

# THE INITIAL GREETING

Is the first impression the most lasting? Maybe not always, but in the bartending profession, the impression you make on your customer at the initial point of contact, the *greeting*, is crucial – crucial for the image you wish to convey as a *professional* bartender, crucial for the *feeling* you need to create for a relaxed, friendly atmosphere, and crucial for repeat business.

It starts with the automatic SMILE, followed by a brief statement, such as “Nice to have you with us,” or, “Hello, how are you?” or, “Hi, what can I get for you?” You just can’t walk up to a customer and TAKE THE ORDER, with no effort to communicate, regardless of how busy it is.

The initial greeting/smile is an opportune time to introduce yourself. It is the “class, money-making” bartenders who have this ability to extend their hand and say to a newcomer, “I haven’t seen you in here before. My name is \_\_\_\_\_, and yours?”, or, “Nice of you to stop by!” And doesn’t this initial greeting and brief conversation with all our customers give us a “clue” as to what our customers have been up to before they got to our place? I’ve detected intoxication many times by slurred speech, droopy eyes, “spaciness”, etc., and have refused service. I never would have known unless I had initiated some type of conversation.

Bartenders are hosts, or social directors, not ORDER TAKERS. We strive to make all our customers feel at ease and comfortable being in a bar, just as though they were guests in our own home.

Why do people go to bars in the first place? To drink? Not really. It’s a lot cheaper to drink at home, isn’t it? I can buy a liter bottle of rum and a 6 pack of coke and get 25-27 drinks for around \$10. The same number of drinks in a bar would be 5 to 7 times greater. People go to bars for recognition, attention, involvement, social contact, entertainment, fraternization and numerous other reasons. A knowledgeable bartender knows that the vast majority of his customers are not there just to drink. Bar patrons want to feel as though they “belong” to something. Familiarity breeds security and comfort. That’s why they stopped in. It’s up to the bartender to give this customer that feeling. If done correctly, the customer will return time and again because you, the bartender, gave him what he came in for. If you don’t give him that comfortable, recognizable experience, he’ll drift from bar to bar until he does find the bartender who will give him what he, and every other customer, is looking for.

Have you ever wondered why some bars are more successful than others? Everyone has basically the same product – Budweiser, Seagram “7”, Absolut, etc. The reasons for success can usually be found in the service philosophy, personalities, and friendliness of the staff. After all, you can get a rum and coke anywhere, right? Why should a customer come back to your bar and see you? Did you give him a reason to? It’s not the drink that makes the customer return!

It all begins with that very important initial greeting. It is the most important part of the bartender’s job. Remember, be sincere, friendly, SMILE,

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welcome your customer. Don't just take the order. Talk a little. Put him at ease. After awhile, introduce him to someone you know at the bar. Get a conversation going. Get customers talking with each other (this frees you up to do other things). Remember his name. Remember what he drinks. You'll make a regular if you keep calling him by his name. He'll feel he belongs.