



# Avoiding The High Cost Of Bartender Turnover

Maintaining a positive work environment is essential to reducing turnover and achieving optimum productivity. It only stands to reason that if you create a conducive working environment your employees will enjoy coming to work and won't want to leave to work elsewhere.

When a bartender leaves your staff, his or her departure will likely weaken the business. It may not be appreciated at the time, but invariably, when an experienced employee leaves a service-oriented business the enterprise suffers as a result.

Bartender turnover is a costly occurrence, certainly something to be avoided whenever possible. When a bartender leaves your staff, the beverage operation loses the benefit of the on-the-job training you've invested in the employee, as well as, all of the expertise and experience the individual was able to accrue at the position.

You must then begin the selection process anew; applications, interviews, paperwork, and training shifts. At the end of the process, the operation must suffer with the new employee's inefficiency.

These costs do not take into consideration the increase in management supervision necessary to ensure the employee is adequately trained. It is also reasonable to assume that the bartender's departure will negatively impact staff morale, customers' perceptions and gross sales.

One key aspect to reducing turnover behind the bar is to create a positive working environment. Negative pressures and stress can be cumulative in effect and rapidly deteriorate the staff's attitude and professionalism. This inevitably leads to job burnout and turnover. When bartenders and servers stop caring about

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their on-the-job performance the clientele are the first to suffer, followed closely by the operation as a whole. Without a positive attitude, a bartender's productivity can be expected to drop and liquor cost, spillage and waste to increase.

Creating a positive work environment is essential in reducing turnover and requires managers to use restraint, patience and fairness when dealing with their employees. The following are some proactive suggestions on how to reduce bartender turnover while creating a positive work environment:

- **Solicit Feedback** — Bartenders are the resident experts on nearly every subject involving the running of the beverage operation. They are at the point-of-sale of nearly every transaction. They possess firsthand knowledge on how the clientele reacts to your operation's prices, products and promotions, and knows how they compare with your direct competitors'. Soliciting their feedback on relevant matters will help create a sense of involvement among the staff while tapping into their cumulative experience and knowledge.
- **Manage By Example** — Employees are not managed. Objects are managed, people are led. Managing by example is an essential form of leadership. A manager who voluntarily gets behind the bar during a frantically busy shift is an illustration of an individual managing by example. Leadership is a dynamic and effective means of creating a stable, positive working environment.
- **Help Bartenders Earn More Money** — Ensuring that your bartenders are earning a livable income is clearly in your best interest. The more money your staff is capable of earning the less impetus there will be for any one of them to leave. In addition, the more money your bartenders are earning, the less likely it is that they will risk stealing from the bar.

Management can play an active role in helping the bartending staff earn more by ensuring that servers and cocktail waitresses tip-out to the bar and the bar receives an equitable share of the gratuities earned on transfers to the dining room. A portion of a bartending meeting could be allocated to exchanging ideas on how to increase tips.

- **Work Demands** — It is in your best interest to remove any impediments preventing your bartenders from carrying out their job description. For example, bartenders are often required to provide beverage service to patrons seated at the cocktail tables. When business is brisk, it is extremely difficult to wait on the customers at the bar, fill drink orders for servers and still provide hospitable service to patrons seated in the lounge. The more difficult it is for the staff to perform their assigned duties the more hassled they'll be and the more likely they will fall victim to "job burn-out."
- **Keep The Staff Challenged** — Professionalism is an ambitious objective, one not easily achieved. Instill within your bartending staff a desire to excel at their position. Continually challenging your bartenders is motivating and will help to stave off on-the-job "burn-out."
- **Provide Support** — It is important for the staff to know that you will provide them with immediate support and backing when dealing with the drinking public. In situations where the bartender is forced to refuse further service of alcohol to a patron, it makes it easier to exercise that obligation when your bartenders know they have your full support and assistance. It is crucial that the refusal of service be handled correctly. It is also important that employees maintain their trust in management.

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- **Job Descriptions** — Do you have employees who are assigned certain tasks or responsibilities that could be better fulfilled by another? For instance, in some establishments bartenders are expected to wait on customers, make drinks for servers, wash glassware, answer the phone and be the cashier for the operation. When it gets busy, they're overwhelmed.
- **Keep The Facility Clean**— How clean is your bar? If you had to think about your answer too long, your bar is likely not nearly

clean enough. Working a dirty bar erodes staff professionalism. The mind set quickly develops that if no one cares enough to maintain the sanitary standards of the bar, than why should anything else really matter? Discipline all but disappears, the incidence of theft begins to increase and all other standards begin to deteriorate. Keeping the bar spotless is not just a matter of protecting the public health and passing health inspections, it also keeps the bartenders focused on maintaining their professionalism.

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