



## Dealing with Overconfidence

A little confidence can go a long way but too much self-belief can have a devastating effect on your game. This month **Jared Tendler** turns his attention to a much misunderstood issue in the poker world.



Jamie quickly discovered a golden WSOP win can quickly lose its value if you overrate yourself.

**I**n my previous articles I've devoted a lot of space to the effects a run of negative variance can have on your game.

However, the pendulum of variance is a non-biased cycle of fortune, and in the blink of an eye a spell of positive variance can engulf your game and with

it, a seemingly infinite amount of the green stuff. When things are going well it can seem like poker is easy and that winning is a formality. But believing your own hype and becoming overconfident is and as much of a destructive force as tilt and something you need to avoid at all costs.

**KEY POINT**  
Too much of a good thing in any aspect of life can be a bad thing – but it can be especially bad in poker.

My intention here is to not only offer an alternative theory on the impact of overconfidence on your game, but to give you a better perspective and method of dealing with the issue of overconfidence. However, before I go any further I want to address the two key issues which I think are important:

**1** Popular poker wisdom has suggested that overconfidence is not a problem. This view is not only outdated but completely false, in my opinion. Overconfidence is a problem and in some cases it can be more destructive than under confidence or tilt. Indeed, some players have gone broke because of overconfidence issues.

**2** Overconfidence is winner's tilt. However, it's not an example of tilt. Tilt is a form of anger (see my previous articles on tilt), but overconfidence or winner's tilt is not. Therefore, by definition, overconfidence is not a form of tilt. It's important to make this distinction because it takes a completely different strategy to deal with overconfidence, because it's caused by excessively positive feelings about your game rather than anger. Essentially, you feel too good relative to your actual skill.

this “2d” image in the background crops up a lot

**Confidence = your actual skill + the perception of your actual skill.**

When you become overconfident your perception of your actual skill gets so overblown that it overtakes you emotionally, much the same way that tilt, fear or any other emotion shuts down your ability to think clearly.

This in turn causes you to make poor decisions in the heat of the moment. Essentially, even though you think you can sit across from Phil Ivey and win, you can't. It's a feeling and that feeling isn't a true reflection of your actual skill. However, overconfidence is such a powerful emotion that it can make you believe things that aren't real.

### Leveling Yourself

In poker, it's so hard to know what your actual skill is because of the amount of variance in the game. Most players default to a results-oriented way of thinking and base

their perception solely on how much they've won or lost. The reason most players get overconfident is because they're purely results orientated and subsequently equate these results to their level of skill, which is a mistake. So how do you assess your skill? Obviously results are important but they don't tell the whole story, which is why you also need to look toward other players for feedback as well as develop your own opinions on your game based on many hours of play.

Results may point toward skill over a large sample, but in the short term, they aren't reliable. Believing that any game you play is like an ATM is a dangerous mentality as it leads you to assume you can play anyway you like and still win. When you become too confident, your edge becomes indistinguishable from

**KEY POINT**  
Quantifying your own skill can be tough, which is why it's important to seek the opinions of those players you deem more skilled than yourself.

variance and you lose perspective on what is actually generating your results.

### Money Won vs. Money Earned

Creating a thought process that forces you to distinguish between what you've won and what you've earned is important. The money you've won is essentially being held in escrow, and unless you increase the quality of your game to a point where you've theoretically earned it, you'll have to pay it back. If you believe it's your money it fuels your overblown perception of your edge and makes the reality of variance tougher to deal with.

In poker, as in sport, there are countless stars who have gotten ahead of themselves and then disappeared. So how can you avoid the same fate?

## The Solution

The main thing you need to work on is getting a better sense of your actual skill, rather than allowing yourself

to get caught up in the perception of your abilities when you're on an upswing.

- 1 Get better at recognizing subtle variance:** Notice the small things that are going your way, as well as the coolers and lucky hands you make.
- 2 Separate what you've “won” vs. what you've “earned”:** You don't need to come up with an actual number, but you do need to go through the process of thinking in this way.
- 3 Treat overconfidence like tilt:** When the emotion rises, take a deep breath and go through the logic process (re. tilt articles). This time the logic statement is, “My skill doesn't entitle me to the money I've won. How do I define my actual skill?”
- 4 Prevention:** Catching the problem before it takes over is essential. If you've been handing out bad beats left, right and center, you must recognize this as positive variance and continue to focus on playing solid poker.

## Conclusion



You can't be as skilled as quickly as variance lets you believe. This isn't to say you can't become good quickly. You can, but you can't master everything in a flash.

Even if your good run is due to you playing better and not variance, you can't relax and let yourself

think you've owned those particular things. Indeed, as soon as you stop focusing on them, you'll become complacent and start making mistakes again. Realizing the reality, and not the rose-tinted reality that positive variance lets you believe, is essential and the only way to eliminate overconfidence from your game. **WPT**