9 Responsible Service of Alcohol

Aims and learning outcomes

This chapter aims to provide the knowledge necessary to understand the context and commercial environment in which alcohol is consumed. It also looks at best practice procedures and strategies which can be adopted to help individual establishments and large commercial operations to meet their obligations to serve alcohol in a responsible manner. After reading this chapter you should be able to:

■   Explain how the context and environment where alcohol is consumed influences consumers' expectation and eventual outcomes.

■   Establish the approaches and strategies used by businesses to make their premises safe and to reduce alcohol related problems.

■   Identify the current structural and systematic approaches to training in the field of responsible service of alcohol (RSA).

■   Apply RSA strategies and training for all staff members and management to prevent guest intoxication, to identify over-consumption and to practice responsible serving techniques.

■   Conduct responsible service of alcohol audits to highlight areas you need to address with further training and new procedures.

9.0   Introduction

Tourism and hospitality companies run hotels, restaurants, bars, nightclubs, cruise liners, guest houses, visitor centres and other licensed establishments where people can relax and socialise with alcohol beverages. These also provide food and non-alcohol beverages, entertainment, a place for family and friends to get together, jobs for hospitality staff including bartenders, chefs, waiters, etc. and vital tax revenues. The well-being of customers is crucial

to the success of these industries, and this consideration in the modern era extends to the responsible serving of alcoholic beverages. The priority of real hospitality is to make sure that customers have a memorable experience, but when they consume alcohol they relax and lower their inhibitions and sometimes get a little intoxicated. This reality places a firm responsibility on hospitality staff members to refuse service to intoxicated individuals because they might injure themselves or others. In recent years the licensed establishments across these industries, along with the co-operation of industry bodies and health officials have developed training programmes to help managers and servers to recognise the symptoms of intoxication and to serve alcohol beverages responsibly.

9.1 Towards a context and venue to enjoy alcohol

The famous American sociologist Ray Oldenburg, in his book *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at The Heart of a Community*, maintains that where people choose to drink is one of the numerous facets of drinking behaviour (Oldenburg, 1999). He also added that drinking is an integral component of social interaction in many cultures. Heath (2000) agrees and states that the majority of alcohol consumption takes place in public settings and commercial venues. The venue chosen is often closely related to expectations and eventual outcomes. Quigley et al (2003) propose the link between certain drink venues and the risk of violence as an example of this. Haworth & Simpson (2004) adds that the quality of alcoholic beverages, especially in developing countries where traditional beverages are consumed, can cause potential harm for patrons at some venues.

Nightclubs, pubs, bars and restaurant venues have focused on increasing their business in recent years through entertainment which is usually offered to patrons as late-night activities. Single (1997) maintains that although these venues are popular in the majority of cities, the activities are also the origin of numerous social problems. These arise because most late night entertainment activities are targeted at young people and are closely linked with alcohol consumption. The consequence of this association leads Room et al (2003) to conclude that some of the most undesirable features of late night entertainment include crime, violence, anti-social behaviour and littering. Rossow and Hauge (2004) maintain that these activities are more closely associated with intoxicated or binge drinking individuals. The impact of this behaviour on the local community is huge. Chisholm et al (2004) argue that these effects place a particular strain on local public services, for example public transportation, policing, emergency services and street cleaning. Late night entertainment venues are concentrated in urban or central city locations in

most countries, and for many individuals who do live in the city this entails transportation, and this requirement can lead to drink driving, road crashes, and traffic injuries (Wagenaar and Holden, 1991). Dealing with under age persons who will try to gain entry and service of alcohol at licensed premises is another concern, especially in countries and regions where there is a defined legal purchase age in operation (Toomey et al, 1998). To meet these particular challenges Wallin et al (2003) inform us that several strategies have been developed which include:

■ Policies to control the availability of alcohol through zoning and hours of sale

■ Incentives for businesses to modify marketing and other practices

■ Social education efforts to redefine norms on individual behaviour (see Chapter 8)

■ Policies which address the service of alcohol.

Quigley et al (2003) contends that adopting policies which address in particular the responsible service of alcohol, including harm minimization techniques, can help to create safe and comfortable venues for drinking alcohol, which in turn will also help to improve communities. Responsible service and consumption of alcohol needs the active co-operation and engagement of all the stakeholders, which includes hospitality establishments, the community and the legislators (Smith et al, 2001).

Figure 9.1: Bartender prepares pre-dinner cocktails for his guests.

9.2   Developing policies and procedures to reduce alcohol related problems

Daly et al (2002) and Graham et al (2004) report that a wide variety of policies and procedures have been developed to target the service of alcohol in licensed premises, offering approaches and strategies to assist them in making their premises safe and to reduce harm. In this section we will review some of these strategies.

Management and design practices

Customers' safety and overall enjoyment can be increased by:

- the proper control of the ventilation, lighting and noise level,
- good crowd control and security measures,
- a mix of patrons by age and gender,
- discouraging intoxicated customers,
- offering a good supply of food and non-alcoholic beverage choices,
- a clean and well maintained establishment, proper seating,
- limiting the size of individual parties and drink specials,
- displaying clearly the conditions of entry, e.g. dress codes

(Arnold & Laidler, 1994).

Safety concerns

To reduce the possibility for harm you should remove broken glasses immediately and consider (if appropriate) replacing them with more durable safety glass or with plastic containers; and use clever methods to advise customers of safety issues, e.g. on drip mats, or signs in the toilets (Graham & Homel, 1997).

Licensing hours

Heavy drinking around closing time can be a problem and reminders regarding customers that you are serving last drinks can encourage this activity. Duffy (1992) reports that extended licensing hours adopted in some areas have helped to reduce intoxication and its associated harmful behaviours. Graham & Homel (1997) advise staggered closing times.

Personnel training

Taking care of intoxicated customers is difficult. Johnsson and Berglund (2003) and Sloan et al (2000) maintain that in recent years training to help server judgement has proved effective. Intervention techniques adopted by

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