magnatta: Whatever you were asked to do, whatever needed to be done, everybody chipped in, right?

Brian Uran: Yeah.

Tino Magnatta: But you were [crosstalk 00:12:30] you're walking the runway.

Brian Uran: One day, the president of the company was like, "You know what we don't have? We don't have an org chart. Brian, why don't you make an org chart?" And I didn't know how to do that, so I grabbed a bunch of Post-It notes and I started making an org chart on my desk. And it was wild. It was wild.

Tino Magnatta: But, I mean, if you think about it, it's almost like there's some sort of lineage between putting all those pieces together and running a casino. We were talking about this before the show. And we were talking about how you've got to know a little bit of everything, but a lot about your thing. Explain that a little bit to us.

Brian Uran: Yeah. You know, I think that's actually my greatest strength that I bring to the table at this place, is that I do know a little bit about a lot of things, and when you sit in these big, long meetings with complex decisions, with ambiguous outcomes, with all of the players in the table, you need to understand how

every decision affects all other parts of the organization. What it means to marketing, by configuring a slot machine a particular way. Or how EVS is effected by doing a donut promotion. Or even the slot technical department, by doing a free donut giveaway on National Donut Day. You know?

You don't think about the glaze getting in the bill validators until you've been on the other side of the coin.

And those are minor league things. But as you go up, every decision affects every part of the organization, and the fact that I've spent a little bit of time in almost all of them. I mean, hell, I dealt craps for a week here. I really have almost done it all, which is invaluable. It's not lost on me, the opportunity I was given. But it's come into my benefit here, for sure.

Tino Magnatta: Now, you said something which I think is very important. You said how it all relates back to marketing. Because at the end of the day, everybody, I believe, works for marketing. Okay? Because basically, everybody's trying to market the casino in some shape or form.

Explain that a little bit, because you know a lot about marketing, but you know everything else. How do you tie it back in, and how important is that?

Brian Uran: I disagree with you a little bit philosophically. I don't think everybody works for marketing. I think everybody sort of works for everybody else. It's a big, symbiotic team.

But your point is valid in that almost everything that we do relates back to the customer, and marketing is the one that has the customer front of mind. All of the decisions that we make on... I keep going back to slots, because after marketing, slots is the second group I spent the most time in. But all of the optioning and the purchasing of the games and slots, it's all done because that's what we think, or that's what we know, depending on what sort of research you do, what the customers want.

All of the food and beverage outlets are putting together menus and recipes and pricing that are for the customers, and at the end of the day, who talks to the customers? It's marketing. But we can't do our jobs, either, without the support of those other people, and they can't do their jobs without the support of us. It's all one big... call it the circle of operations and marketing.

Tino Magnatta: The path that you have taken to learn the business is very unlike anything, any interview, that I've had. But it's allowed you to position yourself to basically run a casino, right? One day. To be a GM and CEO. Correct?

Brian Uran: Yeah, we'll see. One step at a time, Tino.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah!

Brian Uran: Right now, I'm the VP of loyalty marketing and I'm happy to be where I am, but every time anybody ever asks me what I want to be when I grow up, the answer is always The Boss, and whatever that means...

Tino Magnatta: I love it! That's great.

Brian Uran: That's meant different things for eight years in a row.

Tino Magnatta: Of course! Of course.

Brian Uran: And that'll continue to be my answer. But, yeah, ultimately...

Tino Magnatta: How did you develop those... No, no, go ahead. Ultimately...

Brian Uran: Ultimately, I would love to run, as one of my steps along the way of being a quote-unquote, "boss," I'd love to run one of these types of places one day.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah.

Brian Uran: But all in due time. There's a lot of groundwork that has to be...

Tino Magnatta: Yeah, yeah, of course. No question.

Brian Uran: Yeah.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah. You're positioned very well, though. I can tell that. How do you develop a skill to become successful? We've talked about all the nuts and bolts in the casino business, but there are skills that you have that have made you successful.

Brian Uran: Yeah.

Tino Magnatta: What are they?

Brian Uran: Yeah, and I think, I didn't have...

I think I sort of lucked into this a little bit, back in... sort of high school is when it started for me. I always had a love for computers and technology, and I started to take some computer science classes, which is sort of a development, developer language classes, and taught me the basics. And there is no chance that I can develop a full-scale application right now, but what those classes early on taught me, and I just sort of kept building on it, is the importance of logic and the details of syntax, and the importance of understanding data, and what data means to an organization, and how to look at it.

And it's one thing, for me as an individual, to understand what the data is saying and how to speak, and why the data's saying something, and how I did

something. But it's a whole 'nother thing when you can explain it to a larger audience that may not be as technical or as understanding of data. They know data is important. I think you'd be hard-pressed to find somebody who would say that it's not. But me, in my position, I'm lucky enough to develop some skills early on that are data-centric, logic-driven and communicative towards a larger audience.

Tino Magnatta: Yes. It's being able to get the right message to the right person at the right time, right?

Brian Uran: Yeah. You could be the smartest guy in the world and know everything that everything's telling you, but if you can't tell it to other people, it doesn't mean anything. It doesn't matter.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah. And that ability to communicate is very important, isn't it? Especially in our business. So many moving parts, so many different characters.

Brian Uran: Yeah.

Tino Magnatta: You said you spent a lot of time on the slot floor. And you were interacting with a lot of the customers, just in the casinos generally. What did that teach you?

Brian Uran: Yeah. I used to do that a lot more than I do now, unfortunately. But you know, if you walk around on the casino floor, there's two sides of any sort of data set. There's quantitative, which I have at my fingertips all the time, 24/7, and that's what I excel in, is the quantitative data set. The numbers and the analytics behind data.

But there's a whole 'nother side that if you are blind to it, it's a huge mistake, and it's the qualitative data side. It's going up there and actually talking to the customers, and feeling out their emotions when they win or when they lose, or when they have a near-miss. Even on the promotion side. I worked in the promotions department up on the floor for about a year.

And just talking to people. It gives you a whole different perspective on what the data's actually telling you. When you only look at the quantitative side of data, when you're only looking at databases and Excel sheets and things like that, you can sort of infer what customers might be feeling or why numbers might be changing, but unless you have some sort of effort to go grab qualitative data, you're missing, quite frankly, half the picture on what's going on.

That was probably the most valuable thing about working up on the casino floor. I learned a lot of other skills along the way in those different departments, but in terms of the customer feedback, I think that's the one that I still sort of carry with me, is the importance of that information. I'm a data guy, so I love

living in these large data sets, but having had the experience upon the floor, I understand the value of small data sets that are not so measurable.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah. Of course. There's got to be some human brain and emotion backing the stats, right?

Brian Uran: Yeah.

Tino Magnatta: You can't just have pure stats. How has the content that you're offering now changed in the last three to five years?

Brian Uran: For us specifically, we were a brand new place eight years ago. We were a brand new place seven years ago, and then six years ago, and five years ago, and we've just opened a hotel last year. So, for us, at this place, we keep reinventing ourselves, which I think causes a lot of headaches for us internally, but if you're not reinventing yourself in some sort of regular cycle, you're falling behind.

We've had a ton of content to spit out to the guests, but in terms of delivery, we've sort of ridden the rollercoaster, actually. When we first started, we were heavy, heavy, heavy email. We had actually probably a 80% email opt-in rate, or somewhere around there. Heavy email. Obviously, it's hard for a casino company to get away from direct mail, so we're doing that pretty heavy. But we're getting more and more into the mobile space now, which is really exciting. For me, specifically. I'm right in that age group that thinks that mobile... that almost lives their life entirely mobile.

In terms of content, we've had lots of content changing. Content is king. People are desperate for a good story, and we as content creators have to keep satiating them with good stories to tell. And then, delivery is equally as important as a story to tell, if you have a great...

Similar to my comment earlier; if you have a great story to tell and don't tell it in the right channel, nobody hears it. Did you even tell the story? It's like the whole, if a tree falls in a forest, did it make a sound, thing. Obviously, getting more personalized is important. The delivery, we have to give the stories to the people in the channel that they want to have the stories delivered to them.

That's sort of how it changed. It's no longer just coming up with content. It's coming up with content that makes sense for that delivery mechanism, for that channel, for that consumer. Our jobs as marketers is to get people to notice something that we've sent them, or that's out there to consume, and then the second job is to consume it and open it, or read it, or whatever the case may be.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah. The bar has been raised so high now because of all the content that's being created for the different platforms. There's just so much, right?

Brian Uran: Yeah, and it's almost confusing for a user at this point. There's been a content explosion in the last five to... well, really, three to five years, there's been an explosion of content. And an explosion of brands that are delivering the content, and right now, just anywhere you go, you're getting hit with it. And I think it'll come back to the norm. I think people will start to realize companies like ours and curators of other types of content will start to realize it, and it'll come back to where it's a little bit less confusing for the user on where to get their content from.

But right now, it's hard to argue with, "Just put it out there and people will consume it." As long as it's crafted in a way that is interesting and consumable.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah. Almost insatiable appetite for content.

Brian Uran: Yeah.

Tino Magnatta: What do you see as the future of gaming? Given all the proliferation across the country.

Brian Uran: I think the easy answer is sports betting, right? Everybody's talking about sports betting, and there's a handful of states that are already doing it. Maryland, no doubt, is somewhere hopefully in the near future. We'll see how that shakes out.

But I've been a big proponent of online gaming. I think it's been slow to take off in certain areas, but I think as more and more people, like me, are living their lives mobile-ly, and we all have all these devices in our pockets, on our laps, in our bags. We have these commutes that are, at least in urban centers, for now... You're not driving yourself a lot of the times, in these urban centers, where a lot of the youth live.

People just have all kinds of time to consume something, like we were talking about before, and I think online gaming is... We're ripe for it. I don't think people...

It's hard for me to get behind the notion that people will sit at their homes on their desktop computers and consume online gaming a ton. But online gaming, mobile sports betting, all that. That's where we're headed, at least in the next five years or so.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah. Yeah, it's going to be just completely mobile. Do you think that there's some sort of a break coming up, something that will either enhance the slot machine or be different than a slot machine, that'll be the next generation of games?

Brian Uran: I wish I had the answer to that, Tino. I think I'd be in a much different position if I had the golden ticket for that one.

But, you know, a lot of people are talking about skill-based gaming. A lot of people are talking about making it more like a video game, because the millennial generation has grown up playing video games. There's the whole notion of se-sports and how to monetize se-sports. I don't think there's a silver bullet answer to that one. I think it's probably going to be the culmination of all of that. And a little bit of what we already have going.

We'll see! As we inch into it. I think we, as an industry, if I was guessing, are probably a little like I was eight years ago; we have no idea what's coming, we can research it, and we'll adapt as we go.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. But like you said, sports betting is a big thing. And is that... I mean, I know the margins are lower in sports betting. Is it something that you think is going to be a huge revenue generator, or is it going to be more about the traffic?

Brian Uran: We'll see. I think a lot of people are probably looking at it like traffic. We'll see how it shakes out. It's a good demographic of people that are interested in sports betting.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah.

Brian Uran: It's a demo that we've had a hard time attracting as an industry to date, outside of, I guess, Las Vegas.

Tino Magnatta: Right.

Brian Uran: That'll be an interesting thing to see how it shakes out. My sense is that it's the younger male demographic that is more towards a poker game or a table game, will spend some money on entertainment, food and beverage, and wager on sports while they're there.

It does depend on what the availability in the state will be, though. I don't expect that a casino that is in a state that allows mobile wagering, mobile sports betting, will see a huge pickup unless you create these sort of experiences, these living room-type experiences, to watch the games with some out-of-this-world offering.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah. Well, Caesar's just opened the casino of the future, and they have something like that in there. But it's just one place on the strip, so, we'll see how that works out. You can rent a man cave. It's over at the Link. And you can go in and watch... you can do all sorts of stuff that you would do in your basement, if you had a man cave.

Brian Uran: Yeah. I mean, I'll tell you, for me, I'm not... I love watching the ball game from home or in the stadium, but I love watching the ball game from home. It's easy,

it's convenient; if I'm allowed to wager on it while I'm sitting at home, it's going to be tough. It's going to be tough for...

Tino Magnatta: Yeah, it's going to be tough.

Brian Uran: Us as an industry to get me out of my couch.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah, that's for sure. And you got your phone in your hand, and you're with your family, girlfriend, whatever it is.

What are some of the best moments in your career? In terms of stuff you were really proud of. And what are some of the things that you feel that you learned the biggest lessons from? That maybe some-

Brian Uran: I can tell you my most...

Tino Magnatta: You didn't do so well.

Brian Uran: My most proud moment is being asked to be on conversations with Tino.

Tino Magnatta: Hey, I love that one!

Brian Uran: Yeah, yeah.

Tino Magnatta: Nobody's ever said that on the show before! All right, man. You get to be on the show again!

Brian Uran: Yeah, you can save that clip for later, and replay that all you want.

Tino Magnatta: You know what? I've got to tell you something. A lot... I'm going to tell you something, Brian. I have had so much fun doing this show, and when I told the team that I was going to do it, they were like, "You're nuts."

I said, "But it makes so much sense, because I have these conversations with people, and we need to document this stuff. This is what makes our industry, and nobody's doing it," I said. "It's like a crime."

I have 100 hours of interviews of amazing people that have done amazing things in our industry. If anybody's listening out there that's listened to this show or have been on the show, thanks a lot, because you just... It's been a great experience for me. I just gotta tell you. And just the feedback, and talking to everybody. It's been great, and you're by far my best interview, Brian.

Brian Uran: Yeah! I appreciate that, yeah. Yeah.

Cut that clip out, because I want to post that on my pages.

Tino Magnatta: Cut that clip out, yeah.

Brian Uran: Yeah, yeah.

Tino Magnatta: Exactly!

Brian Uran: No, I'm proud of the opening of this place, and the continuous reinventing of it.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah.

Brian Uran: I went through... "I went through," I say, "I went through," but we as a team went through... I know they say every opening is crazy and every opening is different. I've only been through one. Hopefully, there's a few more in my future. But that was incredible, and I was so proud. It was...

The weeks and days and hours leading up to opening the place, you feel like you're never going to do it. You're never going to make the finish line. And then you open the doors, and it's like, "Oh, my God. That was incredible. We did it, and we're here, and there's still a ton of work to be done, but..."

That was really cool. And I was a young, brash kid early on in my career. I thought I had all the answers. That was probably the biggest lesson that I've learned through the eight years of being here, I thought I had all the answers, I thought all of my answers are the right ones, and I was going to lead this group of people, whoever it was at the time, into glory.

And you start to realize that the smartest people are the ones that talk last, and the ones that gather all the info necessary, and I sort of learned that approach a few years ago.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah. That's cool, man. What are some of the things that you learned the biggest lessons on?

Brian Uran: I mean, really just that, is that I can't have been put in this leadership position without the people that are supporting me.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah.

Brian Uran: So, to not listen to them is a crime, really. It's tough being in a position where you're really wanting to do your thing your way, but the team is telling you something completely different, and I had to learn pretty early on that a lot of those times, those guys are the ones that know what the heck they're talking about, because they're in the day-to-day doing it.

Tino Magnatta: Right.

Brian Uran: That was a tough one. That was a big lesson I learned early on.

Tino Magnatta: Mm-hmm (affirmative). What is your advice to the younger generation coming up through the ranks?

Brian Uran: My advice... This is my version of what I think it took me to be successful, but if you have any inkling of being in this business and doing big things, you sort of have to now understand information and how data gets transferred, and how to aggregate and read it. And how to interpret and then sort of broadcast what's going on.

I would start early on in immersing yourself in problems that are data-specific problems, and don't wait around for people to give you suggestions on how to solve it or advice on where to look. Just go do it. And solve a problem that's challenging, that pushes the boundaries, that requires the use of Google and YouTube. Thank God for Google and YouTube! Because that has cut 10 years off of my learning curve, Google and YouTube.

But it's a tool that's at our fingertips now, and if you don't use it, you're falling behind. My advice is to jump in early on problems that you can solve using data. Whatever tools you have available at your fingertips, I tell people all the time that my favorite data tool is Excel. It's not big data, it's not as sophisticated as some of these visual analytic tools that you see, but, boy, it's flexible and it's powerful enough to solve most problems that are given to you.

Tino Magnatta: Oh, yeah?

Brian Uran: That's sort of my advice. start early, and just understand what information is telling you. Because you can't do this fly-by-your-seat-of-the-pants marketing. Or really, anything. You've got to understand what's working and what's not.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah. You're right. It's being able to interpret that information and optimize it. But not only that, but what you said earlier about using your creativity and your knowledge of the customer.

Brian Uran: Yeah. Yeah, that's something, too, that I think is paramount. There's a hundred ways to skin the cat when you're looking at data, but it's the ones who can be creative about the solution and how to overcome a problem, are the ones that ultimately win.

Tino Magnatta: Yep! Great stuff, great stuff. Should we take some calls?

Brian Uran: Yeah!

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

Rogelio: Hi, Tino; hi, Brian. It's Rogelio in North Dakota.

Brian Uran: Hi!

Tino Magnatta: How are you?

Rogelio: Good, good. I guess my first question would be, we heard how your advice to the younger generation coming up the ranks. I'm just kind of curious, is there... and you may find this different, but what would modern-day Brian say if he could travel back in time to, what was it, Sports Authority?

Brian Uran: Yeah. Yeah.

Rogelio: Where you started. What would you say to yourself back then, to kind of brace yourself for casino marketing?

Brian Uran: Ha! "Listen to your elders."

No, that's actually funny. I have a chance to do that, almost, right now. I was telling Tino before the call, it's a pretty fun opportunity I have right now. My brother is actually interning for me right now, and doing a lot of the data stuff, so I have a chance to actually tell him what to do. Not that he listens, which is why my answer is, "Listen to your elders."

But, you know, really, it has nothing to do with Sports Authority, but I wish, back when I was in school and in that part of my career, that I was a little bit more focused on how important sort of thinking logically through problem sets and answers would be. I think I only started to really learn that when I was in... I worked in slot performance for a little bit, looking at the win per units of the different slot machines, and I think that's when it really was like, "Wow, this is actually just one big puzzle that, if you think pretty logically about it, there's at least an outcome and a decision that you can make that's not licking your finger and sticking it in the air."

And I don't think I really understood that back at Sports Authority days, college days.

Rogelio: Sure, sure. And you mentioned you gave praise to those that supported you along the way. Is there anybody specific that comes to mind that you probably learned, or you can contribute most of your learning, from? Was there some kind of a mentor that kind of showed you the ropes quicker than others? Or maybe let you in on their secret, or anything like that?

Brian Uran: Yeah. I mean, I think I mentioned earlier that I've had a pretty rock-solid leadership group here.

Rogelio: Oh, okay.

Brian Uran: But specifically, the person that I think taught me the most about being a mentor to people was a lady by the name of Penny. She really took me under her wings when I was in slots, and sort of... not give me direct advice on how to

treat your team member, but sort of just showed me how to do it, and I think that was one of the more valuable mentors that I've had.

Rogelio: And then, I guess, one last question, you can definitely feel how passionate you are about the job, and about your future. How do you get your team to feel that passion about what they're doing? I mean, clearly, you have a vision, and I'm sure you do a great job of passing that on to your team, but what kind of, I guess, daily ritual or monthly ritual or weekly ritual, or what kind of [inaudible 00:43:10] speech do you give them to kind of go down the same path you're doing?

Brian Uran: Yeah, that's a good question, and I wish I could sit here and tell you that I was the greatest inspiring leader that there is. I try to be mindful of that. The truth is there's a ton of stuff to do, and the way that I try to do it, and quite frankly, I fail every once in a while, but the way that I try to do it is we have... My team is relatively small, and we have a ton of throughput that I expect of them. And it has to be 100% accurate.

I work in database marketing now, which is the last leg of the communication chain, and there are just hundreds of things that have to go right in order to get a piece of mail out the door on time with the right people and the right offers and things like that. And you can sort of get lost in the minutiae, and what I try to do is have some overarching goals for the department, and each task is sort of lined up with an overarching goal.

So, they can see that, all right, maybe they are just checking off some boxes in Excel, if this is the right person that we're mailing the right offer to, but really, the whole goal is about overall player reinvestment, and getting that exactly right. And they can sort of start to see the fruits of their labor and we have these weekly meetings where we try to go over that information. That's how I try to keep them motivated. Quite truthfully, I've been lucky enough that I've had an incredibly motivated database team for the last couple years that I've overseen it.

Rogelio: Awesome.

Brian Uran: Yeah. But I think tying minutiae back to big-picture goals is important. It was important for me to understand why I was being asked to do things that seemed meaningless to me at the time, but if somebody would come to me and say, "Well, here it is as the bigger picture," that was helpful for me.

Rogelio: Great. Yeah, no-

Brian Uran: Thanks for the questions. Those were great.

Rogelio: Yep. Yeah, no, no, thank you. It was good to listen to you, Brian.

Tino Magnatta: Thanks so much!

Rogelio: Thanks, Tino!

Tino Magnatta: Have a good evening.

Rogelio: You, too.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah, take care, bye-bye. Great questions.

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

Speaker 4: Evening, Tino. This is [inaudible 00:45:31]. How're you doing, Brian?

Brian Uran: Hey, good, how are you tonight?

Speaker 4: Good. You guys hear me? Okay, good. Hey, I'm going to ask a question first that has nothing to do with gaming. How's your ultimate Frisbee game right now?

Brian Uran: That's funny! Yeah, so, I was a big ultimate Frisbee player in college, played at UNLV for a few years. I went out and played pickup ultimate for the first time in maybe two years last Saturday. My brother also plays ultimate at UNR in Reno. He's here for the summer, and he was like, "Do you know any pickup games?" We found a pickup game. I went out there and I can still throw for disc pretty well, but boy, the running part, it really has gotten to me.

Speaker 4: Yeah, it goes fast, doesn't it? When you're-

Brian Uran: It sure does.

Speaker 4: Oh, boy. I worked with Travis Lam when he was in Harris, Philadelphia for a short period of time, so I worked with two of your leaders. You have a really good team. That's actually, that's good.

Brian Uran: Yeah.

Speaker 4: You do really focus on making promises to customers and loyalty marketing. Do you do things on the operations side that actually deliver those promises to really close that loop? Do you change the marketing you do based on the ability of your team?

Brian Uran: Well, yeah, so, sure, there's two philosophies to sort of any team-building, and I liken it to an offense in basketball. You can build the team around what you want to do, or you can have the pieces in place and then build your strategies around what your team is good at.

Our team here is good at... we're a real strong executing team, and we're real strong data, so we try to build team programs around that. I don't have any good specific examples, but we're on the camp of building your programs and strategies around the talents and skills and amenities and facilities that you have, rather than taking this approach where, "This is what we want to do. We may not have the right facilities or systems or whatever to do it, but this is what we're going to do."

We're of the latter. I don't have a good specific example of that, though.

Speaker 4: Okay. Well, I'll tell you, I actually was a competitive shopper for one of your competitors before you were in your role, I believe. Did it in a hotel at the time. And I got a lot of offers for food and beverage and entertainment; and was kind of light on the gaming. Has the hotel opening changed the way you guys approach the customers?

Brian Uran: Well, yeah, sure. We now have, along with the hotel, too, we have a lot of incredible amenities. We have this really beautiful hotel, we have a huge event space that's just about to grow, and we have a world-class spa. We have all these amenities. New restaurants. So, yeah. The way that we approach the customers had to change, and I can't, and I won't, go into the specifics of how that happened, and what specifically is going on, but yeah, it shifted our entire paradigm.

Speaker 4: Yeah, as I can imagine. Sorry, I had to step outside for [inaudible 00:49:00] call.

When I was shopping, I remember a lot of Emeril's restaurants. Does that sound right? He's a celebrity chef.

Brian Uran: We don't have...

Speaker 4: [crosstalk 00:49:12] wrong.

Brian Uran: We have a Bobby's Burger joint, is our celebrity chef that's in-house.

Speaker 4: Okay.

Brian Uran: In [inaudible 00:49:19] Property.

Speaker 4: Okay.

Brian Uran: Yeah.

Speaker 4: That makes sense.

Brian Uran: Yep.

Speaker 4: I'm sorry about that. I'll step back inside, sorry.

Brian Uran: No worries.

Speaker 4: I haven't been to the property in a while. Could you kind of list some of the new stuff you've got going on?

Brian Uran: Yes. I think I just went through a good portion of it. The hotel is brand new to us, the event center, those two are now a year old. The spa. We didn't have those for the first six years. I think I mentioned a little bit earlier, I didn't expand on it, but we've opened at least a new restaurant or a new wing of the property for seven years in a row. I like to say that ever since we've opened, we haven't stopped opening.

We have this beautiful outdoor... Smoking in the casino is illegal in Maryland, so we built, basically, a full-scale mini casino right outside of our facility, that it's called the Orchid Smoking Bar, smoking patio and gaming lounge. And it's got a couple hundred slot machines, a few table games, and it's a nice cigar and whiskey bar. There's tons of new stuff. You should really make an effort to come out.

Speaker 4: Yeah! Well, thanks for indulging me. I appreciate that. It was all for me, the last part.

Tino Magnatta: Thanks so much!

Speaker 4: Okay. Thanks, guys. That's all I have.

Tino Magnatta: Appreciate it! Have a good night.

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

Jess Martinelli: Hey, Tino, Brian! Thanks for having me on the show. This is Jess Martinelli.

Tino Magnatta: How you doing, Jess?

Jess Martinelli: Good, I'm good. Listened to the show so far. There's a lot of... I'm pretty new in the industry, and a lot of the stuff that you've said tonight, Brian, it's hitting close to home for me. I was lucky enough to start out in database analytics and at first, you know, the first year of just doing direct mail and working off of Excel sheets, there is a lot of minutiae and all that stuff. But I totally understand now, three and a half years later, how critical it really is to start off, or have some kind of experience in data, right out of the gate. It's so invaluable.

Anyway, I just wanted to also, before I ask you a question, I wanted to let you know that I've been working with some of your people over there. Roxanne

McGonagall and Robert Schmidt. I worked at the D Las Vegas, and we have a partnership with you guys that's pretty new.

Brian Uran: Yeah! Yeah. Brand new this year.

Jess Martinelli: And so far, yeah, everybody's been fantastic. Just wanted to let you know.

Brian Uran: I appreciate the feedback!

Jess Martinelli: Yeah. The Horseshoe Baltimore is one of your bigger competitors. Is that right?

Brian Uran: Yeah, there's a total of six casinos in Maryland, and the Horseshoe Baltimore, MGM National Harbor, and us are sort of the big three.

Jess Martinelli: Okay. What kind of scenarios or, I guess, outcomes, if any, have been discussed as a result of the El Dorado Caesar's acquisition?

Brian Uran: I think it's too early for us to have started talking about that in a way that effects us on a day-to-day operation. That'll take a little bit of time to play out, so I don't really have anything to share with you. I'm sure it will shake something up, but it's a little too early to tell for us for that, I believe.

Jess Martinelli: Oh, okay. No worries! Yeah, that was pretty recent. That was a long shot.

How can a person who's relatively new in the industry get the most out of opening a property? You said you feel like you're opening every single year, and I love that. Got to stay competitive and fresh, but when you're really initially opening the property, how did you absorb that and really just every single day, continue to try to step out of yourself and just look around?

Sometimes you get stuck in the moments, and you just don't absorb it as well. How did you deal with that?

Brian Uran: Yeah. I actually wish that I would have been able to absorb any of the moments, but there's so much to do. Hard to absorb anything while you're going. But, man...

Jess Martinelli: Well said!

Brian Uran: Anybody walking into a casino that's already opening that's never been through an opening, it is impossible to fathom the amount of small, stupid little decisions that have to be made to get a place open. So, what was awesome about my role and the way that the group here allowed me to approach it, was that I could sit in, within reason, whatever meeting I wanted to, as long as I kept the thing moving and I kept the project moving and kept up with my normal things.

The hours were long. I think there was a time there where we were pulling 18 hours, 19 hours, and then coming back the next day, do it again.

Jess Martinelli: Wow. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brian Uran: But I got to sit in and take part of whatever sort of meeting I wanted to, and I spread it around a little bit. Like I was saying earlier, I was a lot in IT. I think IT is where I gravitated towards early on just because of my love for technology and computers and things like that. But then, slots. Slots needed a lot of help. We had 4,000 machines to get open, so I learned a lot about bill validators, and I learned a lot about...

Actually, I didn't learn a lot about... somebody said the word "coin hopper" and I was like, what on Earth is that?

But you get to sit in a lot of different meetings, and as long as you're willing to put in the work upfront, you can learn a ton going through an opening. I tell people that I had six years of schooling in six months of opening a property.

Jess Martinelli: Hm! Awesome! Well, yeah, I'm hoping to be a part of an opening someday myself, because like you're saying, it just seems like those challenges all condensed into a small amount of time, just really change the way your brain works in the long run.

Brian Uran: Yeah.

Jess Martinelli: I've just got one more question for you. What impact did the Capitals being so good at hockey the last couple years have on the casino? You guys have a suite over there, or you got a lot of fans. You do a lot of promotions, watch parties, that kind of stuff?

Brian Uran: Yeah, sure. We got a huge Capitals fan base, and that was a particularly sour moment for me, as a Vegas kid. Now I'm a hardcore Vegas Golden Knights fan. Go, Knights, go! That was an interesting [crosstalk 00:56:37]-

Jess Martinelli: I feel you there.

Brian Uran: Because from a business perspective, the Capitals winning was the better thing to happen, but personally, I couldn't have been cheering harder for the Golden Knights. But, yeah. You stay in the moment, you stay flexible enough where you can market to things happening in realtime, have the watch parties.

Hockey is by far and away, it's not the biggest sport, but it's probably the second-biggest sport in our market behind football.

Jess Martinelli: Wow.

Brian Uran: And there's a huge following for that.

Jess Martinelli: Got you. Awesome. Well, yeah. I'm from Detroit originally, and I grew up with the Detroit Red Wings winning three Stanley Cups in my lifetime. Actually, four. So, I moved to Vegas before the Knights were a team, and it was pretty tough for me to just accept them as my new team. Not that I... don't tell anybody from Detroit that I'm saying this, but the Knights are my new team now.

Brian Uran: I'll keep your secret safe with me.

Jess Martinelli: Yeah. My sister lives in Washington, DC, and it created a family rivalry over a hockey team, when the Knights played the Capitals in the championship, and...

Brian Uran: I couldn't even convert my girlfriend. She was rooting for the Capitals, although she wouldn't tell me out loud. But I think she's a Knights fan.

Jess Martinelli: Oh, nice. Well, I really appreciate the time, guys, and look forward to talking to you again soon, Brian.

Brian Uran: Yeah, thank you.

Tino Magnatta: Thanks so much! Have a good evening.

Jess Martinelli: Thanks.

Tino Magnatta: Okay, I think we got enough time for one more. Hello, this is Tino Magnatta. Do you have a question for Brian?

Rob Gallo: Hey, Tino. It's Rob Gallo. Hi, Brian. How are you?

Brian Uran: Hey, Rob.

Rob Gallo: Great conversation.

Tino Magnatta: So, rob, how are you?

Rob Gallo: Good, doing well, doing well.

Tino Magnatta: Good.

Rob Gallo: Very interesting past, Brian. Learned a lot of things. I just had one quick question, I think we'll wrap it up with this, if I heard you correctly, Tino, saying it was probably the last call. What is the day in the life of the loyalty marketing manager, for the VP of loyalty marketing, look like? Not the brushing the teeth part and in the bed, but when you get to work, what's your modus operandi? What do you do normally?

Brian Uran: That's probably my favorite thing about the position I'm in and the company that I work for, is there is no answer for that. But it's a lot of...

My boss and my previous couples of bosses have all asked me every week to send them a, "What are you going to work on next week? Give me your five priorities thing." And I think I'm 0-for-300 on sending that to them, because my answer is always, "I don't know. Whatever the hell happens when I walk in the door the next day, that's my priority."

But if I had to answer the question, it's a lot of tweaking, it's a lot of number-crunching, it's a lot of trying to keep the team motivated and laughing and joking around, but it's a lot of tweaking programs. It's AB testing. It's measuring reinvestment, it's measuring frequency of communications, it's subject lines, it's all kinds of things. Aggregating the data. Obviously, everybody has the goal of a 360-degree view of the customer and we're no different. I think you and I have talked about this before, Rob, that we want every angle of the customer possible.

And a lot of my job is seeing that through to fruition, and then acting on that information.

Rob Gallo: Do you do anything beyond digital, though? I mean, do you monitor the print ads and radio and everything else that you guys do?

Brian Uran: Yeah, sure. And there's a way to measure that, too, depending on where you're printing, but vanity URLs are a good way to measure the success of a print campaign. The problem that a lot of companies face is there's so much data out there that you sort of don't know where to look to get any answers, so we've taken an approach where we're going to consume one set of information at a time. So, yeah, there's probably areas where we wish we were a little bit better at consuming customer information and acting upon it, but we are really good at the three or four that we've figured out so far, and now we're going to go on to number five and really get good at that and figure that out.

That's been our approach, rather than taking a shotgun approach and trying to figure everything all out at once.

Rob Gallo: Yeah.

Brian Uran: But, yeah, we have the digital, we have the print. QR codes are dying, but I know people still like those things. You can measure a decent amount of stuff with those things. We have proximity information. There's stuff that you can do, that you can action on, that's valuable.

Rob Gallo: Do you spend any time on the casino floor anymore?

Brian Uran: I used to. About a year ago, I used to make it a point to at least walk, do a lap around the casino floor once a day. But I get up there during the big promotions, I get up there and I interact with the customers, and we have events, but no, I don't spend enough time up there, quite frankly. Most of my time is spent downstairs trying to understand the people that are upstairs, from a data side. And I know that I said earlier that's only 50% of the picture, but that's where most of my time is taken up these days.

Rob Gallo: Yeah. All right. Well, I thought it was a very interesting conversation, and enlightening, to your background. It was interesting.

Tino Magnatta: Thanks so much, Rob.

Brian Uran: [crosstalk 01:02:52]

Tino Magnatta: Really appreciate it.

Rob Gallo: Have a great night, guys!

Tino Magnatta: Take care.

Rob Gallo: You, as well.

Tino Magnatta: Brian, great show! Really appreciate you coming on. And by the way, everybody listening, if you're at the casino marketing technology conference, Brian is on a panel with Chris Jenner and Mike Donovan. And it's going to be really good. I got the A Team, and I'm looking forward to that. Actually, you're doing two of our panels, right?

Brian Uran: Yeah. I'm doing two. I'm doing the one with you, which will be the second highlight of my career, and then I'm doing one on mobile loyalty and apps and the mobile space, and how that's reshaping the casino industry. I'm looking forward to that; I'm looking forward to the panel with you. Thanks for having me on the show. It was awesome!

Tino Magnatta: Thanks, man, I really appreciate it. Continue the great work, and we definitely want you back on the show. I really appreciate you being on this time.

Brian Uran: All right, Tino. Talk soon.

Tino Magnatta: Have a great evening.

All right! Brian's cool, as you've seen. He knows his stuff. And Thursday, July 11th, I have Steve Cardinal. Steve Cardinal is not in the casino business, but he's a CEO of an insurance company, and he's an amazing guy. Wait till you hear what he has to say about team-building and leadership and being successful. Hugely successful guy.

Remember, everybody's got a story to tell, but you just have to have time to listen. Have a good evening!