

How To:

Successfully Manage Staff

What Managers Want:

AN OPEN LETTER TO BARTENDERS



By Bob Johnson

Here is a list of gripes managers tend to have about bartenders. Feel free to pass it out to your staff, and maybe even have them sign on the dotted line.

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I wrote an article a while back titled, "What Bartenders Don't Like About Bar Managers." [Ed. note: Glean this great info by reading that article in full at www.barbizmag.com today!] It generated a lot of response from bar managers in the form of "testimonials", like, "I've been guilty of this, and this, and I'm not sure about that," etc. Some e-mails remarked, "Thanks for making me aware of some points I've overlooked," or, "I had no idea bartenders felt that way."

And then I thought back over my years in the bar business about the many nagging, peculiar things bartenders had done to me when I was a bar manager—things that just drove me up a wall! But bartenders and bar managers have to co-exist, because we have a business to take

care of and we both derive our livelihoods from our bar. So I came up with a long list of things bartenders do or say that just drive me nuts. Hope you enjoy it (and put it to good use!).

1. "Hey, boss, business would pick up if you'd do some advertising!"

Many bartenders don't realize they are the strongest and best PR/advertising means available. Word of mouth is free. Customers return to a bar over and over if the bartender gives them a reason to come back. You know—quality service, a little conversation, getting each customer involved with the room, remembering names, introducing us to each new person at the bar, talking to them, etc. Radio/TV/newspaper advertising might

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pull a person in ONE TIME out of curiosity, but that person won't return unless you give him or her a reason to do so.

2. "I can't work today because I'm sick!"



Granted, management doesn't want anyone working when they are truly sick. We don't want to spread disease and we don't want a totally miserable, sick-looking employee representing our business. But let's not kid each other. Maybe 80% of the time you call in sick, you're not really sick! Maybe you're not feeling your best, but you're not sick enough to call in—but you do!

Management is aware of two factors regarding sickness: 1) the average number of days missed per year because of illness is six. 2) If you are really sick, it will usually be in the morning. And that's when you call your replacement—in the morning. Don't call me! Call your replacement! It is your responsibility to find someone to work for you, not management's. You only call me with this problem after you have exhausted your fellow bartender telephone list. One day you'll get to return the favor. We're a team/family, remember? We look out for each other, right?

3. "It's not my job," or, "I wasn't hired to do that. I'm a bartender, period. That's it!"

I remember the time I managed a bar at a Holiday Inn in Miami Beach. My first day I politely asked two cocktail servers who were standing around doing nothing to pick up some cocktail napkins that fell on the floor. I was told, "Sorry, that's not my station."

I asked the day bartender, who was also doing nothing, to take down the glasses from the overhead glass racks and run them through the dishwasher. I was informed, "Sorry, I'm not a bar back—that's their job."

And when I wanted the beer cooler emptied out and cleaned I was told, "Sorry, I'm a bartender. I only make drinks. Cleaning out the beer cooler is the porter's job."

There are many businesses that have union labor agreements between management and workers because it's necessary. I don't think it's necessary in the bar business. The bar business doesn't function well with an attitude of, "It's not my job".

We have to be a team! We work together at everything. Whatever needs to be done, we do it. It's where our money comes from. What management wants to hear occasionally is, "Need me to stay longer tonight, boss?" or "Is there anything else I can do for you before I clock out?" or "Why don't we get the bartenders to come in on Sunday when the club is closed and tear the bar apart and clean it like it's never been cleaned before!"

4. Arrive at least 20 minutes early for your shift, please.

I start to panic when it's 6:59, you're due to start your shift at 7:00, and you're still not here. When you arrive a little early it gives me a chance to explain a policy change, or a new drink promotion, or maybe we can have a cup of coffee together and chat.

5. Telephone

No personal phone calls, unless it's an emergency. And leave your cell phone at home!

6. Eating

Never in front of customers. And please leave the bar nuts alone!

7. Smoking (assuming it's not banned in your city)

Never have a cigarette in your mouth or hand while waiting on a customer. It's unprofessional and ashes can fall from the cigarette and land anywhere. And did you wash your hands after smoking that cigarette? If not, it's a Health Code violation.

8. Talking

Don't waste your time talking to fellow employees or band members. Your talking time should be spent with customers. Make every effort to get along and be friendly to the people you work with, but remember, they're not the ones who put money in your pocket. You have to be all business when you're working. It's why I hired you. We all have a job to do. We were not hired to party amongst ourselves on the job.

A memo/contract from the owner/GM regarding the consumption of beverage alcohol while in the scope of employment (*Drinking on the job*)

Effective immediately, all management and employees of _____ agree not to consume beverage alcohol while on the clock at this property.

- 1) Ethyl alcohol affects judgment and impairs one's ability to rationalize or perform a function that requires effective interpretation or quick reaction. "Misreading" a situation is commonplace for anyone consuming beverage alcohol, regardless of the amount consumed. Counting money, making a judgment call, responding to a pressure situation or settling a disturbance can only be done with a clear mind.
- 2) Therefore, as of this date, management/employee consumption of beverage alcohol on company property while on the clock is strictly forbidden. No employee, especially management, will have a bartender enter beverage alcohol onto a PROMO or SPILL sheet for personal consumption. Management will not bring in their own liquor and management will not open bottles in the storeroom or consume from "dead stock." Management or any other employee may not have a customer or outside source purchase alcohol for them for consumption while on the clock. 100% of every beverage alcohol product will be consumed by the customer only and rung up on the register accordingly. There is no legitimately run retail business that allows employees to consume a mind-altering substance (ethyl alcohol) while performing company functions.
- 3) Our new-hire packet includes a statement regarding "no consumption of alcohol" which we require new hires to sign. It sends the wrong message and sets a bad example if management and other employees are seen consuming beverage alcohol while working and no one else is allowed to.
- 4) Legally, if there are damages or injury to a third party, and you were involved in the situation in any way, and it was known that you were under the influence of alcohol at the time, our company and you may have no reasonable defense. We probably just lost the case. You don't have enough money to defend yourself in this kind of situation.
- 5) Medically, if there is an injury to you while on the clock and you have consumed beverage alcohol in any quantity, worker's compensation will probably not pay for your medical treatment. You'll be on your own.
- 6) Because of the business we're in, we are heavily scrutinized. Our management and staff must never be under the influence of beverage alcohol when confronted by a representative of local law enforcement or a government agency performing a routine assignment at our place of business.
- 7) When you were hired, we did not include the consumption of beverage alcohol as part of our deal with you. If you consume a beverage alcohol product for your personal consumption while working, you are stealing from your company. Please do not put me in the position of having to deal with this, for I will—swiftly and without remorse.

The consumption of beverage alcohol while working is a serious infraction of this company's policy and procedure and will not be tolerated by anyone. I am sorry if this memo appears to be less than friendly. Any problems understanding this memo should be directed to me immediately.

Sincerely,

Owner or GM

I have read and I accept _____'s policy regarding the consumption of beverage alcohol while in the scope of employment. I agree to abide by this policy. Failure to do so will result in my termination.

Name of Club: _____ Date: _____, 201____

Signature: _____ Print Your Name: _____

Position: _____ Date of Hire: _____

Signature witnessed by: _____

9. Don't "rock the boat."

Be aware of the "cancer" that can be created within a business by troublesome employees who blame others for their own faults, look to criticize others, "brown-nose" the boss at the expense of others, set up one employee against another, are always late, always disagree with everything, and are against anything new.

10. Over pouring

Don't over pour for the big tippers or a friend. Other people sitting at the bar see that. You will be creating a very difficult situation for the other bartenders. Remember—everyone should be treated equally.

11. Don't get anyone DRUNK!

When you, the bartender or cocktail server, over-serve someone to the point of visible intoxication—being "fall-down drunk"—that's a serious matter. I'm going to have to intervene, I'm going to have to take care of this customer who has been compromised, and then I'm going to have a talk with you! Yes, we need to sell, but not at the cost of injuring another human being.

12. Involvements

Don't get romantically involved with a customer or a fellow employee. We don't want to lose a good customer over a broken relationship that you were a part of. Keep your personal life away from our business. Keep your husband, wife, girlfriend, or boyfriend out of the bar while you are working. You will have a natural tendency to spend time talking to that person when you should be taking care of business. When customers see you are attached to someone, it always affects tips. You're better off cleaning than wasting time talking to your better half!

13. Gossip

Don't talk to a customer about a fellow employee—ever! Or about how much you dislike the owner or management—ever! If there are problems where you work, keep it in-house! It's nobody's business other than those involved. Keep bar problems away from customers. I don't know of a quicker way for you to lose your job than to run your mouth about owners, managers or fellow employees. It will get back to me, sooner or later.

14. Phone numbers

Don't give out a fellow employee's phone number to anyone, unless it's another employee, and with permission.

15. Clean up

Please don't use new cocktail napkins to clean ashtrays or to clean up spills. Use soiled napkins for ashtrays. Use your bar rag for spills.

16. "I'm off the clock. Time to party!"

Remember, you are never a customer where you work. You are always an employee. You are allowed back into this bar with management's permission only. If so, you will never take a seat away from a customer. You are not allowed to sit at the bar—only a table designated by the manager on duty. You are not allowed to get drinks directly from the bartender. Someone else must serve you. You will never become intoxicated at this bar. It's where we all make our living and you will not do anything to disgrace it or its employees! **Y**

Bob Johnson, CBM, is a nationally recognized Beverage Management consultant who is best known for his publication, *The Encyclopedia of Shooters*, which launched the shooter revolution worldwide, and for creating America's first certification program for bar managers, "CBM" (Certified Bar Manager). Find out more at www.bobthebartender.com.

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