

# RESPONSIBLE SERVICE

Bartenders and food servers are in the best position to make the decision whether or not to serve a patron another drink. It is important to make the right decision. Failure to exercise sound judgement can have severe consequences for all concerned.

The reason for alcohol awareness training is to provide service personnel with a sound, factual basis to make the correct service-related decisions. However, this information alone is not enough when it comes to refusing a customer another drink. It is critical to become comfortable exercising your right and obligation to refuse further service to anyone visibly intoxicated and to have the skills to confidently handle this type of situation when it occurs.

The primary service rule in any commercial beverage operation regarding the sale of alcohol should always be, "When In Doubt, Don't Serve." While this may seem oversimplified, it is the best guideline available. It is important to forego the sale if there is any doubt as to the sobriety of the patron. No one can ask more of their employees than to exercise their best judgement in this situation. There is just too much at stake to base this decision on anything less.

Keep a mental count of how many drinks a patron has consumed. The number of drinks consumed will provide an approximation of how much alcohol a patron has ingested. This information will prove beneficial when supporting the decision to refuse further service.

Never serve an alcoholic drink to someone not yet present. Frequently, two customers will sit down at the bar and order three drinks, one of which is for a third person out parking the car, or perhaps in the restroom. In this situation, the bartender should only serve the two patrons present and wait to prepare the third cocktail until the other person arrives. This third individual could very well be a minor, or someone already intoxicated. Unfortunately, this is an all too common ploy to illegally obtain alcohol.

Hopefully management will support the decision to refuse further service of alcohol to any customer. This support will make it considerably easier to exercise good judgement and cut off a patron when necessary. In nearly every instance, the server is in a better position than the manager-on-duty to assess a customer's sobriety. Therefore, management should always be willing to support the employee in their effort to refuse further service.

What makes refusing further service complicated and often intimidating is that alcohol has a destabilizing effect on a

drinker's emotional state. It is difficult to anticipate whether a customer will acknowledge the refusal calmly, or react in an agitated manner.

Tact and diplomacy are the two best options. When refusing further service, it is important to avoid using insulting language, or assuming a judgmental, disapproving attitude. Telling someone under the influence that they are drunk, or intoxicated will likely make it worse.

Make an effort to avoid embarrassing the patron by keeping the voice quiet and remaining sensitive to the customer's feelings. However, be firm about refusing the customer further service of alcohol. Tones should be authoritative without being overbearing, or condescending.

Regardless of what is said when "cutting off" a customer, the simpler the approach the easier it will be to intervene in the future. An important part of intervention training is to be familiar with the approaches that work best and how to best accomplish the task in the fewest words.

There are only two moments when a patron can be told he or she is being denied further alcoholic service. Either before, or after the person becomes intoxicated. The approach will depend on the customer's level of impairment.

Informing a customer that he or she is being refused another drink is much simpler when done before the person reaches the point of intoxication. The most advisable tactic to adopt is to serve the person what will be the last drink of the evening and then inform the patron of that fact. For instance, a person orders a drink and you know that it is the last one that can be safely served to the individual that night. When you serve the customer the cocktail, lean forward and say quietly, "Here you are...drink this one slowly because it's your last one for tonight."

The person is only being denied future alcoholic service and is not deprived the opportunity to "nurse" what will be his or her last drink of the evening. This approach will cause little embarrassment for a patron and will usually not cause a negative response. (Perhaps as important, it may not put the gratuity in jeopardy.)

Telling someone who is already intoxicated he or she will not be served any more alcohol is a straightforward proposition. In the fewest words possible inform the patron that in your best judgement the person has already had enough to drink and he or she will not be served any more alcohol. There is no need to add any other information to this statement. It is to the point.

The message says that it was your decision based on your best judgement. It does not accuse the patron of being drunk. If the statement is delivered properly, it may not foster a negative reaction. If the refusal is met with a negative reaction, immediately notify the manager-on-duty, whose responsibility it is to handle these kinds of customer situations.

After informing the customer that they are being “cut off” notify the other bartender(s) on duty of the refusal of service so they do not mistakenly serve the individual another drink. In this case, miscommunication can be as damaging as inaction.

This procedure ends when the owner, or manager-on-duty is informed of the situation. It is then up to management to see that the situation is handled correctly, allowing you to resume your duties.

At this time management may arrange alternate means of transportation. The options available are to either call a taxi cab to drive the customer home, or assist the patron in calling a friend or relative to take protective custody, so to speak. It is very important that the intoxicated person not get behind the wheel of his or her car.

The information contained herein is intended to assist in the responsible service of alcohol with the understanding that certification from an alcohol-awareness program is beneficial for all servers of alcohol. Responsibility falls on each individual who serves alcohol. Whether at home or commercially, serve conscientiously and responsibly.

Furthermore, we would like to advance the following:

1. A “strong drink” is not necessarily a “good drink.” Increasing a drink’s liquor portion from 1 - 1 1/2 oz., for example, increases both its alcoholic potency and cost by 50%. Over-portioning alcohol is an expensive and liability-laden practice.
2. Not all drinks are created equally. For instance, a Martini served straight-up is more potent than one served on-the-rocks. Alcohol is soluble in water and will increase the rate at which ice melts. As a result, the melting ice will dilute the drink’s alcohol, rendering it less potent.
3. Similarly, a blended drink is less potent than one served on-the-rocks. Blending a drink with ice makes it more diluted. In most instances, the dominant ingredient in a blended drink is water (the ice).
4. Neat drinks are prepared directly into the glass in which they are served. They are undiluted and high in alcohol concentration. Care should be taken with respect to their service.
5. Shooters and layered cordials are conventionally consumed in one swallow, thereby dramatically increasing the rate the alcohol is absorbed into a person’s bloodstream. Increased rate of consumption tends to accelerate intoxication.
6. A “double” highball, containing 2 oz. of liquor instead of the standard 1 oz., is more than twice as potent as two prepared regularly. A “double” will profoundly impact intoxication. Conversely, a “tall” highball, one prepared in a tall glass with significantly more mixer, is less potent than the same drink prepared in the regular manner.