

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

Speed & Economy of Motion

How to Become a Better Bartender

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Speed & Economy of Motion

Lesson 7

Many years ago, I considered myself a very fast bartender, but I had to take a step back when my mentor told me that he was as fast as he had to be... no more... no less. Speed is what determines 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 can be an art form... with no wasted moves, no wasted trips, and a lot of common sense. A 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
- Making one trip to drop off several drinks – not several trips to drop off one drink

Round trips behind your bar

You are in the well making two drinks for the cute couple sitting at the end of your bar. Once you drop them off and head back to your well... pay attention. On your way back to the well to build the cocktails your server just ordered, pick up the empty glass you see and wipe down that section of the bar to be ready for the next patron, stop at the register to ring up the drinks you just delivered... all before you make it back to the well.

Tip of the day: This mindset will save you a hell of a lot of time. when walking the length of your bar, there will always be something to do. dropping off drinks, ringing up tabs, picking up the dirty glasses left by your patrons, moving bottles left on the back bar and put them in their proper place, taking a new order from a patron who just arrived... you will become a multi-tasking queen or king. just one trip down the length of your bar, and back, not 5... *think about it.*

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Demanding Patrons

The concept learned in the paragraph above works just as well when you have serviced your bar and now are required to actually *talk* to your bar customers. In lieu of spending the time to hold a lengthy conversation with just one customer, spread your good cheer around. Keep the interaction with one customer short, but sweet, and touch as many patrons as you can. The conversations won't be boring, and many of your customers may stay longer just to finish telling you their story. Another trick is to introduce that demanding customer to the customer next to them... and then they can keep each other entertained. This also works extremely well for that customer you really don't want to talk to; but it can keep them drinking.

Tip of the day: This will take some time to master but will result in huge benefits. It will keep your entire bar entertained with minimum time spent with each patron. This will allow you more time to build the drinks your serving staff are demanding... giving them better service and hopefully better bartender tips.

Listen & Pay Attention

Standing in the well making drinks usually means that you aren't facing your guests, but it doesn't mean you can't hear them. You will be amazed at just how much you can hear if you just pay attention to your environment. Your servers may be calling out drink orders, you will have bar patrons ordering drinks, your regulars are trying to finish a conversation with you, (often started the day before), and let's not forget that there will be at least one customer pushing his phone at you looking for a charge. It can get pretty hectic, but just take a few deep breathes and pay attention to your surroundings.

Tip of the day: I used to practice before the start of each shift by stepping behind the bar, close my eyes, and try to listen to what was going on around me. There will be a normal tone on the bar that you will not be able to decipher, and that's normal; but customers ordering drinks will usually raise their voice to get your attention. customers that seem to be whispering are conversations that you also may be able to hear... and those can be interesting as hell.

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Know your bar

It's extremely hard to develop into a fast bartender if you spend half your time trying to find the ingredients to make your drinks. I once watched in amazement as one young, new bartender, took a drink order for a scotch and soda, the "well" would be fine. I watched as she went down the length of her speed rack, picking up one bottle at a time, trying to find a bottle of scotch. She had no clue what scotch was, let alone where it was kept behind the bar. After watching her for almost *ten* minutes, I pointed her to a bottle of Johnnie Walker Black. She poured the Johnnie Walker Black and soda and charged this poor customer three times the cost of a normal "well" drink. She already blew her tip by taking ten minutes to pour the drink and at this point she just didn't give a shit.

Tip of the day: Spend the necessary time to learn and know your bar... before you start your shift. remember where everything is located... where the backup garnishes are stored, where bottles of the well are kept, as well as the call and the premium bottles... as well as their backups. when emptying a bottle while building a drink, you will need to know *quickly*, where the backup bottle is kept... to finish the drink.

Always be prepared

There are a few basic issues that you will need to make a conscious effort to avoid if your intention is to become a fast bartender. These have come from the practical applications from being a bartender that thinks he has nothing else to learn:

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- If you believe that you are good at the “flair” concept, please do not flip bottles or glasses above your ice bin. Broken glass in the ice will take some time and effort to clean up and burn the ice to refill with clean ice.
- Ensure that your bar is fully stocked and ready before starting your shift. This takes only a few minutes if accomplished before your shift but can take an hour if you have to restock after starting your shift. Never rely on the previous bartender to do it for you. He/she may have run out of time or got extremely busy at the end of their shift, or they were simply too damn lazy to care.
- You are responsible for your “bank”; and it needs to be counted and ready with sufficient change to handle the expected business. What would you do if the first customer you serve wants to pay with a hundred-dollar bill? And your “bank” only has three hundred in 20’s? You will need to have sufficient denominations in your cash draw to make the change. Cash is no longer king, but you may have a customer who chooses not to use a credit card... *just be ready*.
- It’s hard to jump behind the bar to start your shift if you don’t have any clean glassware. This is on the same page as checking to make sure your bar is fully stocked before starting your shift... add clean glassware to that list.
- Your normal flow... your rhythm... is key to maintaining a level of service ... everyone will need to stay out of your way

Tip of the day: Your bartending shift is your responsibility, not your teammates’. You can always ask for help, but never assume someone else will do the job for you.

If you have time to lean

You have time to clean. This is one of the most important lessons to learn and here are a few reasons why:

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- If you have dirty glasses/dishes on the bar, no one will rush to sit there; if the area is clean, new patrons will join you. Yes... patrons have been known to sit in front of dirty glasses, but that just means that you... the bartender... will need to stop your normal flow of business to clean up the mess.
- When a customer orders a glass of wine, please make sure the glass is clean, with no lipstick on the rim of the glass and no water spots. Interrupting your moves behind the bar to stop and clean the glass you just picked up is not going to make your day.
- Mixing tins... nothing can upset a customer more than when they order a drink that requires the bartender to *"shake it"* ... and the bartender puts his/her nose in the tin to smell it... *not cool*. There are very few ingredients that will leave an odor in the tins... so clean them after you make those drinks and stop putting your nose in them.

Tip of the day: Many years ago, i was privileged to be allowed to go to a very successful dinner house in La Jolla, ca, 30 minutes before they were scheduled to open. they allowed me this because, yes, i was a very good customer, but i also had a true appreciation for professional bartenders. I would sit and watch as four bartenders started their shift 30 minutes early, for the express purpose of washing and polishing every wine glass they had. they carried an extensive wine list which required a sizable glass inventory.

A bar-back's story

If you are fortunate, you have a bar-back on staff. A bar back is basically, the bartender's assistant, pure and simple. The lunch shift just ended and "happy hour" doesn't start for another couple of hours, this is not the time to take a smoke break and hang out with your buddies in the kitchen. Usually, customers won't see a bar-back until happy hour is in full swing and the bartender may need help in keeping up; but their primary function should be the prep-work that is required in anticipation of a busy shift.

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An integral part of good service in a busy bar is the bar-back; and is usually someone who has an interest in becoming a bartender, but also someone who has no experience dealing with the personality side of the business. It is a win-win situation for all parties only when the bar-back can take his ego out of the picture. Becoming a professional bartender is not for everyone. It is the accumulation of knowledge and experience gained over time, combined with the motivation required to learn a demanding trade in the service industry.

When bartenders go through their change of shift, the actual bar should be stocked, clean and ready for action. Glassware should be clean, stacked properly and ready for service, with the wine glasses given some extra attention and polish.

Experienced bartenders will know what's going on around them, and aware of everything going on at their bar. A good, experienced assistant, the bar-back, should know more. Not only are they aware of what the customer's needs are, they also need to be aware of what the bartender's needs are... and what the bartender is going to need next. They share the same stage as the bartenders they are there to assist.

One of the things that many don't realize is that a bar-back is being watched by the same customers that are there to watch the bartender... and those customers see everything. From the drinks they watch you sneak, to the drinks you give away to servers and customers, to the drinks you take into the back... *everything*.

All the mixes that a bartender will require to create the cocktails; the juices like grapefruit, orange, and cranberry juice, should be stocked and ready. The Bloody Mary mix and specialty mixes created by the bartenders or management may need to be prepared before the shift starts. Accessibility to the items required for specialty drinks will need to be where the bartender and serving staff can find them. The fruit garnish, correctly cut, dated and properly stored, the napkins on display and ready, and the ice bins should start clean, and then filled in preparation for a busy shift.

Tip of the day: A bartender should be able to walk behind the bar at the start of his shift and know that the bar is fully stocked and ready to work. Leaving the bar for any reason is unacceptable, especially if it's to get something the bar-back missed.

A Bar-back's education

After all, that is why most choose to become a bar back; so that they can eventually become a bartender. They are a bartender's backup and support; they need to learn to do the job of bar-back from behind the bartender, not in front of him. They will need to listen and become aware of what the bartender is doing and more importantly, what he needs. Part of a bartender's job is to direct and teach the bar-back; it's not just about making a cocktail.

A good bartender may spin around during the process of making six drinks, taking cash from two customers, while getting the next cocktail order from a server. He's in a groove that stops immediately if a bar-back is standing where he needs to be. A bar-back needs to be taught on how to maneuver behind the bar and not get in the bartender's way. They need to learn how to work with bartenders, not against them. Listening to what is going on around them and taking their direction from the bartender. Eventually, with practice, they will learn to second guess each other, and words will rarely be needed, but that takes time and a good bar presence. Do not rush into your bartender's well to make a mixed drink unless he or she tells you to. Get the beers or wine from the cooler behind you... clean up the mess in front of the new customer, fill in the blanks, while your bartender does his job.

Tip of the day: There is a method for replacing and re-stocking glassware; a method passed down from bar-back to bar-back; and one that management has no clue about. The more a bar-back learns about how to do their job better and more efficiently, the better bartender they will become.

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Igor is a competent, fast, bar-back, but has been at it way too long. He has taken the attitude that he is just as good, if not better, than the bartenders that he is supposed to be assisting. A bar-back in the well, instead of doing their job, is not a good thing. He spills a drink in the well, necessitating a quick clean up, but he ignores it. Igor just kept digging into the ice to make more drinks, without giving any thought to the fact that the next drink he was going to make using the vodka-soaked ice... was a plain coke.

I watched as he made a total of six drinks and only two had to be re-made, the reasons are irrelevant, he had to make them twice. As he moved behind the bar, he was throwing dirty dishes into a bus-tray, slamming metal water pitchers onto the bar, and taking drink orders from customers and attempting to make their drinks. When someone isn't doing the job, someone else is forced to do it for them, in this case the three bartenders stepped up their game and took care of business. The bar-back gave the overall impression that he was too good to be just a bar-back. He thought he was cute... I thought, along with most of the other bar patrons, that *obnoxious* would have been a better word.

Tip of the day: As I mentioned, he is a fast, competent *bar-back*, but only when he shows up to actually be a bar-back, the job that he is paid to do. truth be known, he is now a very good bartender, but it took about a year longer than it should have.

A bartender has drink orders to make from food and cocktail servers, as well as the customers. He may also be taking food orders for the customers sitting at the bar. A bartender's job includes entertaining the patrons, supervise some staff, and take in the money. The beer coolers should be stocked early to allow the time necessary for the beer to come to temperature. *No one wants a warm beer.* The liquor backup, whether it is to be stacked and ready to replace empty bottles or sitting on display on the back-bar, should be up to "PAR". The bottles should be wiped down and unsealed, in anticipation of being used quickly and efficiently. The bottles lining the back-bar shelves need to be facing to the front, facing the bartenders and the customers.

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There is a method for replacing and re-stocking glassware; a method passed down from bar back to bar back; and one that management and bartenders have no clue about. The more you learn about becoming a good bar back, the better bartender you will become.

Remember, a bar-back needs to:

- Stay out of the well
- Not make mixed drinks
- Keep the ice bin full
- Maintain the liquor and beer at PAR value (fully stocked)
- Do what the bartender tells them to do
- Pick up and clean the dirty glasses from the bar and keep the bar clean
- And keep the flirting with staff and customers to a minimum... they are not bartenders yet!

Tip of the day: A fully stocked bar, ready for service, will allow for faster, more efficient customer service, which can mean satisfied customers and better tipping clientele. A bar-back's primary focus should be to learn what the bartender is teaching them and once again, they need to keep control of their ego... after all, the bartender probably has enough ego for both of them.