

Jackpot! Harrah's Winning Secrets for Customer Loyalty

By Robert L. Shook

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The inside story of the gaming company that hit the jackpot playing by its own rules
Robert L. Shook, a New York Times bestselling author, delves into the business behind one of the world's foremost gaming and entertainment companies, Harrah's. Since Bill Harrah took over a small card game business in 1937, Harrah's has become a top casino, dominating Nevada and beyond. The first gaming company listed on the New York Stock Exchange, Harrah's is a $4 billion-dollar business driven by smart marketing and smarter leadership. This book is the first to examine Harrah's and its leader, a man who dominated an industry and amassed a staggering fortune while refusing to deal with mobsters and corrupt politicians. Though Bill Harrah died in 1978 and the company has since been sold, Harrah's has retained its sense of history and remained an industry leader. Following the company's growth, Shook uncovers rich business lessons about marketing and customer loyalty, increasing market share in fiercely competitive industries, and maintaining a sense of integrity in a cutthroat business world. This is a compelling and intriguing story of a company that gambled and won, and it offers business readers an opportunity to benefit from the hard-won lessons of a paragon of the entertainment industry.
Robert L. Shook (Columbus, OH) is a seasoned business journalist and the ghostwriter behind several New York Times bestsellers. He is the founder and former CEO of Shook Associates and the American Executive Life Insurance Company. He is the author or coauthor of thirty-five books, including The IBM Way, Mary Kay on People Management, and Mary Kay's You Can Have It All.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly
Tourists who visit many casinos are considered "promiscuous." How, then, does a casino foster "customer monogamy"? Business book veteran Shook (coauthor, Longaberger) examines gaming behemoth Harrah's to find out. Based in "clean" Reno (as opposed to "dirty" Las Vegas), Bill Harrah began in the mid-1930s, combining a risk-friendly outlook with customer-service fanaticism. Indeed, Shook attributes Harrah's success primarily to its founder's ironclad adherence to the golden rule. Harrah insisted that his casinos ban "shills" (house players), instituted detailed employee background checks and installed the "eye-in-the-sky," all of which eventually became Nevada gaming law. Harrah's is a transitional organization, bridging shady Las Vegas with legitimate, family-oriented corporations. After the founder's death in 1978, pragmatic successors Mike Rose and Phil Satre shepherded Harrah's toward wider expansion by partnering with Holiday Inns, moving into new territories, imposing a corporate structure and using IT to track customer activity. Among the book's lessons: think long-term, understand your market and, most emphatically, watch that customer-he has much to teach you. Largely a story of horizons identified and conquered, there's virtually no conflict here. But Shook spins a well-researched, focused account that offers uniformly sound advice, although its applicability to other fields is open to question. At times the book reads like a product of Harrah's own PR department, perhaps an unavoidable pitfall for a book about a company as worthy of emulation as this.
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From Library Journal
How does one casino differentiate itself from another? Harrah's does it by developing customer loyalty instead of theme casinos. Shook, a prolific business writer, has detailed the history and business strategy of the Harrah's casino organization, from its 1937 founding to the present. If the reader can ignore the exclamation points at the end of many sentences, this book provides a fascinating look inside the gambling industry. The author arranges the story in three sections: Part 1 covers the establishment of Harrah's first casino in Reno, Nevada and the running of the company until the death of its innovative founder, Bill Harrah. Harrah's took its first risk by establishing itself in Reno when all other casinos were in Las Vegas. Part 2 chronicles the sale of the company to Holiday Inn and its expansion into Atlantic City. Part 3 details the spinning off of Harrah's into a separate company again and its continued growth as more states legalized gambling. Throughout the book are extensive interviews with Harrah's employees from top management down to card dealers and wait staff. An index would have been useful, but this is otherwise an excellent purchase for business collections of all libraries.
Stacey Marien, American Univ., Washington, DC
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