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The Role of the Bartender

Aims and learning outcomes

The aim of this chapter is to highlight the role of the bartender. On completion of this chapter the learner should be able to:

- Explain the attributes and qualifications necessary for the ideal bartender
- Apply the appropriate technical knowledge and procedures in the bar
- Know how to deal with enquiries in the bar
- Explain the importance of the bartender's job description and cultural appreciation.
- Explain the roles of beverage service personnel

2.1 Introduction

The general public has two very different perceptions of bartenders. On one hand, bartenders have always held an almost iconic role in folklore culture; they have the shoulder to cry on – the encyclopedia of drinks knowledge to draw on or the fatherly figure with the sympathetic ear for the love sick. Another image is that of the key master – the bartender holds the keys to a night of wild abandonment and sinful rites of passage. Bartenders must be always able to deliver excellence for their customers and guests. Their professional abilities and personality strongly influence the positive or indeed negative experience of the bar for the customer. The role of the bartender is never just about the preparation and service of the bar's products, for the bartender is crucial to creating that unique experience for their customers which hopefully makes them want to return by themselves or with family, friends and business colleagues on an regular basis.

2.2 Roles of the bartender

The bartender is responsible for maintaining superior levels of beverage service to all customers at all times. Their duties involve taking orders and handling cash and control procedures to ensure the highest levels of cleanliness, safety, accountability and storage of all beverages in the bar and throughout the licensed premises. In some bars, bartenders with special skills and knowledge of preparing mixed drinks can be referred to as a *mixologist*. All mixologists are bartenders, but not all bartenders are mixologists. Regan (2003) argues that as bartenders we understand that mixologists should really be called 'cocktailians'. Either way, bartender and mixologist are terms that have come to be used synonymously in most bars.

Successful bartenders will normally have gentle arms to guide the trouble-makers to the exits, gentle and strong elbows to raise a glass to toast a customer's birthday and to pour the contents (discretely) away after toasting. Strong wrists for shaking cocktails and gentle for stirring Martinis with precision. Acute hearing skills to take drink orders from multiple sources and to keep them in order, and strong hands able to be completely independent of one another, with the dexterity and motor skills required in modern busy food and beverage establishments to operate at various speeds. Regan (1993) states that 'a good bartender has as many faces as a clock'; while Murphy (2007) contends that good bartenders must be able to listen, to talk, to share and to deliver. Being able to listen to other people is an art and traditionally, if you respect the customer, the customer will respect you.

The bartender will play many roles in the bar, and management teams will seek to source and hire the very best bartenders to meet their new ever-changing hospitality environment. Bars are distinguished by their customers, their products, their marketplace and location, therefore the attributes and qualifications of the bartenders to be hired should differ per location. The majority of bar owners rank the following attributes and qualifications crucial during the recruitment, interview and trial periods:

- **Pleasing personality:** bartenders should be pleasant and good humored in their dealings with customers, superiors and colleagues.
- **Education:** bartenders must obtain or be given access to basic or advanced education commensurate with the bar and its marketplace. This might include additional courses in hospitality and customer care skills
- **Ability to work with other people:** bartenders should be able to work with their other colleagues and management and be capable of using their own initiative.
- **Honesty:** bartenders operate with large amounts of cash, tips, change and occasional requests from friends and the opposite sex for free drinks and food. It is therefore crucial that bartenders can be fully trusted at all times.
- **Punctuality:** to be on time for duty, as late arrivals cause a domino effect on service delivery for customers.

- **Personal appearance:** bartenders should present themselves well groomed, clean and neat, their clothes should be clean and pressed.
- **Personal control:** bartenders must control their emotions be considerate, quiet, courteous, tolerant and have respect for customers and colleagues.

The ways in which a bartender receives the customer and talks to them are of great fundamental importance. A bartender should always base their behavior on common sense and modesty.

Table 2.1: Bartender's personal appearance. (Murphy, 2005)

Male – professional image	Female – professional image
Posture: habitually upright, alert and interested	
Manner: alert, cheerful, ready smile, poised	
Neat, clean uniform free from stains, spots, perspiration and well pressed for example trousers, shirt, necktie, waistcoat, and apron.	
Black or dark socks	Black or dark stockings, tights, hose
Black non-slip, closed in shoes, conservative style, well shined and comfortable for standing hours at a time	
High standard of personal hygiene, frequent showers, use of deodorants and mouthwash.	
Clean shaven, no strong aftershaves	Some basic make-up, no strong perfumes
Hair close cut, styled neatly, well brushed or tied back	Hair styled neatly and tied back neatly
Hairnet worn over all hair (as appropriate)	
Name badge worn at all times, if appropriate	
Limited use of jewelry (wedding rings only)	
Nails trimmed and clean	
Body tattoos (discreetly covered)	
No alcohol, eating or smoking whilst on duty	

Personality

The single most important attribute which bars rank the highest is personality. Thurstone's research on personality, cited in Murphy (2009), highlighted the five major domains of openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and emotional stability. The bartender's personality strongly influences the positive or negative experience of the bar for the customer. Bartenders are people, like everyone else and they take their personalities to work with them. The personality that comes into contact with the bar's customers will determine, to a great extent, the success of the bar. This unique experience is sometimes referred to as 'the moment of truth'. Most bar owners are well aware of how important it is to maintain this healthy relationship between their bartenders and their customers, regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds and position in the local community.