

# **COCKTAIL WAITRESSING IS THE TOUGHEST JOB IN THE BAR BUSINESS! ©**

By

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In my opinion, the toughest job in the bar business is cocktail waitress. They have to put up with a lot- from customers as well as bartenders and managers. They are not appreciated enough and are shown little respect.

The image of the profession is easily degraded, and, stupidly, bar managers and bartenders seem to place cocktail waitresses in a stereotypical "no brains" classification. Management is usually guilty of just throwing a girl out on the floor without the benefit of adequate training. It's a "sink or swim" mentality as the bartender meets and has to direct the seventh or eighth "new waitress trainee" in a week. The numbers game! Put the ad in the paper, herd them in, and the one who flirtatiously catches the manager's eye is the one who usually gets the job! And the structured, 4-5 day training program for the new Waitress? Forget it!

If there is any bartender or bar manager reading this column who thinks cocktail waitressing is a "walk in the park" job, think twice! Too much happens too quickly on the floor. Just delivering a tray of drinks without spilling anything is a trick in itself. Remembering what everyone previously ordered without having to ask them, then placing the drink correctly on the napkin without knocking it over, requires organization, memory, and skill. Multiply this small part of the job by eight to ten more tables full of people. Keep all tabs separate, clean the table and if you allow smoking, clean the ashtrays and fetch/ light cigarettes or cigars, anticipate refills, cash out tabs and make change for 6 different people at one table, put up with harassing and demanding customers in such a way you don't blow the tip, then run back and forth a total of three to five miles a night! Get the picture?

Columnist Dear Abby said it well: "If there isn't a special section in heaven for waiters and waitresses, there ought to be. They have to smile when their feet hurt, put up with ignorance, arrogance, rudeness and crudeness, and hold their tongues and their tempers when they'd like to explode. Just walk a few hundred miles in their moccasins, and any job after that will be a "piece of cake."

## HIRING THE BEST POSSIBLE WAITRESS

When hiring for the cocktail waitress position, I look for someone 25-35, preferably divorced with a child or two (they really need their job) and average looks. No raving beauties! The more beautiful the girl, the less she has to work, or will work. The young beautiful girls, 18-23, are too easily distracted. They overreact to the attention they get in the bar business, particularly if they're very inexperienced. The younger ones are easily swayed into drugs and parties by customers. Their lives become disoriented. Consuming beverage alcohol, during and after work, becomes a life style – particularly if the house allows it.

As a bar manager I need my waitresses to show up on time, work their butt off, and do so with a pleasant attitude. *No one drinks while working and their cell phone stays in the trunk of their car!* They must be dependable! The less drama they create, and the more they pay attention to the detail/requirements of their job, the smoother my bar seems to run. In my opinion, dependability and stability seem to be found mostly with women in the 25-35 age groups. Of course, there are always exceptions.

When interviewing for a cocktail waitress, I always give an Entry Level Test. Even if they have little to no experience, you need to know what they do know. Ask questions about types of liquor, addition/multiplication problems, different glassware, garnishes, etc. The ones who say they have experience but can't answer most of the questions are probably wearing the low cleavage blouse.

I recommend you never hire anyone who *smokes*. You can get around discrimination by asking the question in the interview, "How long can you go without smoking a cigarette?" The response might be, "Oh, about 3 hours!" I will continue with the interview, but their future with me has already been determined. If you hire smokers, they constantly ask for breaks, they usually don't wash their hands after smoking, they call in sick more often, most of the time they're late for work. etc., etc. Why bother?

## THE TRAINING/ORIENTATION PROCESS

There are many ways to train incoming personnel. Every club I've ever worked does it differently. The usual way is, "This is Sally, our most experienced waitress. Follow Sally around for a couple of days and she'll show you everything!" Management stays away from the "girl in training" because they don't know much about waitressing. I understand – but at the very least, they should do a "checklist" of the most important things to know and understand. Give the checklist to Sally and make sure she "checks off" the entire list before the new girl is allowed to go on the floor.

In my opinion, the first day of training should be spent with the Bar Manager and the Head Cocktail Waitress persons. This is the time the New Hire Packet is filled out in its entirety (application, entry level test results, W-4, I-9, photo copies of Driver's License and Social Security card, person to notify in case of emergency, Notification to report 100% of your tip income form, Visibly intoxicated Persons Policy form, Rules and Regulations of the club discussed, etc. etc.). The new hire then goes with the Head Waitress to start learning the ropes. There's so much to know! Can you operate a POS system? Let me show you how to ring up a drink order. Here's our policy about handling credit cards. You must ID anyone who appears to be 30 or younger. What glassware is used for what drinks. Who cuts the fruit? What garnishes go on what drinks? After 2-3 days of the "Head Waitress introduction", then go to Sally and say, "You take it from here for the next couple of days. Let her shadow your every move." With this for a start, your new hire has a good chance to succeed, and you'll reduce the amount of turnover in the cocktail waitress position. Now, let's take an order!

## TAKING THE ORDER

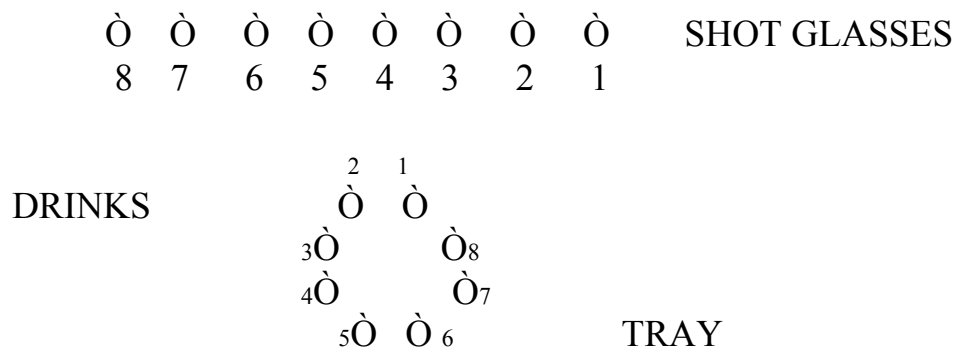
Place the napkin in front of the customer. A smile, along with a cordial greeting, enhances quality service. "Welcome to \_\_\_\_\_ . What may I get for you?" is an example of a pleasant greeting. Repeat the order back to the customer. This eliminates mistakes at the bar. Pay specific attention to specific requests, such as "with a twist", "no fruit", "on the rocks", or "very dry". Now take orders from three to four tables at once rather than one table at a time.

Most bars today use a POS system to record drink sales. The waitress should write the order down on a scratch pad (house policy prevails), then go to a POS terminal and enter the order. The bartender gets a ticket printed out behind the bar and makes the drink order according to the ticket. There should be NO VERBALIZATION between the cocktail waitress and the Bartender, unless the

ticket says “See Server” at the bottom of the ticket (used for special instructions on making the drink that the bartender needs to know about).

If you don’t have a POS system to enter drink orders, you must write down each drink order on a separate line of a tab/guest check using drink abbreviations (ex., SC/R – Scotch on the Rocks). Your guest checks should be in numerical order and “signed out in the office” before going on the floor. Make sure there are no checks missing. You are financially responsible for closing out every one of those checks. You should have a CASH tab for documenting all drink orders paid by cash. The bartender draws a red line under the last drink made on the check, signifying the drink has been made and rung up. This system requires the guest check, whether cash or tab, be turned into the bartender. He/she makes all the drinks on the tab, rings them up on the register and draws a red line underneath the last drink order on the check.

The question is who makes the drink? In 2 sided ice bin drink making stations (one half sticks out on the server side of the bar and one half sticks out on the inside of the bar) there is a soda gun on the cocktail waitress side. Using this technique, the cocktail waitress gets the right glass, fills it with ice, adds the mix to 2/3 of the glass (soda, tonic, OJ, etc.) and puts a shot glass in front of the drink for the bartender to pour the liquor. If necessary, you must put in the garnish (sword pick – no hands touching the fruit), then the stir stick/straw. The liquor is the last ingredient to go into the drinks. Arrange the drinks on your tray in the order I have described and turn up a shot glass for each drink, following the diagram below.



Do not call out for the liquor from the bartender unless you are completely ready! (Glass, ice, mix, fruit, stir stick). Shot glasses are lined up from your right, coinciding with the glasses on the tray. Rotate the tray left to right, or *clockwise*. The bartender pours the liquor into the shot glasses as the cocktail waitress “calls out”, and then she dumps the liquor into the glass, rotating the tray as the “call” is continued.

There should be a drink written on each line of a guest check/tab after ringing up the order. Do not leave the service area until either all your tabs have been rung or the bartender says it's OK to go. The bartender must check what was just poured or made against what is on the checks

With POS systems, I prefer the bartender makes the drink in its entirety. In other words, the bartender gets the glass, ices it, puts the liquor in, adds the mix puts in the garnish and stir stick (the last 2 steps could be handled by the cocktail waitress - provided they know the correct garnish to put in the drink!). I want the bartender to control all the mixes (soda gun, pineapple juice, grapefruit, cranberry, etc.) – not the waitresses. If I serve coffee in my bars I put the coffee pot behind the bar and only the bartender pours the coffee. He only does so because it's on a check! It's been rung up. A receipt is given for the sale. In bars where the soda gun, coffee pot and numerous other juices are available to the cocktail waitress, count on a lot of theft! One of our many jobs as Managers is to keep our employees from the temptation to steal. When they see the mixes are not accounted for in inventory, the waitress station becomes a “free for all”. The employees drink the cokes, coffee, etc. in large amounts. If ever you do sell a diet coke or a cup of coffee and the waitress serves it from the waitress station without it being rung up, you can be assured the money for that sale goes straight into her pocket! I think it's o.k. to allow employees to have a non-alcoholic beverage while working, but they pay for it – at a discounted employee price! Nothing is for free in a bar – nothing! Not even to employees.

## SERVING AND COLLECTING

Serve ladies first if in a party. The rung up–red lined-guest check stays in your apron or in a designated slot in the service area. Sub-total the tabs when time permits, unless you have a register that gives a previous balance. Give a receipt for every transaction.

When collecting money in any denomination from your customer, always remind him/her of the denomination of the bill. “Flash” the bill in front of the customer and always say “X out of X” e.g. (\$7.50 OUT OF \$20!). This can save you trouble, because many times a patron thinks he has put out a bill of a higher denomination (Does alcohol impair judgment sometimes?).

Always serve a drink using your tray! Carrying a drink by hand is tactless and unprofessional. The real purpose of the tray is to give a better presentation of

service, “with style”. You will be able to pick up more dirty glasses, bottles and ashtrays on the return trip to the cocktail waitress station.

***YOUR TRAY SHOULD STAY GLUED TO YOUR HAND AT ALL TIMES.***

If you serve drinks with your bare hands and don't use a tray, you've probably messed up the shell of the glass. That's the customer's domain, not yours. Several times I have seen waitresses pick up a glass from the top – her fingers curled around the rim – the part people drink from! Cocktail waitresses must NEVER touch the outside shell of a Martini glass, brandy snifter, champagne flute, and wine glass – any glass that has a stem – with their hands! We're only allowed to pick up stemmed glassware by *the STEM*, not the shell. Bartenders have to constantly watch cocktail waitresses serve drinks on the floor. If waitresses are not following proper serving technique, they must be corrected immediately!

**DO YOU GIVE YOUR CUSTOMERS A RECEIPT FOR EVERY ORDER THEY PLACE WITH YOU?** If not, why not! Every customer gets a receipt for every purchase made in a bar. It's the law! It's also a great deterrent to theft!

Constantly roam through your station picking up empty bottles, glasses, soiled napkins, empty ashtrays (always “cap” an ashtray in front of a customer), inquire for additional drink orders and make yourself available to your customers at all times for their needs. If it's slow, stand in your station area and just be there in case a customer needs something, or just walks in. In other words, don't lounge around the service station area talking to fellow employees about last night's date or personal problems. If it's still slow, go to the entranceway of the club and greet the next customer coming in. “May I show you to a seat?” Of course, you're going to seat that customer in your station. In most clubs, there should be several girls waiting at the front greeting customers. Your job is to sell liquor, provide quality service and make it happen! A little personality at the front goes a long way!

When your customer is ready to leave and asks for the check, add it up. If using a calculating machine, staple the tape to the check. Present the check face up to the customer with the total written in big numbers, circled. Never announce the total - always present the check. When bringing the change back, always count the money back out loud, placing it on the table, never in the customer's hand (give him a chance to look at the change on the table top. It gives him a couple of extra seconds to think about your quality service). “Fan” the change on the table top as

you count it back placing larger bills on top so the customer can *see* that the change is correct.

### SO, HOW GOOD ARE YOU?

\_\_\_\_\_ Are tables and chairs clean?

\_\_\_\_\_ Is the candle lit?

\_\_\_\_\_ Are clean ash trays on the table?

\_\_\_\_\_ Are chairs properly rearranged after cleaning the table?

\_\_\_\_\_ Is the floor free of napkins, straws and sword picks?

\_\_\_\_\_ Do you place beverage napkins when you first approach a table?

\_\_\_\_\_ Is your greeting pleasant and does it sound sincere?

\_\_\_\_\_ Do you thank the party for the order?

\_\_\_\_\_ Do you use proper abbreviations and print clearly?

\_\_\_\_\_ Are proper garnishes used?

\_\_\_\_\_ Do you serve ladies first?

\_\_\_\_\_ When you take the initial order, do you inquire as to method of payment, i.e. "Will this be cash, or would you like to start a tab?"

\_\_\_\_\_ Do you check for re-orders when glasses are 1/3 empty or less?

\_\_\_\_\_ Do you have a positive approach when checking for re-orders?

\_\_\_\_\_ Do you thank the party after payment and leave the impression that you enjoyed serving them?

\_\_\_\_\_ Do you know the names of entertainers, what days they work, what hours, and how long their breaks are?

\_\_\_\_\_ Do you keep the service area neat?

\_\_\_\_\_ Do you replenish garnishes, straws and napkins when low?

\_\_\_\_\_ Do you help the other waitresses collect for checks, garnish orders clean tables and make change when you're not busy and they are?

\_\_\_\_\_ Do you understand the importance of being at work on time or even a little bit early?

\_\_\_\_\_ Do you leave a positive attitude about filling in for someone who is legitimately sick or on vacation?

\_\_\_\_\_ Do you ask for help when behind?

\_\_\_\_\_ Can you answer questions about drink contents?

\_\_\_\_\_ Do you know prices?

\_\_\_\_\_ Do you average 15% of sales or above in tips?

\_\_\_\_\_ *DO YOUR CHEEKS HURT FROM SMILING?*

## SCHEDULING COCKTAIL WAITRESSES

I remember when I would spend an entire 8 hour day laboring over the weekly cocktail waitress schedule. The phone would ring. "What days do I work next week, Bob? I need to know if you'll give me next Thursday off. I originally asked you for Wednesday off, but my boyfriend can't make it back to town until the next day. So, can you change me to Thursday off?"

So, for the third or fourth time, I crumble up the schedule and start over! I had the schedule "fixed" – set in stone – and now I have to change it again and switch people around just to accommodate this one person who had a last second change of plans!?



If you try and accommodate each and every “Request for Change of Schedule” you won’t have enough time to run the business. It’s a waste of your time to keep changing the schedule to accommodate personal requests...

There’s an easier way. Lock in your schedule and keep it the same week to week. No changes. Then, rely on a strong “team/family” attitude from your staff that strives to help one another, led by a Head Waitress and a Head Bartender who can keep this under control and keep it fair. But remember, the business always comes first! The business must win first! Or no one wins.

My “fixed” schedule looks something like this:

**Cocktail Waitress Schedule, Weekly (Sample)**

| Name | MON         | TUES        | WED         | THURS       | FRI         | SAT         | SUN          |
|------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
|      | 6-CL / #1-2 | 6-CL / #3-4 | OFF         | OFF         | 4-12/#3     | OFF         | 12-8 / #3-4  |
|      |             |             |             |             |             |             |              |
|      | 6-CL / #3-4 | 6-CL / #1-2 | OFF         | OFF         | OFF         | 4-12 / #3-4 | 12-8 / #1-2  |
|      |             |             |             |             |             |             |              |
|      | OFF         | OFF         | 12-6 / #1-4 | 11-6 / #1-4 | 6-CL / #1   | 6-CL / #1   | OFF          |
|      |             |             |             |             |             |             |              |
|      | 12-6 / #1-4 | 12-6 / #1-4 | OFF         | OFF         | 6-CL / #2   | 6-CL / #2   | 8 -CL / #3-4 |
|      |             |             |             |             |             |             |              |
|      | OFF         | OFF         | 6-CL / #3-4 | 6-CL / #1-2 | 8-CL / #4   | 8-CL / #4   | 8-CL #1-2    |
|      |             |             |             |             |             |             |              |
|      | OFF         | OFF         | 6-CL / #1-2 | 6-CL / #1-2 | 12-6 / #1-2 | 12-6 / #1-2 | OFF          |
|      |             |             |             |             |             |             |              |

Don’t put the names on the left side of the schedule yet. Once you have decided on the hours necessary to “cover the needs of the business”, then give this blank to your Head Cocktail Waitress and have her fill in the names on the left (Seniority usually dictates who gets to pick first. The hours posted on the schedule are followed by, e.g., # 1, etc., which is the Station assignment).

This is a permanent schedule. Permission for any daily adjustment to the schedule goes through the Head CW. If you have a strong Team Family group of

people, then covering for a person because of a personal situation shouldn't be a problem. Employees should want to help each other out. An employee is not allowed to go into overtime because of a schedule change covering for someone. The Head CW and the Head Bartender is responsible to the Bar Manager for making sure all shifts are always covered! Each Department takes care of itself, amongst itself! Management should not have to be included in schedule situations.

Using the "locked in" schedule makes all the difference. The girls know exactly when they're supposed to work every week. Regular customers know when their favorite server/bartender works. They will stop by more often, knowing that "Sally" works today from 12-6 (for example). Employees can *actually plan a personal life outside of work...* Showing up late for work diminishes because each girl gets into a better daily routine. Morale picks up! Business picks up! Management doesn't have to spend 8 + hours a week making a new schedule! Management is finally relieved of this terrible "schedule burden"!

***Good cocktail waitresses are hard to find: keeping one is even harder!***