

Success is in the Cards

According to **Ellen Leikind**, author of *PokerWoman: How to Win at Love, Life, and Business Using the Principles of Poker* (Mary Ann Liebert Inc., Publisher, 2010), the skills that make a poker player a winner at the table are the same skills that can make her a success at life. Whether you're looking for a soul mate or a corner office, Leikind says, you'll need to know your hand (where you're strong and where you're weak), bet strategically, and understand your opponents. "Good poker players know you play the players, not the cards," she says. Leikind, who is not a professional poker player, but an accomplished professional with an MBA, deals us in.



Who taught you to play and when did you discover that poker skills were essential life skills?

I learned how to play from my mother when I was a teenager and we would play off and on as I grew up. As an adult, I worked at Pfizer Pharmaceuticals and at L'Oreal in marketing and new product development. I walked away from poker for many years but when I took a year off from work about six or seven years ago, I started playing in a weekly game of Texas Hold 'Em. When I re-entered the workplace (I'm now an executive consultant at a top infomercial company), I started comparing situations at the poker table with events that happened at the office. The real moment it dawned on me was when somebody I had previously worked with asked me to do a freelance project. Typically, many people can do a freelance assignment but this was so specialized that there weren't many people who had experience in this area. My potential employers asked me to come down on price but I realized I had "pocket aces"—the best hand you can have—so I stayed firm and sure enough, they paid what I asked. That was the light bulb moment.

What lessons does poker teach?

When you start to play poker, you think it's all about what you're dealt, but later you learn it's how you play those cards. You'll play differently against different players. Poker gives you the skill to read and understand people's motivation. For some people it's the win, for some it's the socialization. You learn who is aggressive, who is fearful, and you learn how to exploit that. I also talk about the importance of position and how the last person to act is at an advantage. Information is power.

Do women play differently than men?

Yes, women play more passively than men in a co-ed game.

While men can be recklessly aggressive, you'll see women hoarding their chips—even when it's a practice game and the chips have no value whatsoever. They don't play to win; they play to avoid losing. Poker gives women confidence because it gets them out of their comfort zone and encourages them to be more assertive. They learn to stop "betting like a girl" and be competitive, but in a friendly, social way.

How does poker help you in personal relationships, especially romantic ones?

Women have a tendency to wander into a relationship and "see what happens." In poker, you can't do that. You'd better know what you're looking for and you'd better be in the right game with the right players to get it. If you want to get married and you're dating men who just want a good time, you're in the wrong game. It's like being at a low-stakes table when you want a big purse. And in poker, you learn that if you're not getting a read and you don't know where you stand, you can put in a "feeler bet" to provoke a telling response. Ask questions, don't let it ride!

So this book is more like an empowerment program than a how-to?

Absolutely! This is not a "how-to" book about poker, it's an empowerment program that shows even women who have never played before how to break into the boys' club at work (poker is an important networking tool), find their confidence, and use their skills to get what they want out of life.

How can women learn more about you and your workshops?

Visit www.pokerprimadivas.com for information about classes, workshops, and events. **WAG**

Ellen Leikind, author of *PokerWoman: How to Win at Love, Life, and Business Using the Principles of Poker* Leikind's book is available on www.Amazon.com or www.Liebertpub.com/poker

