

BARTENDER'S LIVES CAN BE RUINED

Bartending is a great full or part-time vocation, but it has been the ruin of many well-intended people. Many bar-tenders get carried away with drinking the product, thinking it's part of the job.

Bartenders stand behind a bar for long periods of time and listen to complaints and problems. People open up to bartenders. People trust bartenders. A couple of drinks is all it takes.

The stories and problems that a bartender must listen to can drive anybody to drink. This is one of the cancers that make bartending a dangerous job. Everyone's problems, added to his own, can drive the bartender to his favorite watering hole after work, where he may chug a few before going home. Five or six nights of this, week after week, and the bartender develops a *need* for the "drug" alcohol, just so he can make it through another day.

A routine sets in. From here, bartenders begin drinking on the job, whether it's allowed or not. Vodka, for example, is easy to drink. It's barely detectable on the breath, especially with any type of mix – and the bottle is right at the bartender's fingertips.

There are many generous customers who want to buy the bartender a drink. How many bartenders can refuse a free drink? There are only a few states that do not allow a bartender to drink while working. How many owners and managers encourage their bartenders to drink because "it's good for customer relations and helps sales!" In my

opinion, there ought to be a law against this kind of mentality and practice.

Wake up bartenders! The owner or manager who allows or encourages you to drink with customers makes a statistic out of you. The house ends up with the money – you end up with the problem. When the problem becomes uncontrollable, the house hires another bartender, that's all! Do you think you can't be replaced?

And, if you're ever injured on the job and have to get medical attention, you will lose your workman's comp benefits if there is alcohol or any other illegal drug in your system. That means you pay for emergency room treatment to fix that cut hand requiring seven stitches because of the foggy, hung over condition you were in that morning from the day before attempting to cut fruit.

I was sitting at a bar recently, observing the bartender's inability to handle business due to drinking on the job. I saw her "shooting" Peppermint Schnapps with friends. It took forever, it seemed, to get her attention for my drink order. I put a \$10 bill on the bar top and ordered my usual Absolut and O.J. with a splash of club soda. She went to make the drink but had to return to ask me to repeat the order. Then she pours bar vodka instead of Absolut and forgets the splash of club soda. So she had to make the drink over, wasting the bar vodka. She took my \$10 bill and brought me change for a \$20. I corrected her again, preventing her from ending up short in her drawer. Then the bar manager walked behind the bar and said, "Hey, Joanie, there's a customer over there who wants to buy you a drink," and off she went to get another free drink.

Another time I saw a bartender pour himself four good shots of Ouzo in an hour. A customer who didn't want to drink alone bought all four. Meanwhile, someone was agitating a single girl at the bar. The bartender interjected, uninvited, and nearly caused a major bar brawl. He overreacted to a situation he misread, embarrassed the girl, lost the customer (and the tip), and had to be calmed down by a cocktail server before he could continue working. His reaction to that situation would have been totally different had he not been under alcohol's influence.

Alcohol is an anesthetic, a central nervous system depressant – a drug. It dulls your senses. In moderate amounts it appears to stimulate because it inhibits the “new” part of the brain – the part that records new learning, judgment, and social controls. It also makes you feel physically able and emotionally freer. At first it can be a great “pick-me-up”. But, in excess, alcohol puts the “new” brain parts to sleep. You're not as sharp or aware. You don't even realize your mistakes. Your personality can radically change.

Most bartenders don't realize how *quick acting* alcohol can be. When alcohol enters the stomach, about 20 percent of it is absorbed by the capillaries which line the stomach, which then takes it to the brain. The remainder is absorbed through the intestine after the pyloric valve (a little “trap door” at the base of the stomach) opens.

One could have three or four drinks in a short time and hardly feel anything. Most of the alcohol is being

stored at the base of one's stomach. Then the pyloric valve opens and the alcohol hits all at once. Ever notice that? It happens often at Happy Hour time, when customers come in for a couple of drinks and have no food in their stomachs. The alcohol goes straight into the small intestine where about 80 percent of it is absorbed into the blood stream immediately. Once alcohol gets into the bloodstream, it circulates up to the central nervous system, the part of your brain that controls behavior, judgment and the ability to use motor skills, like drive a car.

Don't misunderstand me. I personally enjoy beverage alcohol. Most people do.

Why is it that bartenders can't qualify for life insurance, disability insurance, or a car loan, or a home loan? Is it because we work in a violent place – a bar? Not necessarily. According to one insurance analyst, it's because, “it is too easy for a bartender to climb into a bottle himself and run away from the problems he has to hear about all the time.” (Another reason is because bartenders don't report all of their tips, thereby showing a small yearly income – not enough to qualify for any kind of a loan. You are also depriving yourself of substantial Social Security income and unemployment compensation benefits.)

Many bartenders find themselves exploited, taken advantage of, because of the availability of the product alcohol. Many bartenders have succumbed to the temptations of the very product they're required to regulate. How can they regulate others in a bar environment when they can't regulate themselves?

It's time many bartenders took a long, hard look at themselves. What were your drinking habits *before* you entered the bar business? Have they changed? Are you drinking more? Are you drinking everyday? What improvements have you made in your life because of the bartending profession? Are you involved in your community? Do you go to school? Do you participate in sporting events? Are you healthy? Do you work out 4 times a week?

Don't kid yourselves, bartenders! Bartending does not require great physical or mental prowess. It's a business – a way to make money – nothing more or less. Don't let it rule your life. Don't let the product of our business take over your life. Don't let it deter your personal development and growth. Use the profession of bartending to better yourself! Use bartending to become a better and more accomplished person.

There's a chimpanzee named Mr. Joe that knows how to bartend. He can make up to 40 drinks on verbal command and rents out for private parties. Whenever you think you're something great, invincible and bulletproof, Mr. Joe might come by and take your job.