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Customer Care in Bar Operations

Aims and learning outcomes

Successful customer care is really about keeping the customer satisfied. On completion of this chapter the learner should be able to:

- Apply customer care techniques in the bar.
- Observe and anticipate customer requirements.
- Anticipate and respond to particular requirements of customers' children, elderly and disabled persons.
- Explain the importance of culture and its influence on food offerings in the bar.

6.1 Introduction

The bar industry today is faced with increased competition from a variety of entertainment sources, and bar owners also recognize that other establishments are providing a similar offering, sometimes at lower prices. This realization has brought about an increased focus on the care of customers and their viewpoints. When customers leave bars unhappy, it is usually because they encountered attitudes of indifference from staff and poor service. Dissatisfied customers usually talk to others about their dissatisfaction and the negative effect of this outcome can paralyze all your best pro-active customer and marketing efforts. It costs, on average, five times as much to win a new customer as it does to keep an existing one. Unfortunately, bars put enormous efforts into winning new customers and very little into customer care and retention.

6.2 Customer care

Stone & Young (1993) argued that 'customer care is not a veneer to be applied to an organization to make it look good for customers'. In the bar industry it should be a core value and should be built in to the very fabric of your offering – you should always seek to underpromise and overdeliver. But how can you

deliver on your customers' expectation time after time? The starting point must, of course, be with yourself. You must seek to see yourself as others see you in all your glory, which includes all your faults. As you go through your daily duties, it is very difficult to stand back and ask, 'what can I do to improve our customer care techniques and improve business and profitability'? The first answer must always be to improve the quality of your service. A good bartender needs job crafts, people-handling skills, a positive attitude, good business procedures, communication and teamwork, and a commitment to continual learning. To get it right for your customer in the bar, you have to know what to do, and how to do it in thoughtful, appropriate and efficient ways.

6.3 Making the difference

So much has been written and spoken about customer care, customer service, and even customer delight, but what does it all mean to your bar?

Peter Drucker (1954) once wrote 'there is only one valid definition of business purpose: to create and keep a customer'. How your customers feel about you and supporting your establishment, largely reflects how they think you feel about them. You have to have a real passion for your customers; passion and the ability to impact on your customers are the two major factors in the bar industry today. You also have to be able to convey your enthusiasm and to surround yourself with employees who buy into it. If everything that you and your employees do sends a consistent message to customers that they are valued and respected, your chances of retaining their business increase immeasurably. Impress your customers through sincerity and enthusiasm, and delight them with your product and service.

Customer care does not work unless people are committed to it.

- **Expectations:** customer expectations of the level of service they regard as satisfactory are rising. Bars are constantly exploring just what their customers want. This focus has placed increased demand on all staff to perform, not just in terms of productivity, but also in terms of customer satisfying behavior. The focus of attention in all successful bars is on individuals (bartenders, sommeliers, waiters, chefs) and their behavior. Therefore, the difference is you.
- **Commitment:** commit yourself to providing the highest levels of service in every aspect of your duties and responsibilities.
- **The hidden differences:** the major hidden difference between people lies, of course, in their *personalities*. Similarly the hidden difference between the many products and services offered in your bar is in the employees who make, sell and serve them.

6.4 Creating first impressions

Do you believe first impressions are important? How can we improve these first impressions in the bar industry? A prospective customer will be won or lost by their first impressions of you and your bar.

You will usually have only one chance to make a first impression, so the initial impression is vital. These first impressions can be vastly improved by adopting the following techniques.

Creating a good first impression – face to face

- 1 A natural smile, a welcome expression
- 2 Immediate acknowledgement of the customer's presence
- 3 Undivided attention, with a courteous, hospitable and efficient manner adopted at all times
- 4 Use eye contact
- 5 Address customers by name if possible
- 6 Present a smart, neat appearance
- 7 Customers should be advised of any delays in service
- 8 Do not drink or eat in front of your customers while on duty.

Creating a good first impression - over the telephone

- 1 Answer the telephone promptly
- 2 Clearly identify the bar
- 3 Speak clearly
- 4 Try to use the customer's name
- 5 Always let customer ring off first
- 6 Avoid holding up the customer without explanation
- 7 Give customer telephone calls priority over personnel calls where possible.

Improving on those first impressions

Now that you have hopefully created a good first impression, you need to concentrate on improving on these first impressions. Consider adopting the following techniques to make them feel special.

- 1 Anticipate your customer's requirements
- 2 Co-operate with customers or groups in a hurry
- 3 Pay attention to the needs of special groups (i.e. the elderly, young children, or disabled)
- 4 Treat all customers equally