



Conversations w/Tino

Guest	Matthew Mingrone
	General Manager
	Eagle Mountain Casino
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Tino Magnatta: Welcome to another episode of GT Radio. I'm Tino Magnatta. Tonight I got a paizan on the show. Yes, that's right, a fellow Italian, and we were just talking about some great things before we hopped on here. Welcome to the show, Matt Mingrone. How are you, buddy?

Matt Mingrone: I'm great. Thanks for having me, Tino.

Tino Magnatta: Now, we're both kind of like from the same backgrounds of Italian immigrants, and that kind of shaped a little bit of who you are, because as we both know, back then it was all about the hustle, right? I know your Dad worked three jobs and he was like ... He was doing it, right? Tell us a little bit about that.

Matt Mingrone: Yeah, he was ... Yeah, we have like you said the immigrant background where they worked hard. Didn't matter how many jobs. My Dad did work three jobs and sometimes he came home 11, 12 o'clock at night after teaching night school and it was ... That was the original side hustle. I know that the Millennials think that they invented it, but my Dad, my Grandpa had two different jobs. That ... Those are the original side hustlers, but they always instilled [crosstalk 00:01:29] that in me and my brothers and it was always about hard work and you never went home and said, "The teacher gave me too much homework", 'cause then you got a, "Oh yeah? Well, guess what? Now, you gotta do the dishes and now you gotta go cut the grass and do more homework." It was always [crosstalk 00:01:45]-

Tino Magnatta: That's right. You never got [crosstalk 00:01:46] rewarded. It was always ... Yeah, tough love. You think that kind of shaped the way you deal with life?

Matt Mingrone: Absolutely.

Tino Magnatta: How is that? Explain that to us a little bit.

Matt Mingrone: The way it ... After you see people like that, my grandparents, my father, and even my mother, and they had jobs and they were always working and busting their butt for us to have what little we did have and it makes you appreciate it, and so when it comes time for you to step up to the plate ... If I saw something I wanted, whether it was to be a marketing manager, director, even GM now, you know that you gotta put some work behind it, but you focus on that goal. "How am I gonna get there? What's the path?"

To me, that's always shaped whatever challenges I've had. I've thought about ... I've expected to have some work behind it, so it's not a surprise and it's when something maybe becomes a little too easy I get a little suspicious. "I didn't have to really work for that. What happened there?" The best results always come from and they're always the sweetest when you work the hardest for 'em.

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Do you think that in that area ... Do you think there's a lot of change from when you were doing it like that at that age? To other people coming up at that age? You think there's a difference? Or is it the same principle?

[Matt Mingrone:](#) I'm not saying that there's ... There's still a lot of hardworking people. I mean, I don't think that part changes, but it's a different level I think. I know that a lot of kids that we hire or even my nephews and ... They get maybe caught up with the ... We have parents and I even have friends that are grandparents. They'll try to maybe eliminate some of that work to make it a little bit easier, so when it comes time for the work, I've seen-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Cut corners?

[Matt Mingrone:](#) I've seen my nephew go, "Oh, I gotta do that just to get that?" Or even my kids, "I gotta do that just to get X, Y, and Z? Whatever it might be? Nah, never mind." That's the [crosstalk 00:03:49]-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Why do you think that is?

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Really-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Why do you think that is?

[Matt Mingrone:](#) I think it's because we spoil people. We spoil our kids, our grandkids. We spoil our nieces, our nephews because we know how hard it was to work, how hard your parents worked, and you don't ... You always want your kids to have better than you. I think that's what ... That's just a general human nature thing and [crosstalk 00:04:06]-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Yeah, and [crosstalk 00:04:06] I think back in [crosstalk 00:04:06] the day when you and I grew up, I think the resources were a lot more limited, right?

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Absolutely. I mean, we didn't have things like technology to make our lives easier, right?

[Tino Magnatta:](#) No.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) If you had to pull over to tell your Mom you were coming home, you had to go to a payphone, or I mean, it wasn't just [crosstalk 00:04:25]-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) That's right.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Pick up the phone and text if she was at home. Otherwise, you wouldn't be able to get here.

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Right. Exactly right. Now, you have a pretty interesting story about the hospitality thing. It was kind of baked in the cake already for you. Tell us a little bit about that.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) I was ... From a little kid I've always been interested in casinos and gambling. I mean, Ocean's 11 was one of my favorite movies with Frank Sinatra and those guys and I always felt that was a great movie. We were allowed to go out to dinner, pick a restaurant to go out to dinner every year once we passed 10, so when I was 12 I picked The Turf Club at The Meadows Racetrack out in Washington, Pennsylvania, which is a very nice casino. Does very well for itself, but it was just harness racing, and my parents were going, "Are you sure you want to go there?" I'm like, "Oh, God, the glamour of harness track or horse racing, to me that [crosstalk 00:05:21]-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) You loved it.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) That was [crosstalk 00:05:24]-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Loved it.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) It was in my blood [crosstalk 00:05:24]-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) How old were you?

[Matt Mingrone:](#) I was 12 and I had my Dad making two-dollar bets going up to the window, and then he would [crosstalk 00:05:31]-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Wow.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) So tired because he couldn't finish his meal, and I was ...

[Tino Magnatta:](#) I love it!

[Matt Mingrone:](#) He's like, "Can't we just finish our meal? Don't you want birthday cake?"

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Very [crosstalk 00:05:41] scary, man.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) I'm like, "No Mama. Go place this bet." Yeah, and so driving home, my parents were saying [crosstalk 00:05:49]-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Oh yeah, that's right because [crosstalk 00:05:50] they took you there on your birthday, right?

[Matt Mingrone:](#) That's right.

[Tino Magnatta:](#) They took you there on your birthday and you were running back and forth eating the cake, but also making the bets, right?

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Yeah, I was having my Dad making the bets in between his bites and he was getting [crosstalk 00:06:01] frustrated.

[Tino Magnatta:](#) What a story. What a story [crosstalk 00:06:04]-

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Well, you know, at that point it was [crosstalk 00:06:04]-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) I love it.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Pretty much sold in the ... I was dyed in the wool, ready to go to be in the casino business. Yeah, that was [crosstalk 00:06:11]

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Come on, Matthew, come on. Go place a bet. Hurry up before ... I can just see it.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Oh, driving my Dad nuts.

[Tino Magnatta:](#) You're like, "Come on, hurry up!" Right [crosstalk 00:06:22]-

[Matt Mingrone:](#) He had to go make the bets. Yeah.

[Tino Magnatta:](#) "Hurry up before this race closes."

[Matt Mingrone:](#) That's hilarious.

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Yeah, "Come on, hurry up!" It was all part of it, right? It was all part of the experience [crosstalk 00:06:33] right?

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Oh, absolutely [crosstalk 00:06:35]-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) It was all part of the experience. You'll never forget that. I mean, harness racing now is a lost art, but it was the kind of thing ... Thrill you get when you ... Experience when you go into a casino that's well run, right? You get that adrenaline [crosstalk 00:06:47]-

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Absolutely [crosstalk 00:06:48]-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Think ... Yeah, that's what you got, so you got the [crosstalk 00:06:50]-

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Later on in our lives ... Oh, that was the hook. That was the hook.

[Tino Magnatta:](#) That was the [crosstalk 00:06:55]-

[Matt Mingrone:](#) And then later on when I was in high school, we used to go to The Jersey Shore. I lived in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania [crosstalk 00:07:02]-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Oh, man.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Grew up there and [crosstalk 00:07:03]-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Yeah, I've been to [crosstalk 00:07:04]-

[Matt Mingrone:](#) To Jersey Shore and we went to my parents' friends or the friends' families I was with, they would go into Atlantic City and they would go and we would tag along and hang out on the boardwalk. Every now and then, we'd sneak into The Playboy and try to sneak around security and they were too [crosstalk 00:07:20]-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Oh, man, yeah. You [crosstalk 00:07:21]-

[Matt Mingrone:](#) They were too good. They were like pushing us away and ... It was the [inaudible 00:07:24] lights, of the machines, and the yelling at the craps table-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) The sounds and ... Yeah.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Oh yeah [crosstalk 00:07:31]-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) People all dressed up, right [crosstalk 00:07:31]-

[Matt Mingrone:](#) It was very glamour.

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Everybody dressed up.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Yeah. Oh yeah, back in the day [crosstalk 00:07:36] heck yeah-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Back in the day.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Men wore sport coats-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) To the nines.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) At minimum.

[Tino Magnatta:](#) To the nines.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) It was a night out.

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Yeah, it was crazy. What was your first break?

[Matt Mingrone:](#) My first break, I was in South Shore Lake Tahoe at what then was called The Horizon, and I was working the front desk and they had a publicity manager position, publicist/publicity manager, and I have a degree and stuff and I always wanted to get in the casino business and this was my shot. Don Kennedy was the Vice-President of Marketing. He gave me my first shot and he said to me ... He goes like, "You don't have any experience." He goes, "All I want you to do is

work hard at whatever I give you to do", and there comes that work ethic part again. I gave him a hundred percent and I learned so much from that man and that property. He was a great mentor. He really was a great mentor.

[Tino Magnatta:](#) What do you think he saw in you? Obviously he didn't know about your work ethic when he sat down and talked to you, but what do you think [crosstalk 00:08:44]-

[Matt Mingrone:](#) He had-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) That he saw in you from what he asked you?

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Well, we had a long conversation before even the interviews and I was always friendly as a front desk clerk and he had talked to the manager, the front office manager. He had talked to them about [crosstalk 00:09:00]-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) He'd already did his research [crosstalk 00:09:01]-

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Yeah, and then I told him ... He asked me one question. "What do you want to do? What are you doing here all the way from Pittsburg, Pennsylvania?" I said [crosstalk 00:09:13]-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Good question.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) "I just want to be in this business. I want to be in this business and I always wanted to work where people go on vacation and where people go to have fun." I said, "I'll bust my butt for you, and no matter what you tell me to do, I'll do it." That became the thing. I was always available. He called down the hall, 'cause we didn't have a director or even a manager in between us. It was Vice-President and then me as Publicity Manager. "Hey, who needs ... Who can go to this chili cook-off and this regional chili cook-off and take some prizes?" Or, "Who can go stand at this booth at the sales show down in San Francisco? Help out the sales department?" Or, "Who can go pick up the GM or the CEO of the property at the airport?" "Okay, I'll do it." I just ... Whatever[crosstalk 00:10:03]-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Right, and good attitude [crosstalk 00:10:03]-

[Matt Mingrone:](#) He asked me to do, I did it.

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Whatever you needed to do, you did. Yeah, and you started to get a multitude of experience of different people on different levels.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Absolutely, and I just watched him, just like I watched my parents. Here's a guy that was the Vice-President of Marketing standing on a ladder hanging strings of garland or pictures of winners and signs and hanging them on the ... Doing the dirty work. When you turn around and you say, "Well, if this guy can do it, I'm gonna do it. He's gotta ... His suit costs [crosstalk 00:10:36]-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) That's right.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) "Costs more than my car at the time. If he's willing to get up there in his suit and hammer nails into a wall for winners' pictures or whatever it might be, I ... Why can't I?" Lead by example.

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Then you went to The Hilton, right?

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Right after that I went to The Reno Hilton, yeah, and he actually brought me down because of our relationship and I go from publicity and promotions to the more specialized player development. I was the Casino Marketing Manager, and here I have a whole new world, a whole new world of ... I think we had eight hosts at the time that had much more experience than me that reported to me and the same thing applied. I just watched them, tried to help, and help. It's all about people, it's all about ... This is a people business. They say ... People say to me all the time, "Well, you're in the money-making business", or, "You're the entertainment business." We're not. We're in the people business, and there's two groups of people [crosstalk 00:11:42]-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) More than any other business. More than any other business.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Oh yeah, because there's two groups of people that you gotta worry about. First is your team, and the second one is your guests, and that's been the same thing since probably the first casino opened to today and beyond. I learned a lot [crosstalk 00:11:57]-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Now-

[Matt Mingrone:](#) From him on people and that's what player development [crosstalk 00:12:00]-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Yeah, sounds like every [crosstalk 00:12:01]-

[Matt Mingrone:](#) That's all about people.

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Yeah. It sounds like everywhere you went you just soaked up the invitation and you make your transition and then you transitioned from Bay Mills to the GM at Eagle Mountain. Tell me a little bit about that transition for you, 'cause that was a big one, right?

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Yeah. Well, it was a major ... I had been ... When I came here to Eagle Mountain, I had been a Marketing Director or in marketing management for all ... At that time, probably 19 years of my career, and I got here to Eagle Mountain, I was the Marketing Director and our General Manager had retired, was getting ready to retire. He had been here already going on 10 years, so I was here about four years, but I kept ... He kept involving me. Here's another guy, Tom Stewart, kept involving me in other things besides marketing. "Help out food and beverage with this. Go look this over and help out the slot department." Or, "Work with

table games on staffing or tournaments." Things that would be more like an assistant GM, so I was fortunate to have people trust me, but also I'd ask for direction and then I'd follow it and get it done and maybe tweak it here and there to make it successful. It came down to being available, always being available.

When he retired, and lucky guy, got to go hunting and fishing and do all the things he wants to do, golfing, we sat around as a bunch of department heads and we're like, "Well, we're getting nervous. What if they bring in somebody that wants to change everybody?" I said, "You know what? Why not me?" Nobody said no, so that's how I kind of won over the council. Why not me? I know the team, I've been here four years at the time, four and a half years, I know the guests. I know the market. I might need some help with some of the other departments and stuff, but I know those teammates, those department heads, and I'm not a micromanager. I'm all about learning, and as long as we work together as a team, we'll be successful.

We've been very successful, thanks to God and this team, and it's been a great ... It'll actually June 1st will be five years as me being General Manager.

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Congratulations. When you took the job [crosstalk 00:14:23]-

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Thank you.

[Tino Magnatta:](#) How long had you been in the business?

[Matt Mingrone:](#) When I took the job [crosstalk 00:14:28]-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) I mean, five years in the business [crosstalk 00:14:33]-

[Matt Mingrone:](#) As GM, so 23 years. 23 years in the business.

[Tino Magnatta:](#) It took you 23 years to get to the GM business, and that ... I'm just saying that because a lot of our listeners are gonna be younger and just so that people ... Matthew, you and I know, you're not born a GM. It's a very complicated job, and you need a lot of times to learn a lot of different things because you're ... You have to know every single department pretty well because then you gotta read the numbers, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. Everybody listening out there, 23 years, five years as a GM, that's almost 30 years total, so ...

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Actually, February [crosstalk 00:15:08]-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Patience-

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Will be my ... 23rd ... My 29th years. It is patience. I didn't think I wanted that [crosstalk 00:15:13]-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Patience.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) That kind of responsibility. I never thought I wanted to care like how much the chips cost when we buy new chips or cards. How much the ... What the ... If it didn't have anything to do with marketing, I wasn't really sure, but then I kept thinking to myself, "I love how it all interacts. I love how every piece is part of this great puzzle, and being able to change some ... Whether it's cultural things or policy and procedure things that have an impact. Have a positive impact on the team, as our guests as well." That's what really got me. You know what? That's why I want to be GM, 'cause I want to make a positive impact on the business, but on the people and be able to do that.

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Yeah, and I mean, at the end of the day, you were ready for it. You felt confident [crosstalk 00:16:05]-

[Matt Mingrone:](#) I was.

[Tino Magnatta:](#) I think that you were ready for it. 23 years in the business, I mean, there weren't ... You worked most of the major departments with some great mentors. Talking about mentors, let's backtrack a little bit. You had some great mentors. Don Kennedy [crosstalk 00:16:22]-

[Matt Mingrone:](#) I have. Don Kennedy was a fantastic [crosstalk 00:16:24]-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Jim Kikumoto [crosstalk 00:16:25]-

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Mentor. Yeah, Jim Kikumoto of Chinook Winds, I just saw Jim ... Was it ... At G2E this past year I think it was and I kind of shocked him. I told him ... I said ... He was one of the guys that said down with every department head and went over that monthly P&L, line by line, and it forces you [crosstalk 00:16:44]-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Yeah, and how important is that?

[Matt Mingrone:](#) To understand ... It forces you to understand 'cause, number one, you didn't want to be embarrassed with your boss, but number two, you want to again make that impact where you're looked upon where you can be trusted. You know how to manipulate, you know how to work your budget to get the most impact, the most positive and add addition to the company bottom line. Yeah, between Jim Kikumoto, Don Kennedy, Tom Stewart, the last GM I had here, it really was interesting.

One thing they all had in common, they weren't micromanagers. They were, "I'll help you get your job done as a department head. I want your input, but there's gonna be sometimes I have to say no, but know if I have to say no that's on you because you have to prove to me what you're trying to sell me or get changed or purchased, you have to prove to me what's the worth of it. I'll help you get there, but I can't do your job for you."

I've worked with some bad people, some bad GMs where they were micromanagers. I'm not gonna use their names, but you come to appreciate ... We've all had those kind of bosses where they micromanage the heck out of it, which makes you appreciate the people that don't micromanage you and are more of a facilitator and less of a tyrant. Those are the things I ... That have really shaped me as a GM and I have a saying. "If I have to write your schedule or if I have to do your job, why do I have you?"

[Tino Magnatta:](#) That's right.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) It's ... I'm not [crosstalk 00:18:26] trying to be a jerk about it to anybody when I say it, and I understand ... I want that person to be the expert in their department. I want the slot directors to be the expert in slots. Table games, food and beverage, those department heads need to be the experts in their spots and then we work together as a team. What do we all bring to the table?

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Yeah, and if there's any issues they definitely you to run in some value. What are [crosstalk 00:18:52]-

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Right. I'm not sure that's a [crosstalk 00:18:52] facilitator, but ... What's that?

[Tino Magnatta:](#) What are some of the headwinds we need to watch out for in our industry? There's a lot of expansion and a lot of proliferating gaming and ...

[Matt Mingrone:](#) I think ... The thing that concerns me the most is more specialized. It's maybe too reliant on technology and data. I mean, I'm a big believer in data. I'm a big believer in really narrowing your focus and giving people what they want, but losing the personal touch scares me. Losing the one on one with a guest, whether they're the biggest player you have or an entry-level person that's never been to your property, that type of guest service always wins out.

They're guests, not customers. That was taught to me years and years ago. They're guests, not customers, and if you keep treating people like guests, that's far better ... Think about yourself. That's far better than being treated like a customer. You want to be treated as a guest, and that's what I think ... That kind of scares me. I love technology. I'm a big believer in technology in every day and I'm a techie myself in some regards when it comes to personal technologies, but I get a little nervous when we start to eliminate personal touch or people skills.

When you go to a grocery store and you see all of these ... Or a Walmart or a Target, where you see these self-checkout aisles. You have nobody touching with that person. You have nobody interacting with that person, and that kind of concerns me 'cause what if they have a complaint or what if they have a praise for somebody or something?

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Yeah, and [crosstalk 00:20:30]-

[Matt Mingrone:](#) That's my [crosstalk 00:20:31]-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Is that ultimately if you think about it, it's not all data, it's also part gut feeling because you're talking about the experience and you have run through the experience in your mind and you already had that experience, now you want to share it with the customer. That's not ... That's a visceral thing. That's not something that you can learn from data, right? Was like you saying [crosstalk 00:20:58]-

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Exactly.

[Tino Magnatta:](#) The feeling you had when you [crosstalk 00:21:02]-

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Then when-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) When you walked in ... When you saw the casino and people all dressed up and ... That you can't understand with data. That you have to experience that and recreate it.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) One of the things that has proved crazy successful ... When I first came to this property, the General Manager at the time Tom Stewart was telling me how great the guest service is, and I'm sure ... In my mind, I've been in the business 20 years, whatever it was, and I'm thinking to myself, "Yeah, I'm a marketing guy. I know how to use that. How true is that really?" Then, I took off my badge and I went and I stood by The Players Club and I was incognito, basically looking like a guest, and I started watching the interaction.

Now, for people that don't know, this is a casino that's located at the top of a mountain. It's hard to get to. It's practically switchback roads, and it's a typical locals' casino, but we're so financially successful. I started asking people, "Why do they come here when there's other places that are easier to get to? To play slot machines or to get to?" It came down to, "Well, they had relationships with the slot attendant, with the beverage server, with the cooks." I was listening to all of this anecdotal evidence that data would never have thought captured.

This property's in its 23rd year. This is the 23rd year in this property's existence and we're very, very financially successful because of the people. We have great slot machines, but so does the other guy. We have great table games and fun games, but so does the other guy. Good food, so does everybody. When it comes down to it, it's what's gonna make them make that decision, and it comes down to that personal touch. They were bringing Christmas gifts to a beverage server because they knew her kids liked a certain toy.

Or vice versa, you had a beverage server that had a couple of ... Or, I'm sorry, a slot attendant that had a couple of cigars because she knew it was that guest's birthday last week and she needed to see him and she knew what kind of cigar he liked. It's those kind of things that will live on and will continue to solidify

people. Talk about brand loyalty. Marketing can spend millions of dollars, but you can't get that kind of brand loyalty from a guest without that interaction, that personal touch.

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Now, do you think that our business ... Do you think that we do enough when we talk about ... I know everybody talks about customer service, right?

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative) [crosstalk 00:23:39]-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Are we doing enough with our customer service strategy? Are we taking it seriously enough that we're actually spending time and money to improve it like we spend money on marketing? Do you think that we have that attitude towards customer service?

[Matt Mingrone:](#) I don't know. I can't really speak for everyone. I know that it's a challenge. As an operator, as a GM, you certainly go, "Oh God, that's another thousands of dollars to get somebody in to come in to help", but you have to make certain effort and you gotta ... It starts at the top. I've been at several properties and you will know properties and stuff where they say, "We're gonna do tremendous guest service. This is our new program and we're gonna do it and you're get prizes and you're gonna get this and that." The next thing you know, it's a couple of months down the road. The GM's not paying attention, not playing his part actively supporting his direct reports. Then the direct reports don't support their direct reports. The supervisors don't support the front, and so within six months to maybe a year or two that program's gone and it doesn't really mean anything.

There's a thing that crap rolls downhill, excuse my language, it doesn't. It rolls uphill.

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Yeah, of course.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) It rolls uphill, 'cause who's responsible ultimately? It's me and it's everybody else that's with me. I know that places get a little disillusioned with, "We have the biggest, most-expensive hotel", or, "The biggest, most-expensive restaurant", or, "The biggest headline entertainment." If you don't make the people feel appreciated when they come in, make them feel appreciated when they leave, they're gonna go somewhere else. There's too many options nowadays. I mean, the proliferation is difficult. That's the competition, and it's anything you can spend your money on. Movie theater, restaurant [crosstalk 00:25:31]-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Yeah, it's growing. Yeah, and it doesn't have to be casinos. It's anything to do with entertainment.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) I ... Once we ... We did a real quick informal study at one of the casinos, I think it was at Bay Mills, and we just asked people as they were coming in and out,

what did they like the most? Or what did they like the best about the property? One of those things ... I really didn't care what they liked the most because those are good things. It's the problems that you want to fix. One of the things they said was, "Sometimes I can come in and spend \$500 or a thousand dollars, and that may not be a lot compared to what your other people spend, but that's a lot to me and sometimes I feel like I'm ignored. Or sometimes you don't know that I've spent that money or appreciate it."

That's why I've always taken that forward and said every interaction matters, even if the guest is just asking where the restroom is or what time the buffet opens. You treat them like they're the top player, like they're the most important person in front ... That we have. People appreciate that. Think of yourself, and I think of myself [crosstalk 00:26:34]-

[Tino Magnatta:](#)

Yeah, there's never enough [crosstalk 00:26:34]-

[Matt Mingrone:](#)

If I go someplace and ... Yeah, if it's apathetic. There's nothing ... There's bad service, but just as bad is apathetic service. I don't care. It's just as bad as someone being rude to you.

[Tino Magnatta:](#)

What would you tell the people coming up the ranks, the younger kids?

[Matt Mingrone:](#)

Patience, like we said previously, and always be open. When my boss used to call down the hall, "Hey, who wants to drive down to San Francisco? We gotta go to a trade and travel show and the sales team's tied up with something else." Or, "Who wants to give a tour of the casino? Do this." Or even today, "Who wants to go and" ... Somebody asked me, "Hey, can you come by and speak to our orientation class?" "Oh my God, I forgot. Yeah." Yeah, do I want to go home? Absolutely, but all those experiences add up to not just your resume but your understanding of people. Understanding of how this business works and helps you make decisions later on down the road.

That's ... I was so blessed to have people that would give me responsibility, give me direction, but give me the responsibility because they knew I would try my hardest, and then if made mistakes, which I have, nobody's perfect. Don't tell my ex-wife that. I've made some mistakes in my life, and we ... You gotta learn from those mistakes. One thing I pride myself on is not making the same mistake twice, but always be available and open for the challenge. If it means work, it means work, but in the end it's gonna help you. It might not be tomorrow. It might be six months, it might be five years from now. In my case, some of it was 23 years later where I got the change to make an impact.

[Tino Magnatta:](#)

Yeah, you're definitely doing that. What do you see in the future for our business 10, 15 years out?

[Matt Mingrone:](#)

I really like ... I do, and this is where I kind of contradict myself, I love the technology and I love the player games now that like Gamblit has and those

types of games with the skill-based games. I don't have any Gamblit games on my floor, so that was a free shout out to them, but I love those kind of skill-based games and I think you see it on cellphones, so you know it's just a natural progression in our business.

I think that as they're playing the Candy Crush and stuff today, you could have those types of games tomorrow in your floor, and I think it has to. We have to progress past ... Yes, the reels still have their place. Heck, in this day and age, we still have all these different pay lines and video games, but we still have some IGTs with the reels, Double Diamond Reels that are still just as popular. Everything has its place [crosstalk 00:29:32]-

[Tino Magnatta:](#)

Right, people like that.

[Matt Mingrone:](#)

I think the interaction of ... I think starting to intertwine the newer technology is kind of the way to get people back or get younger people more interested and more involved because it's something they're familiar with. I think the other part of it is getting back to our roots of being a service industry. We don't use that phrase too much anymore, but we are a service industry. That's one thing I noticed about hospitality. It does matter. I think that's still gonna play a major role. I know we used the thing about guest experience, user experience, but I think the main thing is to continue the combination of technology, personal touch. Technology where you want it, but also having that personal touch where you need it. I think that continues to be ... We're always gonna be the service industry, and I think coming forward, whoever can combine those together with those newer games and the newer ideas becomes the winner, really.

[Tino Magnatta:](#)

Positioning [crosstalk 00:30:45] yourself for the future.

[Matt Mingrone:](#)

Yeah, and that's really what it comes down to. Having a good time never goes out [crosstalk 00:30:51] of style.

[Tino Magnatta:](#)

No. No, of course not. You talked a little bit about how the ... When ... 2008 was the only time that the casino business actually reset itself because of the financial crisis. What happened then? Where has it grown to now? I think the competition is building, but what happened in 2008? What did we realize as an industry?

[Matt Mingrone:](#)

I'm not an expert, but what I witnessed was the people that got hurt by the 2008 more than other recessions that I know of 'cause I'm not that old, but where your average blue collar ... It was a housing ... The housing is what really started, right?

[Tino Magnatta:](#)

Yeah.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) These were people that were working class that maybe got into a loan or even middle class, got into a loan and then got destroyed by balloon payments and all that bad debt really piled and piled, and those were the people that were hurt. If you look at our business, everybody can talk about the 80/20 rule and their whales and at their top end, but really your life blood is your blue collar average ... They used to call 'em FITs, your [crosstalk 00:32:06]-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Minimum level, yeah. Yeah, the mid level.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) That's your [crosstalk 00:32:10]-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) That's your bread and butter. Yeah.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) That's your bread and butter, exactly, and whether you're a tourist place or a grind joint, local's grind joint, it turns out to be that that's the least amount of people you can lose. That's the least category you can lose, 'cause ...

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Yeah, it's most [crosstalk 00:32:28] valuable.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) That is the most valuable, and because that makes up a lot of your spend, and yeah, sure, your whales, your top end, your Diamond players or whatever, your elite players. Sure, but they weren't the ones that were hurt as much as the ... As much as everybody else in the beginning. Then everybody else tightened up and got nervous because we all did.

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Yeah, right.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) That's what originally ... To me, that's originally how it all started.

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Yeah, and that fundamentally changed because I think it was the first time the casino business had been hit and actually-

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Oh yeah.

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Got affected by the downturn in the economy, right?

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Well, yeah, because I remember when I first started in this business in '91, I remember my bosses and other department heads saying, "Two things that always go up in a recession or in an economic downturn: gambling and alcohol consumption." That was not the case this time because the people that were hurt the most were the people that didn't have as much to lose. I mean, they had more to lose but it meant more to them.

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Got it.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) That's [crosstalk 00:33:35] what I think happened.

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Should we take some calls?

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Yeah, let's do it.

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Hello, this is Tino Magnatta. Do you have a question for Matt, Matthew?

[Arcell:](#) I do. Hello? You hear me?

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Hello.

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Hello. We can, yes. How are you doing today?

[Arcell:](#) Good, good. Hi, my name's Arcell. I'm actually calling [crosstalk 00:33:54]-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Good.

[Arcell:](#) From New York City.

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Oh, great.

[Arcell:](#) Obviously, you talked a lot about some of the challenges from '08. My question for you is, what do you think was the biggest challenge that you have to overcome in current times right now?

[Matt Mingrone:](#) It's difficult right now. I'm in California and a lot of states are going through this now with minimum wage and things, but people having a livable wage. I think that's become a challenge, that and healthcare costs. There's two things that you can't control. You have to give people a livable wage and healthcare is going through the roof, right? We have no control of that, and so that's where you got to weigh out how your departments are structured. I have a saying that if you are getting full-time benefits, then I need to get full-time hours from you and needing to be leaner and meaner.

We used to have ... It was almost 40% of our workforce here was part time, but as the whole healthcare situation grew and grew, we've had to switch 'em over to full time, so we're probably more like 80-20 now and it's become a major expense that you have to really pay attention to. That's really the challenge, those expenses. Being able to control the things you can control, whether it's writing great schedules, keeping an eye on overtime, but it really comes down to the labor and which is benefits are part of it. The whole compensation package of your compensation expenses. That's to me ... That's our biggest challenge right now.

[Arcell:](#) Awesome. Thank you.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) You're welcome.

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Thank you so much. Have a good night.

[Arcell:](#) You as well.

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Hello, this is Tino Magnatta of GT Radio. Do you have a question for Matthew?

[Mike:](#) Aloha. Makai anui. How it's going today, Matthew?

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Good, makai anui [crosstalk 00:35:49]-

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Doing well, doing well.

[Mike:](#) Good. Great show so far. It's ... I always love to hear the come up stories and kind of the different challenges and you've kind of spoken to it a little bit. You're property not necessarily surrounded by population. What were some of the things that you do to keep that business stream going? Especially with those ups and downs with the economy? Where do you think that Eagle Mountain really has its niche?

[Matt Mingrone:](#) We've become ... We have a value ... We're a value proposition to our guests. We're a typical, blue collar locals joint. We don't have a hotel. We really have thrived on that guest service, but also as a locals mentality, keeping things reasonably priced. We are ... Our food and beverage is reasonably priced, our concert tickets are reasonably priced with the idea of being that value proposition. I think that helps in recessions as well. Being able to know you're gonna get more bang for your buck and get a great experience by the way you're treated. In turn, people spend more time with you.

It really comes down to if gas prices go up around here, that really hurts us so we have to look at, what are we doing? Whether it's through our Players Club, through ... What are we offering on the floor? What are you gonna eat in the restaurants? We've positioned ourselves as that value proposition, whether it's our whole percentage, our give-back percentage in our player development to continue that same making people feel like they're appreciated and making sure that they feel like they get value for their money. I think that's really what helps us, what's helped us for all these years, and what continues to help us through the next millennium.

[Mike:](#) Those are all good points and I really love the point you keep making about you can't forget the relationships in this business. It's so important to understand those relationship at every level. You also mentioned you've been fortunate to have some really great mentorship in your career. How do you identify potential candidates now who deserve or who need that mentorship so that you can develop the next generation so you have that succession plan when you're ready to start swinging the golf clubs?

[Matt Mingrone:](#)

Well, I think it starts with when you as a department head or a general manager actively involved in their day to day. You don't sit hiding in your office. One of the first general managers that I had, he would practice as he called it MBA, Management By Walking Around, MBWA, excuse me, Management By Walking Around. I try to practice that. It's not just to make a presence, but to talk to them and see. I think you'll find ... You'll see the attitudes, you'll see the conversations that you had if they're interested. Just by the people having those kind of situations by having access to whether it's through the department head or the general manager himself, taking an interesting in everybody and letting the ones that really have the initiative come to you. It really ... It makes it that much easier.

I used to have, and I still do it but I don't do it as often, I called them General Manager Roundtables, which I kind of stole from The Hilton. They used to do President ... Lunch with The President, I think it was called, and The Hilton did those periodically. I had about ... I think we did about 35, 36. Basically it was like 13 times on day shifts, swing shifts, and graveyard where I would come in on their shift and have a meal with them and just talk to 10 different people each time. Whether they were a supervisor or a frontline staff and I just asked them, "What's your biggest challenge? What do you want to do? Do you want to be a supervisor? Do you want to ... Are you going to school?" Just taking an interest in people.

Boy, did I learn some things that I was really upset about, but I also got to know a lot of people that were the reason why this property's so successful. It's again about like that word you used I agree a hundred percent, it's that relationship. I found out there are people that work in different departments that wanted to be a supervisor but didn't know how to go about it. I've turned their department head onto it. I've taken a few myself. I don't know everything, but all I know is just listening to somebody, you can help them a whole lot.

That's been our challenge. We're very homegrown in our department heads. We have ... I think it's over 30% team members, total team members have been here at least 10 years. We have 500 team members right now. That's a big number. 33, right around 32, 33% have been there at least 10 years. That means something's going right, and so a lot of them are department heads and supervisors and managers, and I encourage that. Even if you're not a supervisor and you want to be, come on in to the supervisor training. That's okay. I have no problem with that. That just shows initiative on your part.

[Mike:](#)

That's great. That's great [crosstalk 00:40:56]-

[Tino Magnatta:](#)

Absolutely.

[Mike:](#)

Give that personal touch and encouragement.

[Tino Magnatta:](#)

I think it's fantastic.

[Mike:](#) What are ... We've all been doing it for a while, so I think every operator has their own what I call pet peeves. What are some of your pet peeves that you've kind of [crosstalk 00:41:10]-

[Matt Mingrone:](#) I think two pet peeves that ... I think I already mentioned them but I didn't mention them as pet peeves. One is apathetic. Apathetic service. Apathetic way you do your job. You don't care, then why are you here? Micromanagement. I ... I've had some bad micromanagers and so I made that conscious decision that I was not going to allow that when I became GM, when I was able to change it. Those are my two big pet peeves. I've this thing about when I was doing these management roundtables and I was sitting with frontline staff, I found too many discrepancies of how things are done and so that became a saying, "If it's a rule for one, it's a rule for all", and that means me as well. I guess you would say favoritism or really inconsistent application of the rules bothers me. Those are my three, yeah.

[Mike:](#) That's ... Those are all good ones I think. Really fantastic. What's something that for you in your career, now that you've been chairing it for the last five years and you're implementing the vision, what do you see next for Eagle Mountain?

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Well, we're trying to move. Actually, we're trying to move down to Porterville, next to the Porterville Airport. The tribe has owned some land there for about 26 years. They've owned it in an industrial park, and we're in the process of getting a final EIS done and to get the ... It's part of the two-part determination to get the land into trust, which means the Department of the Interior and the Governor have to agree that it was ... It's beneficial for the tribe to move and it's not detrimental to the community where we're moving to, and so far, so good.

We're in the final process of that and getting to that new, big property where we can better serve our market area [crosstalk 00:43:10] and better serve our tribe. People ... This is my fifth tribe. People lose sight of the fact is we're not making the Board of Directors rich, we're not making stockholders rich, we're providing the funding for a government that provides for their people, whether it's police, fire, homing ... Housing, education, and the list goes on and on in tribal government. That's really what it comes down to. We're excited to be able to give them more.

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Great [crosstalk 00:43:39]. Mike, thanks so much. Great questions.

[Mike:](#) Yeah, thank you. It's all right. Enjoy your time, guys. Have a good one.

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Thank you so much [crosstalk 00:43:50]-

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Thanks, Mike. Appreciate it [crosstalk 00:43:50]-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Have a good night. Some great questions.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Yeah, definitely.

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Hello, this is Tino Magnatta. Do you have a question for Matthew?

[Hady Antisana:](#) [inaudible 00:43:58]. It's Hady Antisana, Matthew. How are you?

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Hello, Hady. How are you?

[Hady Antisana:](#) I'm doing fantastic, and [inaudible 00:44:07]. Wonderful [crosstalk 00:44:10]-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Hello, Hady [crosstalk 00:44:10]-

[Hady Antisana:](#) Seeing you at Naga as well. Two lesson that I often speak to about in my keynote, but today you gave me such amazing examples that I took away as well, is you putting up your hand and inviting yourself to that role of GM as opposed to waiting around to be asked. I think that's absolutely amazing and more and more people should learn from you with that. Very confident and courageous. The second one is your patience is ... You were ... To be successful you contact the elevator. You had to take the stairs and you certainly did take the stairs for I think for 23 years.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Well, I ... Yeah, and some of it was I didn't know if I wanted that responsibility, but then when it came down to it, it was that I wanted the responsibility, I just wanted to make sure I knew how to do it right, and the patience was part of it. I'm not normally a patient person in life. I'm really not, but in my career ... Also, I know what I don't know, and I know what I need to learn and I'm constantly trying to do that.

[Hady Antisana:](#) Sure.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Each job has been a different learning experience, whether it's been about the people or my own ... It's more learning about myself. When I finally got here, I definitely was ... I knew myself and I knew I could do it.

[Hady Antisana:](#) On that note, most of your career was as a marketing director and in marketing. What did you take away from market ... Your marketing experience that helped you and served you best in your experience as a GM?

[Matt Mingrone:](#) We always talk about in marketing attracting guests. Attracting guests, expending gifts, visits, and bringing 'em back for another visit. When I become the GM, that doesn't change, but my scope, instead of focusing just on marketing, spreads out those same principles across all departments. When it came down to ... Again, it's the person, not a number, not a card number, not a position even. It's the person, it's those personal relationships that you have in casino marketing as a host or a player development person. Having my focus be, let's say, in slots, okay, how are we gonna help them attract more people or

extend their visits? Food beverage, how do we attract more people, extend visits, bring people back for an additional visit?

Those three goals are always in the back of my head in my department. Now, somebody would say, "How does that affect the drop team? Well, on the drop team it's not about my guests, it's about my team. How do I [crosstalk 00:47:07]-

[Hady Antisana:](#) Exactly.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Attract ... How do I attract team members that want to be here? How do I keep them [crosstalk 00:47:12] here and make them happy in doing what they're doing? That's when I always refer back to the people business, and I have two groups of people to worry about. I think you've heard me say this. I worry about my team first and foremost. If I don't take care of my team, then they're not gonna be able take of my [crosstalk 00:47:29]-

[Hady Antisana:](#) Sure.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) And [crosstalk 00:47:31]-

[Hady Antisana:](#) It's not only [crosstalk 00:47:32] about ... Yeah, so it's not about only for you the guest experience but it's also the employee experience that's important.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Absolutely. Actually, it's paramount, and that's why they're ... In our building, it's you're part of the team, you're not an employee, and they're our guests, they're not customers.

[Hady Antisana:](#) On that last note, billboards and you being in marketing you know that billboards sell the brand's experience, the brand promise, but the employees actually deliver on that promise, hence them being so [crosstalk 00:48:07]-

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Absolutely.

[Hady Antisana:](#) Paramount, so how do you ensure that your employees do not become apathetic and do not complacent and that they elevate their game all the time? What do you do towards that?

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Well, we're trying to do a couple of different things. I mean, everybody's had guest service programs in different properties. We're looking at different ways of motivating our team, both within the department and within the whole property. Way back in the day, Harrah's used to do the Better People Place and they even had competitions between departments. We're working on ideas like that, but one of the biggest things ... Again, I hate to use the same example, but it's really just listening and making sure the department heads are empathetic to the teammate's struggle.

Whether it's in their work or in their personal life, but especially, what's your biggest challenge? That's what I ask people all the time. What's your biggest challenge in your job? It always leads into personal life, which we have school, we have life. Life's messy, right? It's easy to say, "Well, keep your personal life at home." How hard is that? That's impossible.

[Hady Antisana:](#) Sure.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) That's who you are, so having a department head or general manager be empathetic to people's struggles and empathetic to what the goal is and understanding that how if this person's happy to be here and feels appreciated just like if your guest feels appreciated, that they're gonna want to go and keep coming back and want to be a manager and pass on that great tradition.

[Hady Antisana:](#) Awesome [crosstalk 00:49:44]-

[Matt Mingrone:](#) That's really [crosstalk 00:49:44]-

[Hady Antisana:](#) Matthew [crosstalk 00:49:44]-

[Matt Mingrone:](#) To me.

[Hady Antisana:](#) Thank you so much and thank you Tino. We'll chat. Thank you, gentlemen. Have a good evening.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Thank you.

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Thanks for calling in.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Have a good night [crosstalk 00:49:56]-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Have a good night. Bye-bye.

[Hady Antisana:](#) You too.

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Hello, this is Tino Magnatta. Do you have a question for Matthew?

[Rob:](#) I do. Matthew, Tino, thank you for getting me on your show tonight. Matthew, you've been very inspirational. A lot of good comments. Thank.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Oh, thank you for calling in.

[Rob:](#) You're welcome. You bet. I had a question on I guess technology. You look at like bill rejections and back in the days, they had candlelights going off on the slot machines to tell you the paper's low and to replace it, whatnot. How do you view technology? I was actually at the ... It's funny you mention it, there at The Horizon at Lake Tahoe. I did some consulting down there. How do you view

technology in the next five years? Or how often to maybe improve that guest experience? I've been at properties where we text hosts right when a VIP arrives so that the host can then go in and give that personal touch, go talk to that customer right to that slot machine.

Throughout the years, and you remember back in the days when you had slot table and ... Or slots in the table. Radiant slips where they do the manta lead to now it's all [crosstalk 00:51:18] automated. Right? How do you view technology and all the data you guys have? How can we make the gaming experience better for customers? Or how can you recognize 'em faster? Or how can we pay out that jackpot faster? Right? The whole macro part of things. People are being serviced quicker by actual people, but they're using technology to kind of help support the jobs they're doing.

[Matt Mingrone:](#)

I don't know if this is possible, but I'm looking forward to the day where it's so personalized that, yeah, it's technology and they recognize you when you walk through the door and you sit down at your machine and it says, "Welcome, Matthew. Here's your favorite games you played the last three visits. Would you like to play something different?" At the same time, I want to have somebody say ... Come up and shake my hand, and how you can integrate those two pieces I think is the biggest challenge and how ... Technology is awesome. I love technology, and I really ... I want to have my own robot butler and name him Alfred, but ... I have a secret desire to be Batman, but ... I have a secret desire to be Batman, but ultimately I'm not gonna eliminate my family members just because I have a robot butler.

The idea is, how can we go forward, 'cause guest service doesn't go out of style, personal touch doesn't go out of style. The need, the human need to ... Even if you've got a complaint, to tell a human being your complaint, to be heard, whether it's a compliment or a complaint, that's never gonna go away, so how does technology help you do that? How does technology help you deliver the service you need? See, it's a tool. Back ... Remember when all of a sudden the internet became popular and everybody had to have a website, and then all of a sudden everybody's website was just like a static brochure on a screen. Like, so what? Now you look at websites nowadays. They play music, they have videos, you can have AI experiences within those websites, but ultimately, you still want to talk to somebody when you want to make a hotel reservation or when you have a complaint.

How do we combine the two? I don't have the answer for that, but I think whoever can figure out the way, in multiple systems maybe, that's gonna be the most successful place to be.

[Rob:](#)

Yeah, yeah. You see eventually technology playing as far as automation or being able to notify employees quicker or some type of role into customer service?

[Matt Mingrone:](#)

Absolutely. I think it's really what it comes down to. Yeah, I mean, it would be great if your ... Let's say it's a bill acceptor jam that you press a button and the

bill acceptor jam unjams itself, yeah, that's no big deal. It would be nice for somebody ... When I walked in the door and I went up to the bar and said, "Hey, Matthew, how you been? We haven't seen you in a while." You actually have a person to say hi. Those kind of things through ... Not facial recognition, but something similar where as soon as you walk into the building, no matter who you are, if you're a rated player of any level, then you have some sort of appreciation, which again, will turn around and drive more people to be involved in the club.

Rob: Yep. Yeah, I agree. I think through all the customer studies and focus groups I've done, the number one things the customers come back saying is recognition. They want their recognition when they come in, so it's good. Yeah, I appreciate your comments, Matthew. Thank you.

Matt Mingrone: Thank you for calling.

Tino Magnatta: Thank you, Rob. Take care, buddy. Yep, great stuff. I think you got time for one more great question, so ... Hello, this is Tino Magnatta. Do you have a question for Matthew?

Speaker 7: Hello, can [crosstalk 00:55:12] you hear me?

Tino Magnatta: We sure can.

Speaker 7: Hello? Hi, how are you [crosstalk 00:55:17]-

Tino Magnatta: Hello? Can you hear us? Good, good. How about yourself?

Speaker 7: I'm doing well. I ... Can you hear me okay?

Matt Mingrone: Yeah, we can hear you loud and clear.

Speaker 7: Great. Matt, I've really been enjoying your conversation and all the things you said. Interesting. I was doing a crash course on who you are and I realized that you grew up not too far from me and you went to Kent and we both worked at Viejas a million years ago, and I share your passion about guest service and also about technology. I have a couple of questions. I guess the first thing is basically a comment. I'm currently working on some projects on the Las Vegas Strip and in that role I've been shopping casinos as an unidentified hotel guest and then a player. The sense that I'm getting from many of those larger properties on the Strip is if anything, technology is used to replace people and it's not used to ... In my experience, it's not being used to empower a team member to go and fix a service issue or things like that.

I've stayed at properties where I waited over an hour and a half for what turned out to be a worn out room service dinner. The 85 fox or something and calls to see where it is. Nobody answers ... Literally nobody answers the phone, and

then it's inedible and you call room service again and you get another voice prompt and say they will get back to you and they never do. Frankly, to be honest, I may never work again, but that's [inaudible 00:57:01] happening on the Las Vegas Strip. I don't see technology used to enhance guest experience. I see technology used to replace humans to save an extra one-tenth of 1% to put to the bottom line for investors. I don't know that putting return on investment ahead of customer service is the right way to go.

I was just wondering if you had any thoughts on that, and then I have another question for you.

[Matt Mingrone:](#)

Well, I agree. I mean, when it comes down to it, if the person doesn't feel appreciated, doesn't feel like you value them, no matter how big or how small they play, they're gonna go find someone that does. To me, technology's the ultimate tool in helping along the way. Helping implement that, whether it's like you said, empowering a team member to be able to take care of that guest, or even ... Yeah, it gets busy in room service, but wouldn't it be cool if you had almost a hologram where you talked to that person directly where they could still be doing multitasking and still be able to get your problem across.

It has to be used as a tool. I don't think you can be absolute one way or another, no technology or all technology. It really comes down to the human need. As I said prior, the human need to communicate with somebody and to have somebody to hear you, whether it's good or bad.

[Speaker 7:](#)

Yeah, I ... Absolutely accurate and I see it disappearing in some instance, and I think that's a loss.

[Matt Mingrone:](#)

One of the things ... I mean, if you keep in mind, one of the reasons why, and correct me if I'm wrong, Tino, or even if you disagree me ... Either one of you disagree with me, but one of the ways that the tribal casinos in California back in the days of Viejas when they first started in '96, '97, when we were first starting to get things up and running, one of the reasons why they became so popular is because we took care of the people that maybe weren't the whales and the top end players. We took care of the average person and we did it with a smile on our face. We were appreciative of them.

That's why they didn't go to Vegas as much or at all sometimes. They went to The Baronas and Viejas and Sycuans and even Pechangas, because they knew the dealers. They knew the slot attendants, and they were treated like they were special. That's really what won over California.

[Speaker 7:](#)

Yeah. It's a huge state for gambling. They say it's ... Twice it's surpassed Nevada at a certain point, so yeah, you're absolutely right. It's all local, right?

[Matt Mingrone:](#)

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[Speaker 7:](#) You know [crosstalk 00:59:43]-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) It's all local [crosstalk 00:59:43]-

[Speaker 7:](#) We're working with a property right now that's actually in California and they pride themselves in a similar sort of guest service experience that they believe that they provide, and there certainly is a core of repeat guests that have been going there for decades that know them by name and bring gifts and replicate some of the thoughts that you had. As a consultant there, I also without a jacket and a tie and blue jeans, I walked around. I didn't experience that as somebody that was unknown to them and I think to some extent that organic, natural growth of that sort of culture is the most honest and the most sincere, but as managers we have to learn how to duplicate that for everyone. Not just the known players, but the person walking in that's new.

I'm wondering ... I was thinking when you said that you're hopefully going to be moving to a more central location with access to a greater market, how fragile do you think those relationships are and that culture is? How do you move that from point A to point B without losing your soul?

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Well, sure. Actually, we're in a very advantageous spot. We're moving down to be closer to our guests, as both our current guests and potential guests that live in Porterville is where we are that won't make the drive right now, 'cause it's up a very wind-y road and at night it's not a pleasant drive, and especially if it's rainy or foggy. We have that advantage, but I've worked at other places where we moved or done things where we had to be very conscious of that. When you build a new place or remodel a section of a casino, what does every guest say? "Oh, yeah, I paid for that. Now they're gonna tighten them a share." Right? That's the [crosstalk 01:01:51]-

[Speaker 7:](#) Yeah, yep. That's right.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) One other big challenge that we have is not changing who we are. That you're gonna get the same service, that same personalized service even though we're gonna be bigger and we're gonna have almost twice as many team members, but we're gonna get the same service, the same feel. We're not changing our name, but we're making a specific effort to make sure we don't change that level of service. To make sure that it stays at eye level and to make sure that those relationships, whether it's between departments or with guests and individuals, that it doesn't change. We didn't just all of a sudden become elite or exclusive. We're still, as we were named by guests, The People's Casino. We're for the people, and even though we're gonna have more amenities to take care of the better players, we also are gonna have a nicer facility and better access for all the players, no matter what your level is.

That's the promise that you have to make and that's your brand. Your brand is that promise, and so this brand has had longevity and we're not gonna change that just because we're moving into a new house.

[Speaker 7:](#) Yeah. Well, that's great [crosstalk 01:03:04]-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) That's great.

[Speaker 7:](#) I wish you all the luck when that occurs, and I've enjoyed this evening. Thank you so much, Matthew.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Thanks for the call [crosstalk 01:03:10]-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Thanks [crosstalk 01:03:11]. Really appreciate it.

[Speaker 7:](#) That ... Take care.

[Tino Magnatta:](#) What a great show, man. It just flew by.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) It did. It did fly by.

[Tino Magnatta:](#) It's been a pleasure having you on the show, and [crosstalk 01:03:26]-

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Thanks for having me [crosstalk 01:03:26] I really appreciate it [crosstalk 01:03:27]-

[Tino Magnatta:](#) Yeah, and I really look forward to having you back as soon as you got ... I know that you got a lot of things going on and there could be some measured moves happening within the next year or so, so we definitely want you back on the show. Thanks so much, Matthew, and we will ... We'll definitely talk soon.

[Matt Mingrone:](#) Thanks, Tino. Thanks for everything. Appreciate it. Have a good night.

[Tino Magnatta:](#) I'll talk to you soon. Bye-bye.

What a great guy. A lot of information, and just a great storyteller and patient. 23 years before he became a GM. Next ... Not next week, actually Thursday I have two women that I've had on the show before, Colleen Birch from Cosmopolitan and Suzanne Trout from Foxwoods. Amazing people. Their interviews were amazing, so I can't wait to have them both on the show.

Remember, everybody's got a story to tell, you just have to have time to listen. You have a good night tonight. Thank you very much for listening. Goodbye.

END