

This is a sample chapter from [Reading Poker Tells](#) (2012), by Zachary Elwood.

GRABBING CHIPS DEFENSIVELY

A player who acts as if he is going to call you is probably weak.

You're playing limit Hold'em. You're heads-up on the river against a mediocre player. You've got **Ad 8d**. The board is **As Ts 7c 2d 3d**. You've bet the flop and the turn. From the way the hand's been played, you think it's even-money whether your opponent has a Ten or a better Ace.

You contemplate a value bet. As you do so, you play with your chips. You notice your opponent grabbing his chips as if he's ready to call your bet. This is an important clue; you know that this player, like many players, makes this intention-to-call gesture only when he is fairly weak. You bet your hand and he calls with Ten-King, which is exactly the kind of hand you expected to see.

Think about it this way: why would a player with a strong hand give you any indication that he was going to call you if you bet? This is almost always a ploy designed to slow you down and discourage a bet.



The player on the left is contemplating a bet. The player on the right is physically announcing his intention to call a bet. This will generally indicate weakness. The player may or may not actually call, depending on their personal tendencies, but there is very little chance they will be raising.

The most amateur players will hold out their chips in a very obvious way, basically stating that they're ready to call your bet. With more experienced players, the tell is more subtle than this. The more subtle variations of this tell are not an act; rather, they are an instinctual physical reaction to being threatened. Usually you'll see it as someone

counting out chips kind of absent-mindedly or someone with their hand poised over their chips as if ready to pick them up. This tell can include a wide range of very subtle hand and arm movements. Once you get better at spotting this tell, you can even try to induce it by just subtly reaching for your chips and watching to see if your opponent's hand moves slightly towards his chips, or maybe lifts his chips off his stack.

Sometimes players attempting to discourage your bet in this way will fold if bet into. Sometimes they will call the bet. You should try to take note of the situation in which a player exhibits this tell. Does he display this tell when he's leaning toward folding? Or does he display it when he's leaning toward calling? Players will usually have specific tendencies in this regard. Limit players are more prone to showing this tell and following it up with an actual call. No-limit players are usually more cognizant and don't display this tell; if they do perform this tell, though, it will usually mean they will be folding to a bet, not calling.



This is the same kind of tell shown in the last picture, only more subtle. Instead of grabbing his chips in an obvious way, the player on the right is just touching his chips. These types of tells can be even more subtle than this.

One thing is pretty certain with this tell, and it's the most important point: whether a player plans to call or fold when you bet, if they're performing this tell they will virtually *never* be raising. Knowing that a player with this tell isn't going to raise will let you narrow down their hand range a lot. Not having to fear a raise also lets you feel much more comfortable when value-betting.

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