

Solving the Tilt Equation

In game where variance can pummel you like a heavyweight boxer it can often be difficult to keep your emotions in check. Going on tilt is the bane of poker players across the world and has caused more than a few bankrolls to go the way of the Titanic and fill the coffers of the fish with riches.

Understanding the nature of tilt is half the battle and in this article I'm going to outline the only reasons why you tilt and in what ways it affects your play at the poker table. First off, we need to accurately define what we mean by tilt and make that definition as narrow as possible in order to develop a specific strategy to accurately deal with it.

"TILT IS ONLY BAD PLAY CAUSED BY BEING ANGRY."

Sometimes common wisdom in poker often defines tilt as broadly as simply playing bad. But if you want to play better you need to know what caused the bad play. Loss of focus, autopilot, anxiety, going against your gut, out leveling yourself, or overconfidence, to name a few, all require a different strategy to solve the problem. This definition of tilt is important because it firmly cements it as just an anger issue, and therefore narrows the focus of your inquiry into the nature of what's made you so pissed off. To really figure out this definition and address the issue of tilt we can create a formula that states:

TILT = ANGER + BAD PLAY

By focusing on the formula for tilt in this way we can begin to see that it is a problem that, much like a math equation,

can be solved. Now that we've established that tilt is an anger issue it becomes much easier to identify various factors that make us angry or go on tilt. These reasons are numerous and can be anything from running poorly, mistakes or wanting revenge against a certain player. Moreover, you can become frustrated because of situational factors such as computer problems, life issues, or the jerk sitting next to you. Essentially there are many reasons why you might get angry at the poker table and play sub-optimally.

It is important to note that tilt is only a problem because our brain is designed to shut down the higher brain functions that control logical thinking, decision making, planning, organization, etc, when anger (any emotion really) rises too high. Also known as the fight or flight response, when you're no longer able to think clearly you play poorly. It's as simple as that. If the brain didn't automatically shut off your ability to think, and you could maintain control over your rational thoughts when angry, tilt wouldn't exist. You'd play fine and just be angry.

BUT WHAT IS ANGER?

It's a question few people stop and think about, but is key to moving towards solving your tilt problem. Anger is

THE TILT OF TILT

You're angry because you're angry. For example, you hate making mistakes and get angry. The more you think about the mistake the angrier you get and more if you realize you made a really bad mistake. Essentially your mind can't make sense of why you're actually angry so you get more frustrated. A dog can be angry but it doesn't know it's angry. When you know you're angry it can cause more anger.



the emotion that represents conflict. In poker that conflict is between how you want poker to be and what actually happens. Basically this is a discrepancy between what you know (taken to mean your whole knowledge and experience of poker) and the reality of poker (which encompasses your opponents and the game itself). So for example, when you are competitive and want to win badly, but lose, you get frustrated. Continue to lose and that frustration builds into tilt.

The conflict between you and poker is really no different than what happens between two friends. If one of you does something stupid or balks at repaying a debt, it's reasonable to be pissed off at them. In poker, as it is with friends, once the conflict has been resolved the anger goes away, and so does tilt. It's often hard to identify the specific conflict in poker, and helping you to do that is one goal of these articles.

Anger, like all emotions also exists along a spectrum of intensity that starts with mild frustration, builds into anger and further into full

blown monkey tilt. Everyone has a certain threshold before they get too angry and the brain starts shutting off thinking. How and when this threshold is breached is different for everyone and one step in gaining control of tilt is finding this point. To illustrate this point further, think of anger or tilt as the water in a water balloon. Each time we encounter a situation that causes frustration or anger, more water gets pumped into the balloon until it eventually bursts. The point just before it bursts is your threshold.

To make matters worse, if you fail to resolve the cause of your tilt, the point at which the bubble will burst gets sooner and sooner. For example, some players can handle many bad beats in a day, but during periods of running bad when it happens day after day after day, eventually you tilt after just the first bad beat.

Lastly, just because you don't go on an expletive ridden tirade like Phil Hellmuth, doesn't mean you're tilt free. Many players tilt internally, and still make just as many mistakes as some more vocal about their frustrations. >>



Phill Hellmuth is well known for going on tilt and letting everyone know it.

TILT PROFILE:
OVER THE NEXT MONTH KEEP TRACK OF THE FOLLOWING:

THE RESULT

➤ Now that we've established that tilt is an anger issue we can look at the second part of the equation and examine bad play. First off, eliminating tilt doesn't automatically mean that you eliminate all the mistakes that happen in your game when on tilt. Here's why. When on tilt, and you've lost the ability to think clearly, you fall back on the parts of the game you've already mastered. The decision to shove the river with air, is not an emotional decision, it's based on something that you're really skilled at. Yes, bad play is a skill you're good at and tilt essentially exposes these underlying bad habits. Often time just recognizing these terrible plays in turn

cause even more frustration, and then even worse decisions. (see Tilt of Tilt boxout).

Understanding this concept is not only important in the fight against tilt but is a wholly liberating notion. Realizing that your decline in performance is a direct result of your brain's natural functioning is crucial to the idea that tilt is not entirely your fault. But while you have absolutely no control over the brain shutting down when it crosses the threshold (or the balloon bursts), you can solve your tilt problem. First by understanding the patterns of your tilt; second by controlling it while you play; and lastly by correcting the underlying conflict that causes you to become angry.

- 1) WHAT CAUSES YOU TO TILT? (Triggers)**
- 2) WHEN YOU'RE ON TILT DESCRIBE HOW YOU KNOW YOU ARE ON TILT?** What are the physical signs or actions (heat in your head, punching the table), the things you say out loud or in your head, as well as the specific poker mistakes you make. (Tendencies)
- 3) WHAT ARE THE EARLY SIGNS OF TILT?** The tendencies that show up before reaching your threshold.
- 4) TRY TO ESTABLISH YOUR THRESHOLD.** The point you can still take action and do something about your tilt.

In next month's article we will delve further into how to control tilt while you play. Until then you can work on your own "Tilt Profile" which will help you better understand your tilt.

Since it's impossible to control something you don't first understand, work on your tilt profile and then next month you'll begin to learn how to control what happens when you tilt. [CLICK](#)