

7 Deadly Sins of a Bartender

Who hasn't worked as a waiter or a bartender before? It's almost like a rite of passage for most of us to at least have worked part-time in some form of hospitality establishment at some point in our lives. Personally, I find it to be a distinguished mark of excellence if someone that I am interviewing for a job tells me that they have past working experience in the hospitality industry. For one, it is a pretty good indicator that they have:

- Problem solving skills
- Can work long hard hours
- Know what customer service is

Hospitality is a great school for life, even if you don't make it your life career. Unfortunately, you don't only learn good things when you're working as a waiter or bartender. For one, you learn to analyze the system that you are working in for weak links that can be taken advantage of. How to finagle a free meal, how to make inventory disappear, or how to reallocate income intended for the owner to oneself. There are a number of rationalizations for such behavior. The two most common ones are:

- I could, so I did
- I don't get paid enough anyway

The opportunities to test the system are exponentially higher for a bartender than they are for a waiter. The process for gaining access to food without it being wrung up on the POS System are just more difficult than for a bartender who receives orders and can dispense alcohol at his/her leisure.

Here is a list of some of the *Tricks of the Trade*. I would never claim this list to be a complete guide of self-enrichment, but it's a good overview.

Giving away free drinks without ringing them up. The intent could be to get higher tips in return or just do your friends a favor. Many bartenders that I know have a fan base that follow them to whatever bar they work in to have access to cheap drinks.

The bar owner is not necessarily losing more than the purchase value in this transaction, because it is questionable whether the benefactor of the free drink would have paid for it in the first place. Nonetheless these are not the kind of guests you want in your establishment. This kind of behavior is particularly unethical if the patron would have paid for the drink.

Disclaimer: No bar owner is adverse to giving away drinks to regular customers as a means of thanking them for their patronage, but there is a clear process that absolves any bartender from this practice. You ring the drink up as a comp and have the manager sign it. Not adhering to this practice is inviting abuse.

Over-Pouring: This is a variation of giving away liquor to please your customers and get better tips.

Charging for a drink without ringing it up: This is probably the most common of irregularities in a bar. Management tries to implement ordering processes that eliminate this, such as the requirement to place a bill in front of every customer after every order, but there are advanced variations of this method that make it possible. I actually discovered some of my bartenders, back in the day when I was still an F&B manager, making copies of the most common variation of orders and passing the same POS chit out to numerous guests. This level of devious energy might surprise many, but if you consider how lucrative being irregular can be, it becomes more understandable.

Stretching Drinks: This practice entails short pouring a number of drinks (e.g. 3), or watering them down, so that a bartender can sell the fourth drink to a customer and pocket the money without throwing off inventory.

This practice doesn't have to be an exact science when applied. Ever felt you were getting a watered down drink? That's usually a sign that the bartender is trying to make more money than intended off his inventory.

Back Pouring: This entails pouring a drink without ringing it up and then compensating for the loss of inventory by pouring either water or a cheaper liquor back into the bottle to compensate for the loss.

Results of Test Installation in Miami Nightclub

Scenario:

Nightclub with 6 bars distributed over 3 floors. System was installed on the floor with the highest volume of business; there are two full bars on this floor with a total of 5 work stations. Each work station has 36 bottles assigned to it. This establishment generates approximately \$100,000 liquor sales a month.

Irregularities Detected:

- 8 foreign bottles found in the bar after the shift started
- 42% shrinkage by the end of the shift
- 17 bottles missing/unaccounted for

Summary:

The total investment for this club would be \$90,000; the estimated loss of revenue per month is in excess of \$40,000. The expected breakeven on investment would be 3 months.

Theft: Got a party to go to? Need to contribute to the party's bar, but the liquor store is closed? What the heck, you have full access to a huge inventory; nobody is going to miss that bottle of Stolli. In other scenarios the liquor is "creatively requisitioned" before the cartons make it on site, or before they leave the storage room for the bar.

Foreign Bottles: This practice entails the bartender bringing his own inventory into the bar to pour out from during the shift. What benefit does this have? He/she pockets the revenue of the drinks poured from that bottle. Should a manager then do inventory it would be impossible to detect via inventory variance (shrinkage). This process is only performed by veteran deviants, but is incredibly lucrative. A bottle of liquor is bought at cost and sold at a factor of 10, i.e. a bottle costing \$10 can easily be sold at a value of \$100. In nightclubs, where this practice is most common, bottles can be sold at an even higher margin.

Theft happens in bars all over American on a regular basis. The question is, are you as a bar manager/owner aware of when it happens?

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