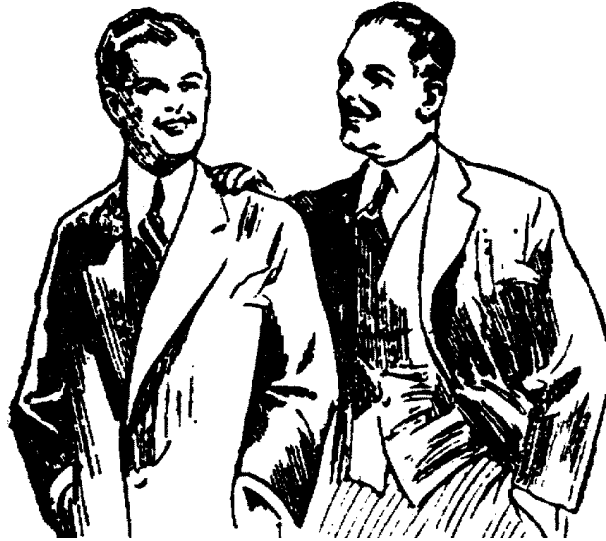


HIRE THE BEST THE FIRST TIME



Amassing a qualified bartending staff requires time and a good deal of effort. Losing someone from your staff is often a two-edged problem — you lose the experience and expertise of the bartender leaving and you have to start-up the hiring process one more time.

Bartenders are key employees. They serve your clientele, dole out your inventory and have their hands in the till. Selecting the right person for the job on the first pass requires preparation and the ability to learn a lot about a person in a very short period of time.

One of the attributes effective interviewers have in common is being good listeners. It's extremely difficult to learn anything about a prospective employee if you're doing most of the talking. Watch the person's facial expressions and body language. Use every valid impression you can to help you make the right choice the first time.

The costs of hiring the wrong bartender can be staggering. It's better to operate short-handed for a period of time and rely on your existing staff to cover the bar than hiring someone unqualified or inappropriate. It will be more advantageous in the long-run to delay hiring another bartender until the right candidate can be found.

Here are some tips on how to make the process reap better results.

- **APPLICATION PRESENTABILITY** — the appearance of a person's application for employment often reveals as much about his or her level of professionalism and attention to detail as does the written information it contains. It's neatness, correctness and presentation reflects much about the author. Make note of how the document looks and any impression it might give you about the person.
- **SCREEN FOR SCHEDULING LIMITATIONS** — When you're handed a completed application, ask the individual a few screening questions, such as :how many hours a week he or she needs to work and how much money the person needs to earn a week. Also, find out if the applicant has reliable transportation and if there are any scheduling conflicts you should be aware of. A few, initial probing questions can often save you from making a poor hiring decision later on.
- **CHECK ALL LISTED REFERENCES** — prospective bartenders should be asked to supply three or four professional references, people who can testify directly about the individual's abilities, character and work ethic. If after the initial interview the applicant seems like a contender,

take the time to contact the person's references. Failing to do so may expose you to charges of negligence at a later date. Contact references in the reverse order the prospective employee list them on the application. People will typically list references in the order they want them contacted.

- **STATED WORK EXPERIENCE** — even if an applicant provides you with an accurate accounting of his or her work experience, it may portray an incomplete picture of his or her competency. Experience is an intangible commodity. It's important in an interview to determine how the applicant's work experience qualifies the person for the position.

- **DON'T OVERSELL THE JOB** — It's best to give a realistic estimate of how many hours a week a prospective employee might work and how much the person can expect to earn. Likewise, don't give the applicant an overly optimistic impression of his or her advancement prospects within the company. The person could become disillusioned and resentful as the reality of the situation sets in.

- **NOTE YOUR THOUGHTS DURING INTERVIEW** — develop a form to facilitate you recording your impressions and observations during an interview. It should contain a list of interview questions and a section for rating the interviewee on the various sought-after qualities and attributes. Use of a standardized form will make the interviewing process more uniform and more likely achieve a beneficial result.

- **EYE CONTACT** — when conducting an interview, it's advisable to maintain steady eye contact with applicant. The eyes often reveal into the person's level of confidence, truthfulness and character. If the person has difficulty maintaining your eye contact, it may provide some insight into his or her personality.

- **ASK OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS** — One key to conducting an effective interview is to ask questions that are challenging and difficult to answer without a lengthy response. Probe for the person's limitations. Ask questions that require an individual to address his or her professional strengths and weaknesses. Essentially, the more penetrating the question, the tougher it is to answer, the more you'll learn by asking it. Consider the following examples:

- A. What is the worst thing your former employer could say about you? What is the best thing?

- B. What would you do if you caught a fellow employee stealing from you?

- C. What are your major job-related weaknesses? Strengths?

- D. What do you like most about bartending? What do you like least?

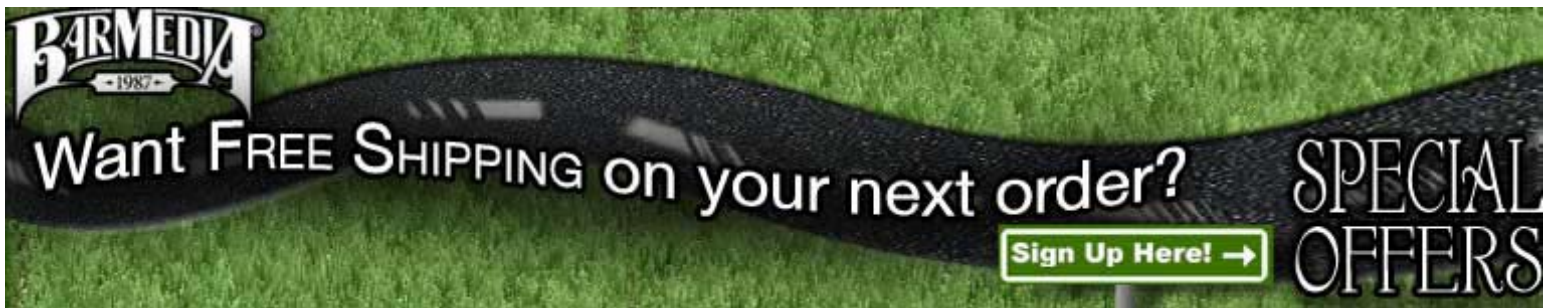
- E. If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?

- F. If you could change one thing about your former manager, what would it be?

- **PERSONAL STABILITY** — considering the high cost of employee turnover, assessing a prospective bartender's personal circumstances and stability is advisable. For instance, some might consider an applicant who is married less of an employment risk than someone who is single. People who tend to stay at their job for more than a year exhibit more stability than those who move from one place to another after only a few months.

- **CONDUCT TWO INTERVIEWS** — the hiring process is too crucial to rely on only one interview or one set of impression\$ to make the hiring decision. It is optimum to have another person conduct a second interview, after which, you'll have someone to compare notes with.

- **TESTING PROFESSIONAL APTITUDE** — before the second interview, test the applicant's knowledge of bartending. Include questions about mixology, products and alcohol-awareness. The results of the test will give you a better idea of the person's level of expertise and—to a degree—his or her stated work experience.
- **PERSONALITY AND Demeanor** — not everyone has the personality to be a bartender. Likewise, not everyone is compatible with the existing staff. It's important to determine whether the person will fit in with your clientele, fellow-employees and management team. The ability to remain calm, composed and emotionally in control is another important bartending attribute to assess.
- **ABILITY TO LEARN AND ADAPT** — no matter how experienced a bartender is, there will still be aspects of the employment which require the person to adapt to a new way of doing things. While you're interviewing prospective bartenders, assess how flexible and willing to learn the individual appears to be. Avoid hiring bartenders who think their learning days are behind them.



ROBERT PLOTKIN is a judge at the San Francisco World Spirits Competition and has recently authored his 16th book, *Secrets Revealed of America's Greatest Cocktails - The Hottest Spirits, Freshest Places and Coolest Drinks*. He can be reached at www.BarMedia.com or by e-mail at robert@barmedia.com.

[Send us your comments at amo@barmedia.com](mailto:amo@barmedia.com)