



## Advice for the Rookie Bar Manager

Being able to effectively manage a bar is not a skill you're born with, or even an ability garnered working as a bartender. Hands-on bartending experience is certainly beneficial, but it teaches you next to nothing about being an effective manager.

I am living proof. I accepted my first job as a bar manager after having bartended for 8 years. It soon became apparent, however, that I was grossly unqualified for the position. My bartending experience helped me to initially establish standards behind the bar, but it had taught me nothing about inventory control, profitability analysis, or how to ensure the establishment stays out of legal trouble.

I proceeded to do two things that saved my job. I started to read everything I could find on beverage management. While most of it had an academic bent and jived little with how bars operate in reality, the material did introduce me to accepted business concepts and practices.

I also reflected back on the managers for whom I had worked. One former manager was an outstanding motivator and created an excellent working environment for the staff. On the other hand, he often undermined his authority by being overly friendly with his employees, typically the women.

Another manager I respected was an unyielding, unsmiling "number cruncher" that seemed to know everything about how the operation was performing, but was incapable of relating to us as people or engendering our loyalty. As a result, the bar suffered excessive turnover and our staff defied policies and procedures at every opportunity.

Over the ensuing two decades I've come to realize that there are three directives managers need to consider inviolate to have a productive career. The first is to never forget for whom they are working and that they owe the house unfaltering loyalty. Secondly, the staff deserves

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to be treated with respect and impartiality. And finally, managers need to ensure that their bar offers the clientele great tasting drinks at fair prices and that they're served responsibly.

## Success Factors For Bar Managers

No one can make or break a place like the manager. It takes a lot of savvy to manage a food and beverage operation well, and frankly not just anyone can pull it off. Between the owner(s), staff and clientele, there are numerous agendas for a manager to deal with every day. Suffice to say, it takes more than being dynamic and outgoing to be an effective manager.

To that end, here are the top things a bar manager needs to master. While there are likely a hundred specific things to keep in mind, here's an easily digested list to start the process rolling.

- **Market Knowledge** — Businesses don't operate in a vacuum. A good manager knows his or her market, knows the competition and what they are doing and responds accordingly. A business where the clientele knows more about what's going on in the market than the management, is a poorly managed business.

- **Maturity** — Managing a bar or restaurant is an emotional challenge. The stress of working in a socially active environment can prove too demanding for some. While it might seem like a party atmosphere, do not lose sight that you are managing a business.

- **Sharpen Your Pencils** — The fundamental objective of the business is to generate profits. You therefore need to diligently monitor any factor that impacts profitability, such as the bar's cost percentages, labor costs and staff productivity. Master the numbers and you'll be well on the way to becoming indispensable.

- **Shrinkage** — This innocent sounding term refers to losses due to theft, waste and spillage. Shrinkage is capable of chewing up a bar's

gross revenues to the tune of 20-30%. Preventing losses attributable to shrinkage requires keen observation, effectively monitoring costs and safeguarding the bar's inventory.

- **Legal Eagle** — If you play the game, you better know the rules. Between health codes, liquor laws and fire codes, there's a lot to know and what you don't know can prove costly. While carding guests may not be time efficient, serving a minor can have disastrous ramifications. So too will serving someone to the point of intoxication. When in doubt, don't serve.

- **Treat People Like Guests, Not Customers** — It's crucial that the staff appreciate the distinction between the two. Guests are catered to and should be made to feel welcome and appreciated. Customers are warm bodies with money in their pockets. Treat the clientele like guests and they'll return regularly.

- **Creativity** — A great manager needs to embrace creativity. Whether it's creating new house signature drinks, happy hour appetizers, or some off-the-wall promotion, every business needs an innovator, someone unafraid to risk trying something novel.

- **Educate** — What your staff doesn't know can undermine your efforts. Enhance their professionalism by ensuring that they are well informed about the products that you stock, mixology techniques and professional service standards. Your investment of time and effort will pay huge dividends.

- **Sense Of Humor** — What with putting out fires, handling customer complaints, and dealing with the employee-related problems, managing a food and beverage operation can be extremely stressful. A good sense of humor can help take the edge off most situations, and helps everyone involved better cope with reality.

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**Robert Plotkin** is a judge at the San Francisco World Spirits Competition and the author of numerous books. You can reach him at BarMedia— [\*\*robert@barmedia.com\*\*](mailto:robert@barmedia.com).

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