

A smiling woman with long, wavy red hair is the central figure. She is wearing a pink and white horizontally striped halter-neck top. She holds a clear glass filled with a light-colored beverage, ice cubes, and a slice of lime. A red straw is in the drink. The background is a dimly lit bar with shelves of liquor bottles, including several bottles of Vodka. A red and white striped awning is visible above the bar. The overall atmosphere is warm and inviting.

Bar Room Basics

How to Become a Better Bartender

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Lesson 1

This guide and digital learning library have been created for only one purpose, to offer a working perspective to help bar owners, managers, and bartenders a different, hands on approach to do their job better. Whether you are someone who wants to be a bartender, a better bartender, or a bar owner/manager, that would like to manage their staff more effectively, this guide can help. The Professional Bartenders that were consulted for this have several hundred years of bartending experience between them; they might not always be right... *but they will never admit it... and they should never be ignored.*

This course offers a quick, hands-on approach to what we feel are the key strengths and weaknesses, that every good bartender should be aware of. It is our attempt possibly replace the “mentor” that every new bartender should have as they grow and learn the profession. If you are reading this, then you already have a phone or computer, the rest is pretty simple.

You can find a dozen free bartending courses available online, but as is the case in most courses, they will only teach you the basics and a few of the common cocktail recipes you should learn... while never touching on what the bar management of the establishment you wish to work for will require. The intention of this guide is to focus on specific problems and their solutions, from a bartender’s perspective; and to help prepare you with some basic knowledge and an understanding of what is important once you step behind the bar. You may not have the personality, or the motivation to become a Professional Bartender, but the sooner you realize this, the better both you... and management will be.

The Five “P’s - *for success as a Bartender*

Personality - Positive Attitude - Professionalism - Patience - Passion

How to Become a Better Bartender

A Professional Bartender

Let's start with what we consider to be a "Professional Bartender". The person we enjoy going to visit, and to watch them work, while dealing with the ongoing madness that surrounds them. They are the confidant that we talk to, confess to, and eventually who will come to know us better than we know ourselves. A good, professional bartender, is a person that we all come to rely on, and eventually trust, with our most intimate secrets. On occasion, we have been known to fall in love with them; or at the very least, lust after them. These stories are about the real people who have chosen to be Professional Bartenders for their livelihood and family. These are not to be confused with the temporary employee who is either a full-time student or is studying to be an actor.

There are many reasons to go to a bar; but social interaction and meeting people, may be the most common. You become a part of the "scene", talking to, and/or for some, just watching the customers around you. After that, there are only a few basic reasons to actually be sitting at the bar; first and for some, the only reason you are there to begin with, is that you need a drink... second, the bartender is attractive, and you enjoy the flirting sessions you are about to enter into. Next, you may enjoy the bartender's personality and fourth and most important in my mind, is the bartender's abilities; (this includes their interaction with the customers and staff, their experience, bar knowledge, professionalism, creativity, and their overall "bar presence").

A Professional Bartender is all about customer service and being aware of his or her own abilities and what is actually going on around them. Experience comes with the time you spend behind the bar. Knowledge comes when you take the time to learn and remember. Professionalism is about pride, Creativity can be what you learn to do under pressure, and Bar Presence is basically common sense and paying attention to your surroundings. Learn these and use them, and you become successful, don't, and eventually you move on to a new career or unemployment.

How to Become a Better Bartender

With a good Bar Presence, comes an Economy of Motion (Speed)... with no wasted moves, or effort. Taking the time to do the job right the first time; from taking multiple drink orders instead of one at a time, to ringing up an order while passing the cash register... while you're on your way to deliver another drink and drop of a few dirty dishes.

A bartender should look the part, be well groomed and be dressed appropriately, always wearing a clean

shirt or uniform. They should have pride in their bar and themselves. Knowing the product is also essential for a professional bartender's success. It is physically impossible to know the actual ingredients of literally tens of thousands of drinks, but a good bartender will know categories. "They will know that a tropical drink invented by that "special" bartender 2000 miles away, will at least have some type of rum and fruit juice, it's a start".

A professional bartender will know their limits, whether dealing with an obnoxious customer, diplomatically educating an arrogant manager, or "sampling" a cocktail while working behind the bar. Drinking while working is a questionable occurrence and one that can cause more trouble than it's worth. It's hard for a bartender that has had too much to drink, to recognize and cut off a customer that also has had too much to drink. Sampling newly made drinks or socially joining your customers will always be a choice a bartender must make but knowing your limits will make it almost acceptable.

Personality & Style

Is all about how a bartender interacts with their customers. Being pleasant and being able to talk to strangers, is a necessary requirement; after all, every customer is a stranger to you at least once. Some bartenders are comedians and love to tell jokes. Others are more concerned about their service level and will concentrate on the actual tasks at hand and only talk to customers when they have the time. A good bartender can do it all, while multi-tasking, and still have a good time while doing it... although telling a joke is considered an art form; not everyone can pull it off. Some personality traits for you to consider:

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- Are you fun, reserved, shy or outgoing?
- Do you have a little Attitude ... but not too much.
- Are you socially capable ... never ignoring a guest?
- And then there's flirting ... when its acceptable and when it's not.

Style can be taught; but it is far better when you create your own. A little of this, a little of that, a slight flourish as the bartender pours a "straight up" martini from the just shaken mixing glass to a freshly chilled martini glass, adding the freshly prepared garnish, and looking into the customers eyes while gently placing the drink in front of the customer on a napkin that seemed to materialize from nowhere, that's style... and you should develop your own:

- A little Flair ... not the flipping bottle type.
- Shaken not stirred ... should always be a good show and they each have their own purpose.
- The "slow" pour... giving the act a little personal touch.
- Good Grooming ... how you dress, your hair and clean manicured fingernails.

Common Sense

Has your customer had too much to drink? A DUI conviction can cost your customer their driver's license with possible jail time, and that's if no one gets hurt. You may piss them off when you cut them off... but they'll be back in a couple of days to apologize; or yell at you... either way, they'll be back. Who is he at the bar with if not his wife? Do you really care? Or should you just offer good judgment and service and leave the moral issues to those better qualified to help.

- Know your customers.
- Know your personal strengths and weaknesses.

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Customer Service

When it's good it's great... and should always attempt to exceed customer expectations. By "working" the bar, you keep your customers at the bar longer and the longer they stay, the larger the bill, and the bigger your tip. You also give them a reason to come back.

- Pay attention to their needs.
- Know your drinks and menu.
- Keep their area clean.
- Cater to their every need, and never, ever, ignore them.

Integrity & Ethics

Either you have it, or you don't; being honest with your customers and your co-workers, will make for a more successful operation. It is also one of the toughest of the key ingredients of a bartender's "makeup". It's not easy to convince a bartender that the ten drinks he didn't charge for will eventually have an adverse effect on his earnings. Give away too many drinks, and your tips can actually be reduced, give away even more, than your tips can go away completely when you get caught by management. The customers may become uncomfortable, the company loses revenue, and you eventual lose your job. Integrity... how do you rate?

- Honesty.
- Respect for coworkers and customers.
- Working under stress.
- Pouring what the customer "actually" ordered.
- Drink comps are acceptable when approved by management – but no free drinks *fortips*.

Bar Presence

Is all about the awareness of exactly what is going on around you. Listening to everything and everyone and having the ability to take multi-tasking to a whole new level. A drink request, change, conversation, a question... do you really have to be looking directly at a customer before you realize they need something? Bar Presence is one of your most valuable assets.

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- Pay attention to your surroundings.
- Pay attention to your customers.
- Pay attention to your staff.
- Use common sense and yes... pay attention.

Becoming a Professional Bartender is all about how you care for your customers, while you are taking care of business, while always keeping the essential bartending tips above in mind. When this is accomplished, you will enjoy the profession and it won't be *"just a job"*. Your customers may become your friends; your employer will make more money, and more importantly, so will you.

Speed

Speed is what is required and will determine how effective a bartender is during those busy times. We have all seen "fast" bartenders, but how effective are they? Moving quickly is part of the job, moving quickly and efficiently is an art; with no wasted moves, no wasted trips, and a lot of common sense. Good Economy of Motion will result in a faster more proficient bartender:

- A clean Bar.
- A more attentive host, (that would be you).
- Considerably better service - resulting in better tips.

Knowledge

This can be taught. Books, recipes, and on-site training are just some of the options available. If a bartender truly wants to learn more about their profession, the tools are readily available. Yes, it's like going back to school, but in real life, one never really stops learning. Learning how to be more consistent, using the right glass for the right cocktail, and the adverse affects of using the wrong glass, is just the start. Making sure the cocktail has the right balance of flavors, and making sure the correct size pour spouts are used on the correct bottles; these are just a few more of the required elements of a bartender's knowledge. Knowledge, take the time to listen and learn:

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- Know how to make a drink.
- Know the Wine – Beer – Mixed Drinks your establishment offers.
- Point of Sale and Inventory Controls.
- Pouring Cost (PC).
- Know your customers.

Experience

This is all about the time spent behind the bar and the job responsibilities you've mastered; and only with the diversity of multiple responsibilities can you achieve an experience level that will teach a good bartender how to react to multiple situations. Knowing what your cocktail server's responsibilities are, your bar back's, your manager's, the hostess, the expeditor delivering a food order; everyone on staff is responsible for exceeding a customer's expectations. The more a professional bartender is familiar with their co-worker's responsibilities and are aware of their surroundings, the easier this becomes. Experience... only time and some common sense can help:

- Economy of Motion.
- Keeping a Clean Bar.
- Too much to drink – Dealing with drunks.
- Keeping the bar stocked – including garnish and mixes.
- How to handle the customers you don't like.
- How to handle the customers that you do like.
- How to handle attitude and bar fights.
- How to handle the "non-tippers".
- Working under pressure.

Creativity

This one isn't as hard as some people make it out to be. If you know how to cook, you already have the basics of Mixology. Substituting a protein or vegetable in a food recipe isn't much different than substituting a different alcohol for a "special" martini, a different fruit garnish for a different taste, or a different wine that might go a little better with the type of food they ordered. Ask any bartender what their hangover remedy is or how they make their Bloody Mary mix and see how many different answers you get. Develop your imagination and confidence and the creativity will follow.

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- Working with limited inventory.
- New drink recipes.
- Substitutions – replacing or correcting a drink order when the specific alcohol type, garnish or mix, isn't available.
- Making a drink that you aren't quite sure of.
- Using a new “boutique” flavored Vodka for a new cocktail and pairing it with food prepared with the same flavor (they will go well together).
- Using a new “boutique” flavored bitters to throw a new curve at an old cocktail.

Consistency

From the drinks being poured to the bar's atmosphere, it can be very important. Ensuring that a cocktail is prepared the exact same way can be critical to your success. Every drink should be made the exact same way... every time. Every cocktail, whether a Bloody Mary, Margherita or Old Fashioned, should taste the same, regardless of who's making it.

The lack of consistency can also make or break the mood of the establishment. A few weeks had passed, and I found myself back in my new home away from home, but Al wasn't working, and even worse, the usual day bartender wasn't there either. I found myself in front of a new bartender, and I was willing to ignore the platinum blonde facade until she placed my drink in front of me and charged me eight dollars, almost twice what the bar manager or Al had charged me. When I mentioned the inconsistency, her only response was that the other bartenders were obviously wrong, and I started to feel a little uncomfortable. I finished my drink, went across the street to another local bar, and was greeted by a tall, attractive blonde wearing tight fitting shorts and a midriff revealing blouse. The obvious time the bartender spent staying in shape was only surpassed by the bright smile and pleasant attitude. I ordered my drink and spent the entire afternoon watching a true professional “*work*” her bar.

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Confidence

Confidence is earned through knowledge, experience, and having the guts to make a decision and stand by it. The more confidence that you exude, the less likely a customer will “question” what you are doing. Once again, there are thousands of different cocktail recipes created by thousands of different bartenders; and it is physically impossible to know them all; and you’re not expected to. Your confidence level should be about your abilities, not someone else’s. Did you make the cocktail to the best of your ability? Did you give the customer the proper answer or advice when asked a question? Are you able to have the confidence in yourself and be honest, even if you don’t know the answer? Often a request for a drink that you have never heard of is a simple recipe if you know the ingredients, so ask the customer what’s in it. What do you like? How would you like it prepared? Some will try to “fake it”, but the smart ones will try to get it right or as close as possible to the original... but the customer’s satisfaction is the priority and your confidence in being able to make a drink far outweighs the actual recipe.

Club Security

If you get into a game of chance or skill with another person in the bar; whether pool, darts, golden tee, pinball etc... you should remember that in some states and countries, gambling can be considered illegal. But if you are doing it, specify *ALL* the rules and have a third party or designated table that holds the money for the match. That way, no one can cheat, and it will help avoid fights and arguments.

If you’re in a bad mood and/or fighting with your girlfriend or boyfriend, do not go out and get drunk together, it isn’t going to fix anything. It’s just going to get worse (this should probably go without saying). If the bouncer tells you that it’s time for you to leave... LEAVE!

Ron White said it best, *“I didn’t know how many of them it was going to take to remove me from the club, but I knew how many they were gonna use, and that there’s some good information!”*

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That story you heard your older brother talk about whopping security's ass at a bar... was a lie. It almost never happens, and you will still be leaving one way or another; much easier to just comply; and it's better for your health too. Security guards in night clubs are paid to work out and take out the trash. If you're drunk and acting like an asshole, you are the trash... no matter what walk of life you come from. Also, when they ask you to leave don't say, *Seriously? Really? Are you kidding me?* Because as you may have already surmised, they aren't kidding, they *REALLY* do want you to leave, and they are most definitely serious. If you push them... they will push back... and the cops will be on their side.

Opportunities

Bartenders are fun, exciting people, who are usually extremely extroverted. People tend to be overly intrigued with us and as a result invite us to do awesome things with them, and even their families. We get invited to holiday dinners and the special functions in their lives, as well as endless invites to attend events with them because we are fun by nature! This happens to us all the time and I happen to be one of those people who has absolutely attended events, travelled half-way around the world, and partied with many of my bar regulars... over the years, they became my personal A-Team.

As a result of the constant invitations, we may experience many things that most people will never have the opportunity to partake in. I have been taken to court side basketball games, trips to LA, San Diego, and Vegas, been taken on cruises, attended many theatrical musicals and shows, dined at the nicest restaurants, toured distilleries around the world, and indulged in some of the world's best food, wine, and spirits. Our jobs definitely have their up and downs, but I can't complain too much... the positive has definitely outweighed the negative.

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At the time of this writing, I was typing this chapter from a Virgin Australia plane while in route to Bali, Indonesia with two of my coworkers. We were asked to join one of our regular customers and his family for his birthday celebration on the other side of the world. The amazing generosity and the relationships that are formed across the bar top, as bartenders, and the guests that appreciate and respect our profession, is why most of us stay bartenders. I have wanted to go to Indonesia my entire life and I actually cannot believe this was really happening. Such a blessing... but that's the sort of memory creating experiences we are presented with.

My job is literally like getting paid to entertain and network with hundreds of people... every day. There are no awkward moments, no ice breakers necessary, because part of my job as a bartender is to make conversation with the people on the bar. Good bartenders are great at eavesdropping and chiming in at the perfect moment, making the guest feel at home and that we can relate; or they know us, and are interested in chatting with us.

The Confessional

It's quiet... that time of the shift right after lunch and before Happy Hour; and it's just you and one customer... The bartender's confessional is now open for business. We are not a Priest or Rabbi; we aren't paid to listen to all of the things you have messed up in your life; and we really don't want to get involved with a customer's battles and demons, but who knew? When you take the time to learn the profession, you also make the commitment to do it right... and there will be times that you will just have to sit there and listen.

Technique

Technique is so very important when trying to achieve consistency... whether you are working with other bartenders or working on your own. Every experienced bartender will develop their own style and they will know instinctively how much alcohol they pour for a specific drink. Not so for the bartender who is too new to have developed these skills or their own personal style. The technique they use and the use of a jigger until they learn what to do is extremely important. Developing your own, personal technique as to how you pour... and when to pour... will be critical to your success.

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Tip of the day: Assigning a lead bartender for training purposes can ensure that all of the new bartenders develop the same techniques and learn the lead bartender's tricks for consistency.

From the Other Side of the Bar

A customer's point of view from the author... as to what is considered important to a professional customer... what he or she is looking for when trying to decide where to hang out. Is it the attitude of the bartender or the quality of the food? Is there a pride of ownership? Is it clean? What is the bar's personality and the personality of the staff? A customer may become a "regular customer" based on a combination of these; but it usually starts with first impressions and the bartender's personality.

An Experience

I was new to the area and decided to find a nice quiet neighborhood bar to hang out in. I didn't much care if it was a nice formal restaurant or a local "dive bar", as long as it was clean, and the bartender was cute. I was also looking for a little attitude, someone who knew the basics; and it would help if she could hold a conversation. I arrived in an area that was known as restaurant row, over thirty bars and restaurants within a short drive or walking distance of each other. I started with a local English Pub that I had noticed when I first drove up.

A large image of Winston Churchill was facing the street and as I walked in, I was met with a large reception area filled with spare stools for young kids and extra chairs; but no receptionist. To the left was a pool table with a small seating area, the right was a dining area, and the bar was in the middle of the room... one of the food servers went behind the bar to serve me.

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My choice was made pretty simple; they only carried one kind of red wine. As the server placed my glass of cabernet in front of me, I noticed that the glass was extremely dirty, with grey water spots covering both the inside and outside of the glass. I took a better look around and realized that my first stop was a mistake. The back bar was a dysfunctional array of beer taps and liquor bottles, with the bottles collected on the floor, in front of the beer taps, that was the extent of the “back bar”. There was a large area set aside for dartboard players and I had an open view to the kitchen area from my bar stool, and, unfortunately, it looked almost as dirty as the bar itself. The two servers working the day shift were courteous and attentive, but they weren’t bartenders; so, I paid for my drink, let a small tip and left.

I walked into another English Pub several blocks from the first, and my first impression was that at least it was clean. I walked up to the bar, took one look at the tiny little male bartender, and gave him my apologies. I briefly explained to him that he wasn’t anywhere near pretty enough and he wasn’t what I was looking for. He totally understood and after a few minutes, I ordered a glass of wine, at least he was fun to talk to and had a pleasant personality. Once again, I didn’t have much choice as to the type of wine; but the glass was clean.

Al was good, he was entertaining, could hold a conversation, and he laid out the lay of the land for me. After all, I was still considered a tourist and he shared with me the bars in the area that might have had the bartenders that I was looking for. As he spoke, he cleaned... one of his bosses once told him that if he had time to lean... he had time to clean... the bar was empty, so Al kept busy. He tried to make me feel better by telling me that Tuesday was the only day that he worked, and that there was usually a pretty day bartender the rest of the week. I enjoyed the bar, and the bartender, but I was on a mission and as much as I enjoyed our conversation, Al still wasn’t pretty enough.

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At the direction of my new best friend Al, I walked into several establishments that he had considered his competition. First was a restaurant with an older female bartender who couldn't stop complaining that her feet hurt and that she needed to sit down. The room was small, the atmosphere was "old California", and the bar's personality didn't quite work for me. The next looked pretty good, a local brewery, but the day bartender was too busy waiting on the lunch tables in the dining room and he didn't seem to have enough time to be a bartender... so I continued on my mission.

My next stop was a dilapidated country spot that was so dirty; I almost took a minute to take a few pictures for the health department. It advertised live music, and offered lunch and dinner until two, but as I entered the place, my first impression was to back out of the place... very slowly. The few customers at the bar and a bartender with more attitude than personality made it very clear that I was intruding, so I quickly left to continue my quest.

Al made mention of a place that might fit the bill because of its proximity to the local college. As I walked in, I noticed that the bar was filled, as it should be. The bartender was a cute blonde, who looked up as soon as I approached, but there was no place to sit. The main room was busy with action on all of the pool tables, and the server on the floor seemed to be as attentive as the bartender. It was a little loud for my personal taste and without anywhere to sit, I made my way out, but I would definitely be back.

As I continued my search, I found a large restaurant minutes from the lounge I just left. It was obvious that whoever designed and built the place had spent a lot of money... it was gorgeous. Off to the left of a very well appointed lobby was what I will call their "blue room". The bar was immaculate and the bar stools and chairs in the intimate lounge area were all done in matching crushed blue velvet. It was beautiful, and I was getting ready to settle in for the rest of the afternoon, but as I made my way to a very empty bar, the manager approached me to let me know that a server would be with me shortly; apparently, they didn't have a day bartender. A lovely woman came up and took my order, and I watched in amazement as she poured my glass of wine from a box, having trouble with the plastic lining.

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Once again, I paid for my drink, left a small tip, and made my way to the door. When the manager asked me if everything was okay, all I could say was “even a bad bartender is better than no bartender”. I was amazed as to just how many places I had already been to, and I still couldn’t find what I considered a nice, clean, comfortable room; with a professional bartender.

I was going to give it one last shot and went into a place that had been open only a few weeks. It advertised itself as an American experience and everything they served was American, no imports at all. The back bar had forty beer taps, with all the high-tech toys that went with it; from automatic beer glass cleaners to a new POS system; but without imports of any kind, your choices were limited. The only alcohol available was two Vodkas, two gins, over a dozen Tennessee Whiskeys and no scotch or brandy; and with very few wine options, it was also going to be a very short visit. I ordered a glass of red wine and watched as the “bartender” used the automated beer glass cleaner on my wine glass, then sat speechless as he poured the wine into a very wet glass. As I sat there, I listened as the day bartender shared with his staff how the job was just a means to an end; he would be moving to Utah as soon as he could make enough money to pay for the move. The other two bartenders were complaining about the shifts they had and started to argue as to who was going to pick up the more lucrative shifts when the day bartender left.

It had been a long day, seven hours and eight bars later, I made my way back to the English Pub for the start of their Happy Hour; at least Al had a personality. I went back to the pub a few days later and Al hadn’t lied, the usual day bartender was a tiny, cute little thing with a face to die for. She worked the room well, moving with grace and style; she was personable and very good at her job. As I sat at the bar to watch her work, the customers sitting next to me and those coming up to get their drinks were extremely friendly and were all having a great time. I have found that usually my first impressions serve me quite well, but I was very happy to have ignored them, taking the time to talk to Alfred. This was a nice, clean place, with good staff and customers; I committed to spending more than a little bit of time here.

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From the Other Side of the Bar – on Preparation

The bar should be prepared before customers arrive. The beer needs to be stocked early enough to allow it to come to the proper temperature; and the fruit garnish needs to be cut and stored correctly. It was three in the afternoon, and I walked into a local establishment and ordered a non-alcoholic beer from a bartender that was just standing behind the bar with his arms crossed. A very wise bartender once told me... If you have time to lean... never mind, you already got the message. It's a shame my current bartender didn't know this. I had several of these non-alcoholic beers and watched as the bartender spent several hours with only one customer, me, and try as I could, he had no personality that I could interact with.

There was a change of shift, and a very seasoned bartender relieved the day bartender, and he was followed an hour later by his new young protégé. She was extremely beautiful but very young, and the formal "bartending school" she had attended a few months earlier was the extent of her experience. As the bar started to fill up with a happy hour crowd, they ran out of fresh cut limes.

As the protégé tried to keep up with the drink orders, the other grabbed a knife and cutting board and quickly cut up a few limes. He glanced up for only a second and sliced off a small piece of his thumb. It was only a small piece, but blood doesn't look good in a cocktail, so he took the time to stop the bleeding and covered it with a couple of band aids.

He was out of action during a very busy time and there still wasn't enough fruit cut. A few minutes later he reached for a beer from the cooler and realized that the beer cooler was empty and that he had to restock; and he got a few warm six-packs from the storage room. While he was gone, the bartender he was supposed to be training was quickly getting overwhelmed.

Tip of the day: It would have taken almost thirty minutes for the day bartender to have his bar fully stocked and prepared for the next shift; but he chose to stand behind his bar with his arms crossed feeling sorry for himself because his bar was empty, and he was bored. The injury to the night bartender and having to start his shift unprepared was all the result of a lazy day bartender who didn't care about his other bartenders or his profession.

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Don't take it personal

Some of the abuse we take as bartenders has nothing to do with us or who we are as a person, it's our job and we have responsibilities and rules to follow. Our job is just like everyone else, but somehow people seem to forget this. We do not set the hours, decide what's on the food menu, or most importantly set the prices! So many people complain and get crazy on us, but as the bartender, we have no say as to how much something costs.

Another thing... we are a business and in business to make money for the establishment we work for. If a regular or someone we know gets a "little" extra, and it's an establishment where management doesn't mind us over pouring; for certain people, we will take care of them. We are supposed to serve a specific amount of alcohol in each variation of a drink, and if a guest asks us to pour a "stiff one," depending on our mood, they will either receive less than they normally would have... just for being dumb, or we'll over pour them just to teach a lesson. Especially in an establishment that is considered a fine dining restaurant and bar, like the one I currently work in; people aren't coming in just to get crazy drunk, they're coming in for the entire social experience.

Also, it's very rare that a bartender who is working hourly and pouring drinks is also doing the ordering of the inventory. If we are currently out of something, it's not our fault, hopefully, the customer will use a little common sense, and just order something else. Our industry is very inconsistent and it's hard to project exactly how busy we will be in an upcoming week. Obviously, for cash flow purposes we aren't going to always order way over our projected forecast. Although sometimes we do more sales than expected; and yes, we do run out of things, that's life. Complaining to a bartender about how you can't believe we're out of something, or don't carry your favorite beverage, is irrelevant to us and in a bar full of thirsty people waiting for drinks, you could end up wasting your opportunity to be satiated with meaningless venting to us. We are on your side and it makes our job easier if we could always have everything, but that's not how the world works, so please try to empathize with us and try to have a little patience.

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Tools of the Trade

The multitude of alcohol, mixes and condiments that are currently available can be daunting, to say the least, with thousands of combinations and choices; once they are removed from the equation, there are very few tools that a bartender actually needs or requires for the performance of his duties.

The internet

Probably the easiest and most valuable tool you have, whether using your cell phone or a tablet behind the bar, the days of whipping out the “Old Mr. Boston” to find out how to make specific recipes are long gone. Not only have the recipes changed from what are considered the original, they are now constantly changing with the addition of new creatively flavored alcohol and the diversity in regional tastes and attitude. A quick flip to a “Google” site... type in the drink you need... and seconds later you have the actual cocktail recipe combined with regional variations and a simple history of the drink.... all within seconds.

The jigger

The double jigger, do you hold it on the large end, the small end, or in the middle? Do you use the large end, the small end, or both? Do you start your pour, tilt the jigger, and end the pour with an over pour, or do you pour the shot to the brim, and then pour it in? It should start with what you consider the perfect pour, whether an ounce, or ounce and a half, and that can only occur with practice.

The most common sized double jigger will have a small one-ounce side and either a two-ounce or one and a half size on the larger end. Learn to hold the jigger in the middle so that you can easily flip it from one side to the other with confidence. Do not attempt to pour the alcohol exactly to the brim and then try to pour it in the glass... it usually doesn't work, and most bartenders aren't able to stop their pour in time... over pouring will still be an issue. If the large size is a two ounce, use it for pouring two ounces; do not use the one-ounce side twice. The more confident you are with both handling the jigger and your ability to pour an ounce with or without a jigger, the easier this becomes and that's when you can start having some fun.

How to Become a Better Bartender

The jigger has several purposes, first and most important is pouring cost (PC) control. The ability to pour exactly what management has determined to be their interpretation of the perfect cocktail, consistently. Management has also determined that based on the cost of the drink, what the sales price of the drink should be. Once a bartender has practiced enough and learned what the amount of alcohol he/she is pouring, the jigger is more for consistency and the peace of mind of management.

Another use is training, to teach a new bartender pouring skills and to keep a seasoned bartender consistent. The third is customer control. There will be some of your customers that either feels that they are special, or just simply want what they haven't paid for... a stronger drink. Every bartender will have their favorites, and with knowledge and experience, will know when a slight over pour is acceptable, but the use of a jigger allows you to use it as an excuse for not over-pouring. "Sorry sir, management forces me to use this damn thing", (the jigger), "so that I won't give away too much."

Pour spouts

Cork or plastic... plastic or metal, they have a benefit and/or a downside; and are supplied in many sizes and shapes, from a free pour metal variety to a large plastic one with a screen cover. The most popular are reflected in the speed at which the alcohol flows from the bottle with a one to four count. As long as you know what you are working with; and a little practice, keeping control of your pouring cost is relatively easy.

It gets to be pretty exciting, from a customer's point of view, when management decides to change all of the pour spouts on all of the bottles, because they like the way they look; and they don't inform the bartenders. This can occur when management has never been a bartender, and when it takes a bartender two to three times longer to pour drinks, resulting in upset bartenders, servers and customers... management might want to do their homework first.

How to Become a Better Bartender

Mixing tins

There are many to choose from... from two metal tins to combining one metal with one glass. Short or tall... big or small; it is usually determined by what type of drinks you are asked to make, and management will usually decide for you; but it really doesn't matter which ones you choose as long as you are comfortable using them. Of the glass variety, insist on buying "tempered" glass, it is less likely to crack or break, saving you from potentially slicing open your hand and spending several weeks on workman's comp while you are waiting for the stitches to be removed.

The muddler

Leave it to a bartender to muddle things up just when you think it perfect. What is a muddler? Which end is the handle? Simply put, it's an essential tool that a bartender uses to mash ingredients before completing a creative cocktail. From an Old Fashioned to a Mojito, it has become important and necessary. As far as which end is the handle? That's an argument that the makers of the tool have tried to answer with new designs and materials, but I'll start with using a little common sense. The newer models have one end that will be rounded, and the other end may come flat or with a textured end, similar to the type you see on a meat tenderizer. In all of the newer designs, whether wood, metal or plastic, the rounded end is meant to hold on to; but here's the common sense approach.

An old school bartender, someone who is actually old, or was trained by one, used a little common sense. The flat end was used when the mixing can or glass that you were using to muddle the ingredients had a flat surface area on the bottom; and the round end was used if you were using a glass that had an oval surface area on the bottom; it was that simple. Both complete the task effectively, but the flat end did a better job of crushing the ingredients.

Glassware

How to Become a Better Bartender

The right glass for the right drink is especially important when trying to create the perfect cocktail as well as pouring “shots”. The “perfect” cocktail is often created by bartenders who love the profession, are very creative, and are trying to impress. Whether it is making something special for a favorite customer or giving management a marketing tool to increase your customer base, a good bartender will be up for the task. Pour an ounce, (the accepted shot); into anything other than a shot glass will make the shot look inadequate when poured into a much larger cocktail glass. You will usually try to compensate by pouring a larger “shot” into the larger glass, which will affect your pouring cost and profitability. A customer given just an ounce will usually complain and ask for more when it is served to him in a large glass, a shot served in a shot glass will rarely be questioned.

Garnish trays

A garnish tray has only one purpose, to make the fruit you use in your drinks easily accessible. There are many varieties to choose from and this is something that is rarely purchased by the bar. Many liquor companies will supply these for free as part of their service and will usually be advertising the popular alcohol of the day. What is important is the size of the tray, is it adequate for the type of fruit you will be using and does it fit on your bar. A key component is if it has a cover and if it is sealed on the bottom.

Wine key

Unless you are graced with the ability to suck a cork out of a wine bottle, you'll need a wine key. There are many options available but a simple corkscrew with a lever and small knife attachment seems to work the best. Wine distributors often give them away as an added benefit of being their customer, but you are under no obligation to use it. Try it and make sure you are comfortable using it, if not, buy one. The more comfortable you are with it, the less likely you will injure yourself when using it.

How to Become a Better Bartender

Bar towel vs polishing cloths

Each has a purpose, and you should never swap them out or use them for a purpose they were not intended for. Bar towels are used to wipe down the bar and stainless, and anything else that needs cleaning. Polishing cloths are used to “polish” clean glassware... especially wine and specialty glassware.

Bartender boot camp

It's always a challenge to stay in shape, mentally and physically. When you keep the hours of a bartender that works and plays hard, these simple behind the bar moves can help. Using isometrics and stretching moves before you start your shift will help keep your body limber and flexible, ready for those quick moves and picking up heavy objects.

Arms

- Shaking the mixing tins above your head will work your triceps
- Shaking the mixing tins in front of you, chest high, will work your biceps
- Shaking the mixing tins a little lower? You're just showing off.

Hands

By using just three fingers and picking up and pouring using the neck of the liquor bottle, will develop and strengthen your hands. Do not use two hands to pick up and pour one bottle, if you are able to use two hands, pick up two bottles.

Calf Muscles

While standing behind the bar, focus on putting your weight on the balls of your feet and slowly.... and raise your body weight.