

A woman with long, wavy red hair is smiling at the camera. She is wearing a pink and white striped halter top. She is holding a large glass filled with a light-colored beverage, ice, and a lime wedge. A red straw is in the glass. The background is a bar with various bottles of alcohol, including several bottles of Vodka, and red and white striped awnings.

Bar Presence & Teamwork

How to Become a Better Bartender

Joseph Palmese

How to Become a Better Bartender

Lesson 6

A good *Bar Presence* is all about your 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, giving a borrower change, a conversation with three different customers at the same time, a question... think about it, 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.

- 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 service your customers, while you are taking care of business, and always keeping the essential bartending tips in mind. When this is accomplished, you will enjoy the profession and it won't be just a "job". Your customers will become your friends; your employer will make more money, and more importantly, so will you.

You're on stage

Being a bartender absolutely has its upsides... we get to sleep in, network, our job is to have fun with people and make sure they have fun, we are entertainers, of the stage that is our bar, and while we are usually up there, for the most part, we are actually "acting". One of the most priceless traits a great bartender must learn how to use to their advantage is reading people. When someone walks into my workplace and toward the bar, I have seconds to read this person's demeanor, overall energy, and physical appearance, to decide the best approach to take with this guest.

How to Become a Better Bartender

To some I may be a very proper soft spoken bar maid who is purely there to pamper my guests and serve while being seen but rarely heard. While to the person two stools down I could be a wild, crude, hilarious party girl who is bringing the fun and the noise. Each guest is looking for a different experience and it's my job to seamlessly provide each guest with that, while always combining it with good service. It can be exhausting, especially since I am doing this with no break for over an eight-hour shift; meaning I am probably hungry, thirsty, need to use the restroom, and wish I could sit down, but no one on the other side of the rail will ever know that because it's my job to be the center of a perfect bar and dining experience.

Tip of the day: Take the time to learn about who your customers are. and what their likes and dislikes are...and make it fun.

Another pairing

I had just started what was shaping up to be a night from hell; it was only the start of the happy hour, but we were already three deep at the bar. It takes two bartenders to work this shift and my partner in crime was new; it was only her third day, and I had no idea what to expect, but I was preparing myself for the worst. I had my head buried in the well from the minute I started and when my partner *finally* showed up, I was not happy, the fact that she was actually ten minutes early had never crossed my mind.

She instinctively knew what to do, first acting as my very qualified bar back to help get me caught up; and then moving to the second well to help keep that side of the bar happy. Without outright staring, I watched as she moved, gracefully and with no wasted motion. Of course, it didn't hurt that she was wearing a tight-fitting black lace top that enhanced her obvious features, but what started to be fun was the way she treated everyone on the bar, while keeping the drinks flowing.

How to Become a Better Bartender

After only three days behind our bar, it was obvious to all that she was very good. She had the knowledge and experience to handle the customers and drink orders, but more importantly, she had a personality and some attitude. She had the customers on her side of the bar in “stitches” as she worked, usually by making fun of herself. My customers on my side of the bar seemed to be getting a little jealous, because a few of them started to move in her direction.

As the bar customers watched us work, my partner's personality became infectious, and we all started to have fun. She kept me involved with her stories on the bar as we both took care of business. What started out to be a night from hell, turned out to be the most fun I've had behind the bar in years.

Management is usually concerned about covering a shift and rarely think about making sure that the personalities and abilities behind the bar are compatible. Instead of working independently, my partner and I worked together and resulted in a better attitude and stronger sales because our customers were having more fun and were staying longer.

Tip of the day: If two bartenders like each other, have the same personalities and their skill set is compatible, it takes the “bar experience” to a whole new level. it also helps if they actually *want* to work together.

Listen Up

The bartender is standing in the “well”, listening to his cocktail and food servers while they are ordering their drinks. Using his peripheral vision, he notices from the corner of his eye; that a customer is standing patiently, waiting to ask him for some change. The bar is full, with every customer engaged in conversation. If you listen... *really listen*... you won't necessarily pick out any one conversation, but you can pick out when a customer whispers or raises his/her voice over the “din” of the crowd.

How to Become a Better Bartender

Normally, when a customer is trying to order a drink in a busy room, they'll have a tendency to raise their voice; making it easy to hear them. When customers are having a juicy, intimate, secretive conversations, they will lower their voices to a whisper; also making it easier to hear them.

A good bartender, that has the presence of mind to be aware of his entire surroundings, whether looking at you, or if his back is towards you... will have a good *Bar Presence*. The servers ordering drinks... the customer impatiently waiting for change... the customer at the far end of the bar trying to order another round of drinks... the couple in the middle of the bar whispering about the end of their night... while being involved in four conversations at the same time... that is good bar presence. It is a skill that will make a bartender faster and considerably more proficient.

Tip of the day: For a split second, close your eyes and listen to what is going on around you. it's not unlike a person who becomes blind, and their other senses become enhanced. it will allow for better service for your guests, you will become faster while anticipating your customer's needs, which will usually result in more money being spent.

The "A" Team

The two bartenders working are an amazing pair... *literally*. They work well together and have fun doing it. The concept of working with other staff behind the bar is all about working together as a team, not about who is a better bartender.

This is where "Bar Awareness" and using some common sense are so very important. What is going on around you, recognizing and understanding what the customers on your bar are in need of, and a reliance on what your co-worker is accomplishing, is critical to your success. Is everyone pulling their fair share, is the bar back keeping up with the bartender's needs and are they doing their job behind the bartender... not in front of them; and are the customers taken care of. If there is no bar back, does one bartender take on those duties while the other stays on stage?

How to Become a Better Bartender

In regards to the amazing pair working, they know each other's strengths and weaknesses. One works quickly, moves with grace, and has no wasted moves; and the other is just a touch quicker but has a tendency to waste her moves. They both talk and handle their customers extremely well and even when one of them gets caught up talking to a customer, the other one covers. One has regulars that are usually considered an "older crowd", but she gets along famously with them, and they tip her very well. The other's group is younger and more aggressive. They don't tip as well as the older group, but they make it up in volume and turnover. At the end of the shift, they both pull in about the same. From the other side of the bar, they are always a pleasure to watch and admire.

Tip of the day: Bar awareness and common sense. pay attention and work together as a team while focusing on your individual strengths... it's not a contest. as a team, you will pour faster, give better service, and make more money.

No wasted moves

Fast... Faster... Fastest... A good Bar Presence coupled with an Economy of Motion is the key but preparation before a shift starts is also essential... everything stocked, in its right place, and ready to go. Garnish was prepared, ice bins full with backup ready, and no missing bottles of liquor. It didn't matter who was scheduled first, both were competent and knew what had to be done. Their egos were never an issue, whether cutting fruit, filling the ice bin or stocking the liquor, they worked together to take care of business.

When the bar is busy, keep your eyes open to the needs of the patrons. Make one trip down the length of the bar, paying attention as you go, and always multi-task. Taking a drink order after delivering drinks and picking up dirty glasses as you go; is a far better approach then doing each little task individually. While cruising down the length of your bar, touch everyone sitting there that is watching you, while replacing a dirty napkin with a clean one... a quick one-liner to a bored patron... and introduce your guests to each other. The pretty little thing flirting with you can be introduced to the guy next to her, this will keep them both busy while you work the bar, and don't worry... she'll still be waiting for you to finish your shift.

How to Become a Better Bartender

Going from point (A) to point (B), and back, while taking care of (C) and (D). You leave the well, (A), to get a drink order from a couple that just sat down at the far end of the bar, (B). On your way to the couple you pick up a couple of dirty glasses and drop them off at the sink; and you pick up a credit card from another guest, (D), who would like to pay his tab and is sitting next to the couple who just sat down.

After taking the new drink order from (B), you stop at the register to quickly print the receipt and run the credit card for approval for (D). You then spin around to prepare the drink order for the new couple; and with the drinks and credit card in hand, you head back to point (B). As you drop off the drinks and ask if there is anything else you can help them with, you hand the bill and the credit card back to the guest that is leaving and on your way back to point (A), you take another drink order from a couple, (C), who just sat down in the section that you had just cleared away the dirty glasses. Delivering the new drinks makes for five happy customers with two round trips from point (A) to point (B).

Leaving point (A) to go to point (B) to get the new drink order, and then back to point (A) to make the drinks, then return to point (B) to deliver them. Then taking the credit card from the guest (D) next to point (B), and going to the register to print the receipt and run the credit card and then back to deliver it. From point (B) to new customers at point (C) who just sat down in front of dirty glasses. After cleaning that section of the bar and taking the new drink order, you return to point (A) to make the drinks and take them back to point (C), then back to point (B) to pick up the signed credit card receipt, and then back to the register.

Tip of the day: This scenario resulted in four round trips instead of two, for the same five customers. Same amount of work but twice the travel distance... now multiply that by a full fifteen stool bar.

How to Become a Better Bartender

Functionality

A bar designed by architects for the egos of the owners rarely helps a bartender in the daily operation of his job responsibilities. Most bars are rarely designed with the bartender in mind. There is usually not enough storage space for the necessary inventory of the liquor, beer or wine, and not enough back bar refrigeration for the wine, beer and mixes. This will result in less availability of what the bartender is trying to sell, if the beer and wine used to restock the bar occurs during the shift, it will not be properly chilled.

Putting television screens in a location that would be better served for liquor and glass storage; having small ice bins in the well that would require constant refilling; the doors on the back bar refrigeration opening in the wrong direction, and no thought given to the availability of clean glasses; all are design elements that effect how a bartender performs his or her duties while behind the bar.

If management went to the expense of installing two bartender stations, they should both be used, even if by only one bartender. The little extra work in breaking down the second station at the end of the night is more than justified during the normal operation of serving your guests in a prompt fashion.

Tip of the day: Poor bar design results in a waste of time and energy. the more time spent *with* the guests sitting at the bar, will usually result in better customer service and exceeding customer expectations will be the eventual end result... and isn't that our goal?

How to Become a Better Bartender

Teamwork – From the other side of the bar

It's hard to sit still and keep my mouth shut, when there are three bartenders working the shift and no one is getting along. Bartender one is fast and capable but feels like the other two aren't carrying their weight and can't stop complaining... *about everything*. Bartender two is extremely attractive but would rather socialize with a good-looking customer and watch a game on one of the many TV's in the room, then pour drinks. Bartender three is keeping her mouth shut and is taking care of business, servicing most of the bar without bitching. She is the best of the three, is extremely capable, and the only reason I stayed as long as I did.

None of them were working together and no one was having any fun, which made them all work harder. Watching from the other side of the bar was like watching a bad "B" movie. All three bartenders, taken on their own, had great personalities, but they didn't get along with each other. The customers who usually sat to enjoy the games *and* flirt with the bartenders where uncomfortable and were forced to just watch the games... and the bartenders were not in a flirting mood.

After almost an hour, bartender one was still bitching and complaining about everything. Bartender two ignored everyone except the two boy-toys she was flirting with that were sitting at the corner of the bar, and she hadn't picked up a bottle or poured a beer in the last thirty minutes; and bartender three, who was usually the most personable, was showing the effects with a lack of personality, as she ran behind the bar trying to take care of her customers while staying out of the way of the other two.

Tip of the day: The "team" concept was thrown right out the window on this one. they had eight bartenders to choose from... management could have helped by being more selective when choosing personalities and skill set when choosing who would work together.

How to Become a Better Bartender

Working as a team starts with the team members, a simple statement, but one that starts with whoever is responsible for assigning the shifts. So often a manager is more concerned about putting bodies in place to cover a shift without any regard for their personalities and style. Bartenders that work as a team, and are capable and competent, often have common personalities and style, but different skill sets. They will always be a pleasure to watch and will move behind the bar as if they are dancing, always aware of their surroundings, the needs of the customers and of each other.

My two favorites work in a higher-end restaurant and lounge, and both have great *“Bar Presence”* and *“Economy of Motion”*. It helps determine how effective they are 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 form, with no wasted moves, no wasted trips, and a lot of common sense. It’s an art form when the “team” behind the bar are compatible, have equal skill sets, and they enjoy working together.

Tip of the day: It will always be more fun and profitable when working as a “team” and even better when everything is set and ready for work.