

Responsible Service
of Alcohol



A Server's Guide

Responsible Service of Alcohol: A Server's Guide



Preface

“This Server’s Guide and the accompanying Trainer’s Guide provide information that blends useful skills, legal and social responsibilities and best practices in order to achieve a responsible service of alcohol within the hospitality and retail industries. With the help of these guides, users will come to know the law and their legal responsibilities, promote social responsibility to communities in which they operate and support best practices within their professions.

All members of staff within the hospitality and retail industries need to appreciate and understand their responsibilities relating to alcohol, know how alcohol affects the body and be aware of the benefits and risks associated with alcohol consumption. These guides are an initial step on the path to learning. They put tools in the hands of practitioners and policy-makers to help them understand their important role in ensuring the responsible service of alcohol.”


Brett Bivans, International Center for Alcohol Policies

Introduction

The aim of this guide is to cover the basic laws and responsibilities required of staff serving alcohol. This may be in an on-license environment, where the alcohol is sold and the customer drinks it in the place where it was bought, or an off-license one, where the alcohol is sold and the customer takes it away to drink elsewhere.

It will of course be of relevance for others who come into contact with alcohol as part of their work in the hospitality or retail industries.

Throughout this guide, you will see the symbol . This indicates you will have to find out the rules or laws relating to your country or workplace.

Another symbol  is for best practice. This information is aimed at managers to give guidance on running a premises.

Selling alcohol requires many skills and involves legal responsibilities - that is, the things you have to do as part of your job in order to comply with the laws. You also need to be aware of your social responsibilities - that is, the things you should do to run a good business and have a positive impact on your community.

In serving alcohol, there are several different aspects to your job:

- ✓ to be a “police officer” ensuring no one breaks any laws
- ✓ to be a sales person knowledgeable about your products
- ✓ to be a cleaner making sure premises are clean and tidy
- ✓ to be a good host helping to create a friendly atmosphere
- ✓ to be a safety officer thinking about the well being of customers and reducing any risks

The theme of this workbook is the “responsible service of alcohol”, but what does this mean?

Alcohol is mainly consumed responsibly but can cause harm if misused. It is therefore important to sell it in a way that minimizes any potential harm. This means thinking about who you are selling to, how much you are selling, and the well being of the customer. Many countries have adopted laws to help make things clearer. There is also a lot of established good practice that you can put in place.

Acknowledgements: This guide was drafted by a team from Alcohol Focus Scotland’s ServeWise program under contract to the International Center for Alcohol Policies (ICAP) and the European Forum for Responsible Drinking (EFRD). ServeWise is the largest provider of social responsibility training for the licensed trade in Scotland. It works with a wide variety of stakeholders including licensing board members, solicitors, licensed trade organizations, police, alcohol action teams and training providers, such as local colleges of further education and private training organizations. The drafting team included Linda Bowie (ServeWise Manager), Joanne Worrall (ServeWise Training and Information Officer) and Mary Ellmers (National ServeWise Manager). This guide and the accompanying guide for Trainers were peer-reviewed by Jim Peters (Responsible Hospitality Institute, USA) and Rob Eicholtz (Horeca Branche Instituut, Netherlands).



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Section 1: Licensing Law

Licensing law is the set of legal rules governing the sale of alcohol in a given jurisdiction. It usually defines who can sell alcohol, when, where and to whom. Generally the underlying purpose of licensing law is to act as a protection against any potential harm to public order or to public health. This is sometimes stated in the law.

Commercial / Noncommercial Alcohol

Licensing laws generally apply in all situations where alcohol is sold or distributed. Alcohol can be produced commercially or noncommercially.

Commercially-produced alcohol includes all the well known drinks and brands, many of which are available worldwide, as well as nationally or locally produced drinks.

Noncommercially-produced alcohol includes distilled spirits such as Russian samogon, Brazilian cacha, Tanzanian gongo, Zambian kachasu and Hungarian palinka. It also includes beer drinks such as banan or sorghum beer or Mexican pulque made from Agave juice. Home-produced wine is a common and traditional form of noncommercial alcohol.


Whilst many of these drinks are produced to high quality, serious health problems have also been associated with noncommercial beverages, as controlling the alcohol content and ensuring the purity of the product can be difficult.

License to Sell

Most countries that have restrictions on who can buy alcohol, will also have restrictions on who can do the selling.

In order to sell alcohol, you may have to obtain a permit or license.


The license may simply permit you to sell alcohol (as in parts of Africa) or it may be extremely detailed (as in most of Europe and North America). For example, in Scotland, there are different types of license depending on what type of sales you wish to do and from what environment. Thus, a restaurant license allows you to sell alcohol in a premises where people are sitting down to a meal and where alcohol accompanies a meal.

 Find out what your country's laws are regarding the sale of alcohol. Such information is provided by relevant government bodies (such as the licensing authority, trade or commerce department or health ministry).

Permitted Hours

Where a license is needed, there are often restrictions on the times you can sell alcohol. It is illegal to sell alcohol outside the hours specified by laws.

The hours may differ depending on the type of license you have, e.g., whether you are selling alcohol to drink on or off the premises or whether you are serving food to go with the alcohol.

 You can find out what the laws are regarding the hours you can sell alcohol from your manager or from a relevant government office, sometimes called a Liquor Licensing Department.



Age & Alcohol

In most countries, it is forbidden to sell beverage alcohol to a person under a certain age. For example, this threshold is 16 years in Italy, 18 in Hungary and 21 in the United States.

Sometimes, the minimum age differs depending on whether you are drinking the alcohol on the premises or buying from a shop. In Sweden, it's 18 in restaurants and 20 in shops; in Denmark, it's 18 in bars and restaurants, and 16 in shops.

In some countries, the permitted age changes depending on the strength of the drink. In Finland, the legal age is 18 for buying drinks from shops with a maximum of 22% alcohol by volume and 20 for drinks stronger than that.

In other countries, the permitted age varies depending on whether or not the person is accompanied by an adult of legal drinking age, such as a parent or a spouse.

The legal age is set because alcohol can be very dangerous to the young. This is because they generally lack the experience of dealing with alcohol and their internal organs haven't finished developing, so a small amount may have a much larger effect than it does on adults.

In England alone, around 21,700 people are admitted to hospital each year with alcohol poisoning, with a high proportion of them being young people.

If there are restrictions on age relating to the sale of alcohol, then you must check the age of the person you are serving. In most countries, staff are able to do this by asking to see some identification that is nationally recognized. However, in certain countries, such as Belgium and France, this can only be checked by officials. In France, only police and public order representatives can request identification. If you are in doubt about someone's age, you must not serve them. How to handle refusing a customer is covered in more detail in Section 4: People Skills (see page 24).



Find out the minimum age when a person can legally buy alcohol in your country or local area.

In some countries, there are also age restrictions for the person selling the alcohol.



Find out the minimum age that you must be to sell alcohol in your country or local area.



Other Duties / Offences

As someone who sells alcohol, you may have many responsibilities apart from checking the age of the person you are serving.

Serving alcohol to a person who is already intoxicated is an offence in most countries. Once drinkers have consumed alcohol to a level that they are showing signs of intoxication, their normal judgement is impaired. Therefore, it is up to the server, not the customers, to decide whether or not they should be served.

When is Someone Drunk?

It can be difficult to know when someone is drunk, and the amount of alcohol consumed will vary between different people. The law in Finland uses the following to define drunkenness - "Persons who are behaving disturbingly or are clearly intoxicated". Another in Denmark states, "You cannot serve a person who is drunk if the person is a danger to himself or his surroundings".

To understand how alcohol affects people, see Section 2: Alcohol (pages 8-14).



Find out what the laws are relating to selling alcohol to a drunken person in your country or local area from your manager or local licensing authority.



In order to comply with these laws, it may be necessary to refuse someone service. Even if it is not the law, it is good practice to prevent drunkenness as it can result in problems.

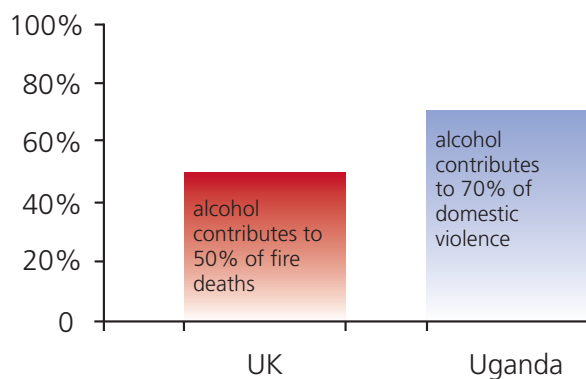


Risks to Staff & Business

- Drunk customers are more difficult to deal with
- More mess to clear up (spillages, breakages, vomit, etc.)
- More disorder, issues may escalate into aggression and violence more quickly
- Staff more at risk for harm
- Increased costs to premises of replacing fixtures and fittings
- Increased staffing costs – need more staff to deal with disorder, likely to have a higher staff turnover
- Premises gets a reputation that in turn attracts more rowdy people and puts better behaved customers off
- Extra visits from the police, which puts license at risk

Risks to Customers

- Drunk customers are more at risk than sober individuals when returning home, whether driving, walking or using public transport - as they are most vulnerable to attacks or having an accident.



As drunkenness affects balance, judgement and sometimes the state of mind, there are many accidents and crimes where alcohol is a contributory factor. These include 50% of fire deaths in the UK and 70% of domestic violence in Uganda.



Drugs

It is not only alcohol that is regulated by laws regarding its sale and consumption; drugs may also have legal obligations. In many countries, these are sometimes found legally or illegally in places that sell alcohol. Let us look at a few in detail:

Tobacco – some countries have a ban or laws in place that prevent smoking in certain places and many only allow sale of tobacco to persons over a certain age. In Ireland, it is illegal to smoke in an enclosed public area or workplace such as a bar or a restaurant.

Cannabis – the laws surrounding this drug can vary from it being legalized in some establishments (as in the Netherlands), to it being totally illegal and resulting in criminal offence (as in Finland).

Cocaine, Heroin, Ecstasy, etc. – Again, there will probably be laws surrounding these drugs' use and sale. Many establishments selling alcohol also have legal responsibility to ensure that these drugs are not available or being used on the premises. Failure to comply may risk losing the license to operate. Make sure you are aware of the signs that someone is using drugs such as these and report any suspicions to your employer.



Find out what the laws are regarding the drugs above.



What Happens if You Break a Law?


In the countries where it is illegal to sell alcohol to individuals under a certain age, there is likely to be a fine and, in some cases (as in Belgium), a prison sentence associated with breaking this law. It can also result in the loss of the license to sell alcohol (as in Sweden).

Similarly, in countries where it is illegal to serve an intoxicated person, breaking this law could result in fines, warnings, loss of license or imprisonment.

Consequences of Selling to Underage Persons

Country	Consequences
Austria	Fine of around €2,200
Czech Republic	Fines to seller and criminal consequences
Estonia	Fine & withdrawal of license and other sanctions depending on infringement (e.g., 1st or 2nd offence)
Finland	A written warning, a restriction to license limiting the service hours. Withdrawal of license for a certain time or permanently, fines, prison up to 2 years
Germany	Fines & loss of license
Ireland	On conviction, the courts must impose the following: 1st offence - a fine of €1270 and closure of premises for up to 7 days. 2nd and subsequent offences - €1905 fine plus closure of premises for 30 days. A license is lost when the establishment has 3 citations. Once license is lost, a premises can never again be licensed
Italy	Imprisonment up to 1 year
Netherlands	Fines
Spain	Fines
Switzerland	Fines and loss of license for a limited time
England & Wales	Fine of £1,000

Depending on the country and the circumstances, these consequences can fall on the server, the license holder or both.

 In order to prove that you are complying with the laws, it is good practice to keep records to show what systems you have in place:

1. Training and Training Records

It is good practice for employers to show that staff have been made aware of the laws through training and by asking staff to sign to show they have understood these laws, or to sit an exam to prove their understanding.



2. Incident Diary

It is good practice to record any incidents that happen, such as arguments or fights, so that any problems can be identified to prevent them from occurring again. It also gives an accurate picture for company communication and passing on to any authorities that may need details.

The current diary should be kept in a handy place where everyone knows where to find it. Old records should be filed for possible use in any legal actions that may follow.

3. Refusals Book

This is a book where you record when you have to refuse service because customers are underage, drunk, etc. This record book is then signed by the manager and shows you are abiding by the laws. It also helps to build a picture of any problem patterns.

4. Age Policies

It is often seen as “not doing enough” to just ask those who look underage for identification as you may miss some people. Where the legal age is 18, many countries make it good practice to check the ID of all customers who look under 21 years of age, so there is at least a 3-year age “buffer”. Some countries use 5- to 10-year buffers as the safe policy when checking age. This ensures that underage individuals are not served in error on account of them looking older than their age.

Summary / Action Points

1. Find out what the law says about who can sell alcohol in your country or local area
2. Find out what the legal selling hours are for your particular place of work
3. Find out what the age restrictions are in your country with regard to alcohol sales
4. Find out what the laws are with regard to selling alcohol to an intoxicated person
5. Find out what the laws are regarding the sale and use of tobacco, cannabis and other drugs
6. Find out what the punishment is if you break a licensing law
7. Ask your colleagues or your employer about policies and systems you have in your work environment to show that you are abiding by the laws
- 8.** Managers - look at your systems and discuss with staff any improvements that can be made to enhance your preventative measures



Section 2: Alcohol

In most countries, alcohol is so widely available that many people forget that it falls into the category of a depressant drug. This does not mean that by drinking alcohol you will feel down or depressed. It does mean that it depresses the brain's functions. This, in turn, changes people's behavior. It is because of its mind-altering properties, and other potentially damaging effects on the body, when consumed irresponsibly, that alcohol can be quite a dangerous substance and why its sales are controlled.

As people drink alcohol, you can see how their behavior starts to change.

- People become a little louder and more confident as they lose their inhibitions
- Some people may start to slur their words
- Some may start to be unsteady on their feet
- Other senses will start to be affected, including vision, causing difficulty in judging distances



If a drunk person continues drinking, it can have very serious effects. Automatic functions start to be affected (heart, lungs). This is known as alcohol poisoning and causes a person to lose consciousness. An unconscious person can choke to death on his or her own vomit. A person can also die from acute alcohol poisoning – from having too much alcohol in the bloodstream.

It is important to know the early symptoms of intoxication and to refuse to serve such customers well before they become obviously drunk.

As alcohol worsens the physical and mental functioning, the more individuals drink, the less likely they are to be able to make decisions about their own well being. This is why it is up to the server to decide who has had enough to drink, not the drinking customer.



Alcohol & the Body

Alcohol is made of very small molecules, and these are absorbed into the blood. Normally, this takes place in the small intestine, but, in theory, if you were to fill your mouth with, for example, a nip of whisky without swallowing it, the alcohol would still be absorbed into your blood through the lining of your mouth. Cell membranes are highly permeable to alcohol, so, once alcohol is in the bloodstream, it can diffuse into nearly every tissue of the body. This means that misuse of alcohol can damage many different organs in the body.

Normally, alcohol is swallowed and goes down to the stomach. The stomach breaks down food and drink before passing it to the small intestine. If there is no food in the stomach, then the alcohol passes more quickly into the small intestine from where it is absorbed into the blood. The alcohol circulates around the body (in the blood) until it reaches the brain. This takes approximately 5 minutes. When the alcohol reaches the brain, it begins to depress the functions of the brain, starting with the part of the brain that controls inhibitions and judgement.

If there is food in the stomach, alcohol will mix with the food before passing to the small intestine. It is this mixing with the food that slows down the alcohol being absorbed into the blood. Note that the process is only slowed down - not stopped. Eventually, all of the alcohol consumed will be absorbed into the blood and will travel around the body, affecting other body functioning.

Alcohol reaches the liver in approximately 20 minutes. The liver processes the alcohol – breaking it down and neutralizing it, then removing it from the body. In general, the liver breaks down alcohol at the rate of around 8 grams of alcohol per hour. See page 12 for help in calculating the number of grams of alcohol in any drink.

The amount of alcohol in the blood is determined by the quantity and type of alcohol consumed, the speed of drinking, whether or not there is food in the stomach and a variety of other factors. The immediate effects of drinking depend upon the amount of alcohol in the bloodstream – the blood alcohol concentration (BAC). BAC varies according to a person's sex, weight, body composition and speed of drinking. Women tend to have a slightly higher BAC than men after drinking the same amount because they have less body fluid to dilute the alcohol.

A small amount of alcohol (less than 10%) is eliminated from the body in urine, breath and sweat. The rest is oxidized - this means, like food, it combines with oxygen in the blood to release heat, energy or calories. However, although alcohol has some nutritional value, it is of poor quality because it lacks vitamins, proteins and other nutrients. Also, unlike food, alcohol is metabolized almost exclusively by the liver. This means that the liver is one of the first parts of the body to suffer the harmful effects of heavy drinking. The diagram on the next page looks at alcohol's passage through the body.

In summary, this generally means that when drinking the same amount of alcohol:

- **Women** are more affected than **Men**
- A **Small person** is more affected than a **Big person**
- A **Person who has empty stomach** is more affected than a **Person who has eaten a big meal**

And because the body builds up a tolerance to alcohol:

- A **Person who drinks rarely** will appear more affected than a **Person who drinks regularly**



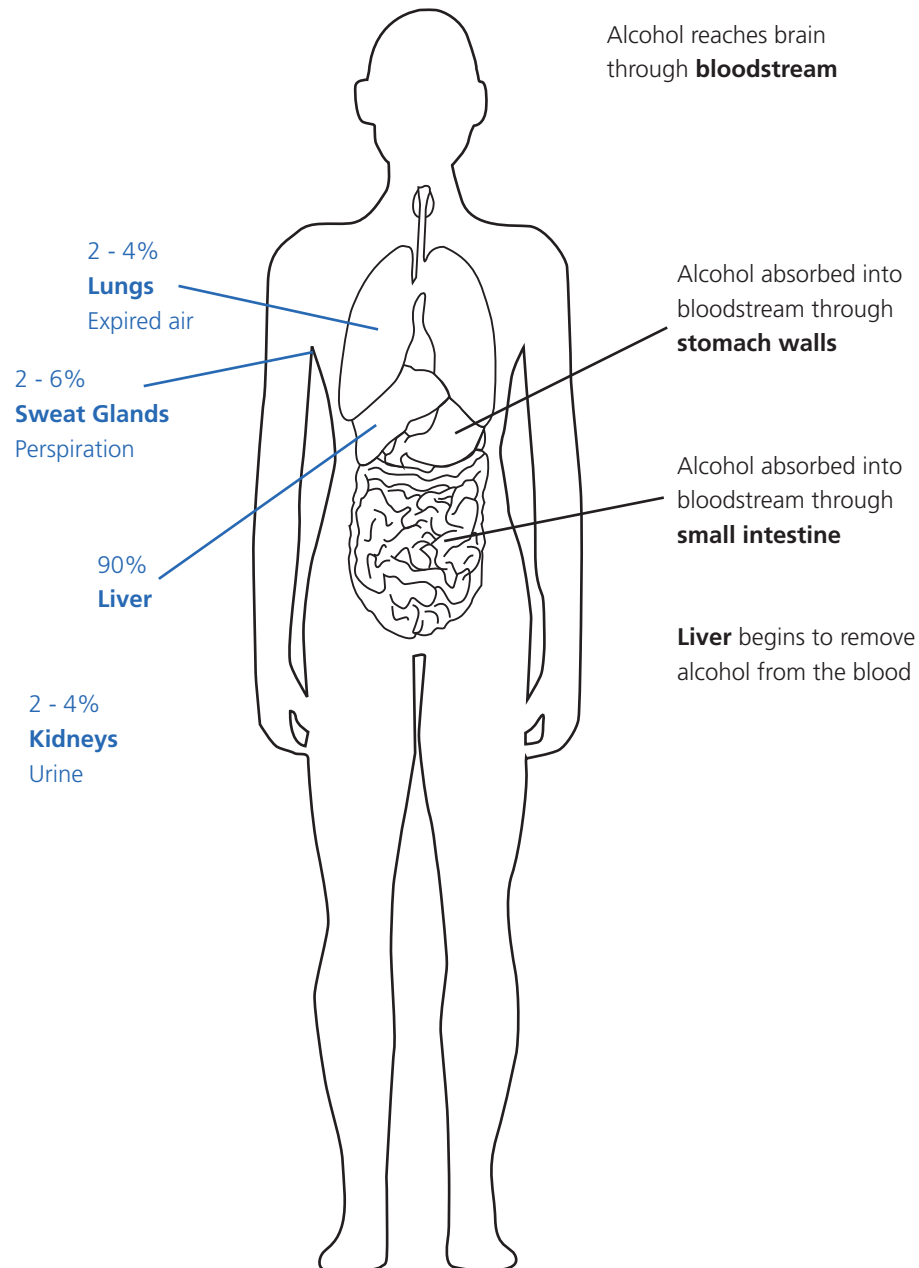
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How Alcohol Leaves the Body

How Alcohol Enters the Body





Strength of Drinks

The strength of alcohol drinks varies. Even within a given sector, there is considerable variation across different drinks. For example, beer can range from about 2% to about 9% alcohol by volume (ABV). In addition, many drinks are mixed with soft drinks or water. In order to make measurement as uniform as possible, the agreed convention for standardizing drinks is grams of pure alcohol (ethanol). What it means in practice is that a “standard” drink will always contain a given amount of pure alcohol, regardless of whether it is beer, wine or distilled spirits.

It is useful for consumers to be able to assess “low-risk levels of consumption”. However, different countries have different standard drink measures, generally ranging from 8g to 14g, and some countries don’t have such a thing as a “standard drink”.

Having an understanding of the risks and benefits potentially associated with alcohol consumption is an important tool for preventing harm. Guidelines can provide people with a sound basis for making decisions about their drinking and allow them to change their drinking patterns as appropriate.



Official guidelines on alcohol consumption are generally produced by relevant government departments (a ministry of health or other department responsible for alcohol issues). Find out what they are for your country. Other guidelines may also exist, such as those given by medical associations.

Some countries have attempted to introduce measures to allow a better estimate of the number of standard drinks in a beverage. In the UK, for example, alcohol producers have made a voluntary decision to specify the number of UK units in a beverage, where 1 unit is equal to 8 grams of pure alcohol.


“An understanding of the risks and benefits potentially associated with alcohol consumption is an important tool for preventing harm.”



You cannot presume that each drink, be it a prepackaged bottle of beer, a standard glass of wine or a measured spirit, is a standard drink. The calculator below allows you to gauge how many grams of pure alcohol are in a drink if you know the amount of drink in milliliters (ml) and the strength of the drink in alcohol by volume (ABV). Both are normally stated somewhere on the label or packaging, the latter usually expressed as a percentage. Alternatively, you can calculate this yourself:

$$\frac{\{ \text{Amount of drink (ml)} \times \text{Strength of drink (ABV)} \} \times 8}{1000}$$


Drink	Amount of pure alcohol(g)
1 Imperial pint (568ml) of lager (4% ABV)	18.2
275ml bottle of flavored alcohol beverage (5% ABV)	11
330ml bottle of premium lager (5% ABV)	13.2
Whisky (35ml measure, 40% ABV) and cola	11.2
Vodka or gin (25ml measure, 37.5% ABV) and tonic	7.5
Glass (175ml) of wine (12% ABV)	16.8
Vermouth (50ml measure, 15% ABV) and lemonade	6

 It is important that you offer a good range of drinks, including some of lower strength or alcohol-free, in a range of sizes.


Pouring Measures


So that people can keep account of what they are drinking, it is best practice to use standard measures for pouring drinks.

Some countries have made this law, as in the UK where the law states that a sign has to be displayed stating the size of measure for wine and the spirits (vodka, gin, whisky and rum). In the UK, wine has to be sold in glasses 125ml, 175ml or multiples of these, and the four spirits mentioned have to be sold in either 25ml or 35ml and multiples of these.

 Pouring measures may differ depending on what drink you are serving. Find out what the laws are in your country by contacting your local government department dealing with trading standards or licensing issues.

The Permitted Measures


 Some countries may have laws governing the type of promotions you can offer. Certainly, in most countries it is not good practice to run promotions that encourage people to drink a lot of alcohol in a short space of time, since this can encourage drunkenness and all its associated problems.

 Find out if there are any laws or good practices relating to promotions in your country.




Drinking and Driving

Most countries have laws about drinking and driving. In those that do, this varies from 0.00% BAC (“zero tolerance”), as in Hungary and the Czech Republic, to 0.02%, as in Norway and Sweden, and to 0.08%, as in Canada, New Zealand, the UK and the USA. Where there is a set limit, breathalyzers and blood samples are used to calculate the concentration, but sometimes physical tests are conducted initially to assess the level of intoxication, such as “walking in a straight line” in some States in the USA.

 Find out what the laws are in your country with regard to drinking and driving by contacting your local government department dealing with traffic offences.


There is no dispute that alcohol affects a person’s ability to drive. In fact, the body begins to be adversely affected from around 0.02% BAC (sometimes expressed as 20mg per 100ml of blood.) Many people ask, “How much can I safely drink and still drive?”


It is impossible to say that a certain number of grams of alcohol or a certain number of drinks will keep you below a government set limit or ensure your driving is safe. As we’ve already seen, the amount of alcohol in your blood depends on age, sex, size, what you’ve eaten and many more factors. This means it is impossible to predict the exact effect and therefore the only truly “safe” level is not to drink alcohol at all when driving.


 If a customer who may be driving is served intoxicating amounts of alcohol, servers in some countries (e.g., in some States of the USA) may face legal responsibility if the person has a car accident and is found to be drunk. This is known as “server liability”. Even if this is not the case in your country, we all have a social responsibility. This is why it is important to let the drivers know the facts and offer them an alcohol-free or low-alcohol alternatives. Other good practices include placing details of local taxi services or bus timetables on display and distributing materials of any designated driver schemes.


Sobering Up

Ask anyone how to sober up or get rid of the alcohol from the body, and people give a variety of answers. However, most of this advice is incorrect and some can cause more harm. Let us look at a few:

Drink coffee  **wrong** - coffee contains caffeine (which is a stimulant) and mixing it with alcohol (which is a depressant) can have harmful side effects.

Drink water  **wrong** – although this may help rehydrate the body, drinking water has no effect on getting rid of the alcohol.

Be sick / vomit  **wrong** – this will only get rid of the alcohol in the stomach and, as alcohol is quickly absorbed into the bloodstream, this won’t help.

Stop drinking and wait  **RIGHT** - there is nothing you can do but wait for your liver to process the alcohol out of your body. It takes around 20 minutes from when you first start drinking for the liver to start to process alcohol out of the body. The liver then processes this alcohol at a steady rate of around 8g per hour.

The best way to avoid drunkenness is for individuals to “pace” themselves - that is, drink at a rate no faster than the body can break down the alcohol.

It is important to think about the amount of time it takes to get rid of ALL the alcohol in your system, especially if you are driving or operating machinery later the same day or even the next day after drinking a significant amount.



Alcohol & Lifestyle

Depending on the culture of your country, the proportion of drinkers in the adult population will vary. In some countries, it is as high as over 90%. Drinking tends to be associated with good times like parties, events and celebrations and is often used as a “release”, for example at the end of a hard week at work. If consumed in moderation, at the right time and place, alcohol can be compatible with a healthy lifestyle. However, people who tend to drink too much, either binge drinking or over consuming, are at greater risk of developing health and other problems.

Binge Drinking - drinking too much in a single session. The precise definition varies around the world. In the US, it is defined as 5 or more drinks for a man and 4 or more drinks for a woman in a single session.

Excessive Consumption - Drinking too much over a period of time. Sensible drinking guidelines also vary between countries.



We have already covered some of the short-term effects of problem drinking, which include the possibility of alcohol poisoning, as well as a high risk of being involved in an accident or a crime. There are also many long-term effects, particularly on health.

When the liver has had to deal with too much alcohol, liver damage may result, ranging from fatty deposits and inflammation to cirrhosis, leaving permanent damage. **Excessive consumption** also has a corrosive impact on the linings of the stomach and oesophagus, causing gastritis, ulcers and reflux; it may also damage the pancreas. Drinking more than 80g at a time is linked with a significant rise in blood pressure, which increases the risk of heart attack or stroke. In fact, alcohol can affect almost all parts of the body adversely when taken in excess of the recommended guidelines.

The Good News

In contrast, there are some reported health benefits associated with low to moderate levels of drinking that is at or below the guidance levels. Alcohol can be a protective factor for the heart, but only at these low levels. Additionally, to date, this effect has only been shown for people over the age of 40.

Summary / Action Points

1. Be aware of the early signs of intoxication. Discuss with other staff and / or your manager what signs would mean you would say no to serving a customer
2. Find out what the official recommended alcohol consumption guidelines are for your country
3. Calculate how many grams of alcohol are there in 3 or 4 of the most popular types of drinks you regularly serve in your job
4. Find out what the laws in your country say with regard to measuring drinks before you serve them. If there are no laws, is there best practice?
5. Find out what the laws in your country are with regard to drinking and driving
-  6. Managers - review the range of products you stock and the information about each of them, so that customers can make sensible, informed choices
-  7. If you don't already do so, display information in the way of posters or other materials to discourage drinking and driving



Section 3: Creating the Right Atmosphere

The atmosphere is the general mood or feeling of a place. It begins to affect the customers from the moment they come in and can influence the way they drink and their ongoing behavior.

Part of creating the right atmosphere is about encouraging people to behave in a manner that is in keeping with the style of your premises. To do this, you must set standards.

Drinking behavior depends on three different factors:

The drink

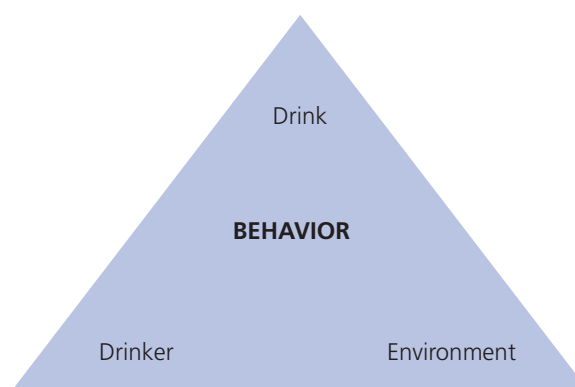
- the amount and strength of alcohol

The drinker

- the characteristics of the person drinking the alcohol and his or her state of mind and personal circumstances

The environment

- the atmosphere and prevailing rules of the establishment where the drinking is taking place



Removing or changing any one of these factors will alter the drinking behavior. For example, a person's behavior at a fine restaurant is likely to be very different from that person's behavior while watching a sports game at a bar. The environment has changed, even though exactly the same amount was drunk in both circumstances.

Or the same person's behavior watching a sports game in the bar will change with the amount of alcohol he or she consumes. Customers are likely to behave differently if they were not drinking at all (perhaps because they're driving) compared to if they did have drinks with a group of friends.

The manager and staff are in a position to control or influence at least two of the three factors above: the amount and type of drink served and, in particular, the environment. The layout of the premises, whether there are more people sitting or standing, the lighting and the music are all things that create the drinking environment.

For instance, there is evidence to suggest that vertical drinking (i.e., where people stand) promotes more rapid drinking than when people are seated. Certainly, the environment that you set can influence whether the customer is more likely to drink in a relaxed, social way or in an aggressive or competitive way.



Protective and Risk Factors in Bars

Research carried out in Scotland in 2005 examined the factors associated with alcohol-related problems in licensed premises, such as drunkenness and violence.

The findings were in line with a number of other studies (e.g., in Canada, USA, Australia and New Zealand). The study found that there is a range of factors that protect against problems in a premises, and that there is a range of factors that increase them. No one factor by itself causes or can eliminate violence, but having a range of the protective factors and making sure there are as few risk factors as possible mean the likelihood of problems is much reduced.

Protective Factors:

- Lack of congestion, not overly crowded
- Inappropriate persons (e.g., intoxicated or underage) being refused entry or refused service
- Good standards of cleanliness and housekeeping
- Friendly staff
- Quick and efficient service
- Calling last orders in plenty of time
- Managing the exit of patrons
- Monitoring patrons, including at entry, the bar and the exit
- Promotion of food (full meals and snacks)
- Higher percentage of customers sitting
- Staff trained in responsible service
- Good range of reasonably priced soft drinks
- Good communication between staff

All these factors encourage relaxed, social drinking.

“Part of creating the right atmosphere is about encouraging people to behave in a manner that suits your premises. To do this, you must set standards.”



Risk Factors:

- Unsupervised pool tables
- TV showing aggressive, offensive, sexual or intoxication-related images
- Music with a lot of offensive or sexually explicit words
- Congestion anywhere in the premises (at the door, bar, stairs, toilets, dance floor, etc.)
- Higher percentage of customers standing
- Drunk or underage persons allowed in and served
- Vomiting
- Drug dealing or drug use
- Drunk customers in the premises
- Staff being hostile or aggressive towards patrons
- Staff allowing aggression or watching conflict
- Staff sending people outside to fight
- Late intervention in situations by staff
- Patrons served double at closing time or served after closing time
- Smokiness and/or lack of ventilation
- High level of noise and movement
- Lack of bar wiping, table clearing, toilet cleanliness
- Openly sexual or sexually competitive activity (such as “pulling”)
- In-house promotion or entertainment focusing on alcohol and “sexy dancing”

In summary, premises that have high standards, are clean and tidy and can control the negative behavior of their clientele are more likely to have a good atmosphere and prevent problems.



Maintaining Standards

Having worked your way through the previous sections, you will already know it can be quite complicated to understand when and to whom you can sell alcohol. One of the best ways to make this clear to everyone is to create a house or store policy poster.

This will summarize to both customers and staff when alcohol can be sold, who can purchase alcohol, what forms of age identification are acceptable, etc. An example can be found on the next page and can be used as good practice.



Use this template as a model for making your own policy, personalized for your premises.

House / Store Policy

Name of Premises: _____

Address: _____

Telephone Number: _____

Type of License: _____

Name of License Holder: _____

In this premises, it is illegal to serve alcohol to anyone under the age of _____ years.

If you look under _____ years of age, you will be asked for identification.

The following types of ID are accepted here: _____

The hours we sell alcohol are: Monday _____

Tuesday _____

Wednesday _____

Thursday _____

Friday _____

Saturday _____

Sunday _____

(amend to suit local law)



It is against the law for us to serve an intoxicated person.

Persons who do not behave in an orderly manner appropriate to our business will be asked to leave.

Prevention of Crime & Disorder

A place that sells alcohol is also part of the local community and therefore has certain social responsibilities. In some countries, these issues have become so important that they are included in the law.

Preventing crime and disorder can cover many things from disorderly behavior to drink-driving and assault. You firstly have to think about which behavior is most likely to cause problems or is a crime in your country, city or area.

 Ask your Licensing Authority or chamber of commerce for information on any partnerships with police or other community services (garbage collection, noise control) to ensure that you are fulfilling your community responsibilities. 



By maintaining high standards and refusing entry to people with undesirable behavior, you will already be preventing many problems. However, it is important that you look out for signs of trouble and try to prevent it from happening. This will be covered more in the next section. There are also good practice systems you can put in place:

Good Practice in Both On-License and Off-License

Incident Diary – this is a record / diary of any incidents that occur (such as arguments or fights) so that any problems can be identified to prevent them from occurring again. It also gives an accurate picture for company communication and passing on to any authorities that may need details. The diary should be kept in a handy place where everyone knows where to find it. Old records should be filed for possible use in any legal actions that may follow. See Recording Incidents on page 27.

Refusals Book – This is a record of the instances when you have refused service because customers are underage, drunk, etc. This record book is then signed by the manager and shows you are abiding by the laws. It also helps to build a picture of any problem patterns.

Risk Assessment – in some countries, this will have to be completed to abide by health and safety laws. However, even if it is not legally required, it is good practice to walk around your workplace on a regular basis, list any potential risks and then work out how these could be minimized. Remember, things can be very different at peak times, when the premises is full of people. Customers themselves can be a potential hazard.

Good Practice in On-License Premises

Drinking Games / Shots Policy – certain drinking styles and products can lead to irresponsible drinking patterns. Drinking games where people “down” drinks or drink more than they would normally intend to can be dangerous and lead to drunkenness. Some drinks, such as shots or shooters that have high strengths, have the specific aim to get people drunk. You should ask the question whether selling these products can ever be responsible. It is a good idea to have a policy on which products are sold and how many drinks customers are allowed to purchase of these high-strength options. Your workplace should also have a policy on how to control such things as drinking games if they are taking place in your premises.

Promotions or “Happy Hours” - It is never good practice to promote alcohol as “drink all you can” for an amount of money or length of time. These types of promotions only encourage drunkenness and its associated problems.

Closing Time Strategy – This is set best practice procedure for your workplace to minimize problems at closing time. As this is the time most often listed in problem incidents, this policy should be carefully thought through and always followed in practice.

Large premises, such as late-night venues with music entertainment, may also plan the dispersal of the customers to ensure that people leave in a safe and orderly manner and to reduce the likelihood of “bottlenecks” and other problems. For an example of a dispersal policy, see www.beda.org.uk.



Best Practice for Closing Time in Bars


Contrary to popular belief, closing time doesn't start when the bar or premises shuts, but well before then. It is important to control the atmosphere of the venue and the mood of your customer and to think about neighboring properties and the transport mechanisms to get customers home safely.

If music or some other form of entertainment is on offer, then you don't want to save the best for last. This is likely to lead to your customers being "hyped up" and not ready to leave.

While you want them to have had a good time,

you need them to be calmer at the end of the night. Many places play slower songs to wind things down. Some larger venues start to close off sections of the premises in order to control crowds.



 It is good practice to call "last orders". This lets people know they only have a certain amount of time remaining if they wish to buy more alcohol. Call this in plenty of time, so you can serve all those who require a drink. For example, many places call last order 15 minutes before they have to stop serving by law throughout the week. At weekends and when it is busier, they call last orders 30 minutes before to avoid disappointed customers and complaints.

As you approach the last few sales, it is good practice to gently bring the lighting up. Turning all the lights on bright as bar shuts can cause people to get angry and feel aggressive, so a slow gradual approach is better.

Display any bus timetables or call taxis for customers (whatever is appropriate for your area). The main point is that you are assisting people to leave safely and trying to prevent a mass exit all at the same time.

“If music or some other form of entertainment is on offer, then you don't want to save the best for last.”



Drinking-up time – the law for your country may state that customers have to finish their drinks within a specified time. Even if this is not the case, you may have a company policy as to what time your premises needs everyone to have vacated it.



Find out what the regulations are around closing time from your manager or local licensing authority for your country or area.

Once you finish serving, it is important that the customers know they cannot buy any more alcohol. Some premises screen off the sales area with shutters; others remove staff from behind the counter, making it clear that no more sales will take place.

The next step is to inform customers of the time remaining. You may need to remind them several times - for example, "10 minutes drinking-up time left", "5 minutes drinking-up time left", etc. That way they are not surprised when you ask them to leave.

Outside your premises, as your customers leave, there is often noise as people chat, decide what they are doing next or say their goodbyes. Sometimes these customers can create litter problems or attempt to carry drinks outside with them.

Where possible, have staff near your exits thanking customers and preventing them from taking drinks outside (where appropriate). If these staff are considered "Door Staff", there may be laws or regulations that they have to abide by and training that may be compulsory.



Find out what regulations apply to door staff in your country or local area.

It is important to remind customers to respect neighboring properties and the people who live nearby, especially at night. Some companies send 1 or 2 staff on to the street with high visibility jackets to direct customers to nearest taxi ranks, bus stops, late night food premises, etc. Some premises feel it is worthwhile to give out free sweets to customers to help control noise. There are many creative, friendly ways of dealing with these issues without causing frustration or conflict.


The aim is for everyone to leave safely, having enjoyed their experience.



Responsible Hospitality and HIV/AIDS







Responsible hospitality training programs are essentially directed at providing a safe and comfortable drinking environment. Such programs are often directed specifically at helping owners, managers and employees of licensed and retail venues to reduce the incidence of consumption of alcohol by young people under the legal drinking age and service to intoxicated customers. But responsible hospitality can also help reduce other types of alcohol-related harm - e.g., through the prevention of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), which leads to AIDS.

Unsafe sex, often referred to as “high-risk” sex or “risky sexual behavior”, is defined by the World Health Organization as including multiple partners, together with lack of condom use and the type of sex acts involved. Some evidence supports an association between problematic alcohol consumption and risk of STIs. Problem drinking (intoxication) may be a critical contributing factor both to heightening the degree of susceptibility a person might have to transmitting or acquiring HIV and to increasing one’s vulnerability to the behavior of those infected with HIV.

 In the context of responsible hospitality, owners, managers, servers and other employees can help reduce the risk of harm by helping individuals make more informed and responsible decisions about their drinking and sexual behaviors. In particular, they could:

- liaise with local NGOs working on HIV/AIDS
- display educational materials about HIV/AIDS at the bar and in bathrooms.

Summary / Action Points

-  1. Find out what disorderly behavior is a crime in your country or area
-  2. Discuss with friends and family the aspects of the drinking environment that can annoy you as a customer, then think about whether any occur in your workplace
-  3. Complete your House / Store Policy poster so you have a clear summary of the laws you must follow
-  4. Read through the protective and risk factors, highlight any that apply to your workplace and think about their impact
-  5. Discuss and put in place the best practice tools appropriate for your workplace
-  6. Write a closing time strategy suitable for your workplace



Section 4: People Skills

How many times have you been a customer and something has caused you to feel frustrated? Think back to how you felt when you weren't served very quickly or when your meal was cold. Many people choose the place they go to purely on the attitude of the staff and the standard of service.

Thinking about what your customers want and ensuring that the environment is safe and pleasant can go a long way to keeping your customers happy and coming back.

As already mentioned, part of your role, along with complying with all the laws, is to provide excellent customer service. This involves several aspects:

The sales person – it is important you know what products you sell and a little bit about each.

The cleaner – research has shown that people behave in a more orderly way in a tidy, clean premises. Mess can also be a source of frustration - e.g., if a person comes to the bar and, when leaning on the counter, gets his or her clothes wet or stained from spillages, it could cause complaints or conflict.

The host – many customers choose the premises they visit based on the atmosphere, the staff and the levels of service. Knowing what your regulars like and taking an interest in their stories become part of service levels.

The safety officer – while serving and circulating around the premises, you should watch for unused glassware, rubbish on tables, spillages, or bags blocking walkways and fire exits.

The police officer – this is probably the hardest part of your role. Sometimes, you will have to refuse service or ask someone to leave the premises. This should always be done politely and calmly and never using force. We will look at this in more detail next.



Preventing Trouble

Seeing potential danger early and hopefully preventing it are always preferable to allowing a situation to get out of hand. Depending on the layout of your place of work, you may be able to see the whole of your premises from behind the bar / counter or you may have to work as part of a team and ensure you check around your premises regularly.



Complaints

It would be unreasonable to suggest that there will never be any complaints or conflict in premises, but, depending on the type of premises, location, age group of customers, etc., this will occur to a greater or lesser degree.

Dealing with a complaint is an art in itself. If you handle it well, you will have brought the customer round from being dissatisfied to being happy. However, if dealt with badly, the customer will feel even more unhappy and is likely to tell as many people as possible about the situation, leading to a loss of potential customers.

Key points to dealing with a complaint include:

- Listen carefully to the complaint, without interrupting
- Show that you understand
- Apologize
- Seek a solution

It is important not to raise your voice or argue with the customer. Observe how other staff deal with issues and consult your manager.

Remember, when people are angry, they often throw insults. Do not take insults personally or retaliate, you have to remain professional.

Dealing with complaints requires you to have patience and to keep others around you calm.

Refusals of Service

Like handling complaints, refusing service should be done respectfully and professionally. The perfect refusal should not be noticed by other customers.

- Approach as early as possible
- State the law
- Apologize
- Let the customers know that they are welcome another night, when they can prove their age or whatever is suitable to the situation.

It may not be appropriate for you to refuse people service until you have built up some experience. Talk to your managers if you are unsure and learn from how they deal with the situation.

If customers are angry, try to calm them down by speaking calmly and quietly. If people or property is threatened, it may be necessary to call the police. Keep your colleagues informed, and the manager will make the appropriate decision.

Remember, if customers are drunk, their brain will be affected by the alcohol, making them less inhibited and so quicker to anger and more likely to say or do things they wouldn't normally. They may also have more difficulty in understanding you. It is especially important to speak clearly and slowly - you may have to repeat yourself several times, and try not to get angry or impatient.

Escalation Plan

Have an "escalation plan". That is, a plan for if things get worse. This is likely to include communicating the problem to other staff and may involve calling the police.



Potential Problem Situations

It is impossible to predict everything that could cause problems, but there are some obvious scenarios that we can look at in more detail:

Large Single Sex Groups

In some types of premises, due to the “party atmosphere” and the group dynamics, single sex groups often start drinking to excess and getting boisterous, which can also upset other customers. So how should you deal with them?

- Speak to them when they first arrive and lay down ground rules (e.g., no drinking games, keep noise down, have a good night but don't get drunk)
- Build up a relationship early on so it's easier to speak to them later – find out what they are celebrating
- Set aside a separate area for them, if possible, to avoid upsetting other customers
- Identify the leader and make him or her responsible for the group's behavior
- Watch the amount they are drinking
- Speak to individuals at the bar
- Make it clear that, if one person causes trouble, they will all have to leave

Domestic Arguments

These are often the hardest to spot. A couple come in and are having a good night, then a row develops that has nothing to do with the venue. Whilst you can't listen to each customer's conversations, it is often obvious if there are ill feeling or cross words being spoken between partners or friends.

- Visit the table, ask if all is ok. The attention and the fact you have noticed are enough to make most quieten down or leave
- If it persists and / or gets louder, you will need to ask them once again if they are ok
- Suggest that this is not the place for their upset / argument
- Let them know that, if they can't put aside their issues, they will have to leave
- Always remain impartial
- Depersonalize the situation by stating it is your job / house rules and nothing personal

Games / Sports

All games seem to have a winner and a loser. This very nature often leads to one person being upset. In premises where customers are playing games such as pool or darts, there is also the added issue of potential weapons. Issues may also arise with whose turn it is next.

To help reduce potential problems:

- As rules differ from area to area, have a set of house rules for everyone to play by
- Put a clear, fair system in place for how to book games and how to determine who plays next
- Ensure the area is well staffed or has frequent staff presence to spot any potential problems
- Put in place a deposit system or some other method, so all darts / cues / etc. are returned to staff after each game



Responsible Service
of Alcohol



A Server's Guide

Body Language

Understanding body language can be very helpful in seeing trouble and dealing with it effectively. The table below shows the signs to look out for if someone is getting aggressive. You also need to think about your own body language. When dealing with the situation, you need to be assertive if you want people to do as you say.

BODY LANGUAGE			
	AGGRESSIVE (angry)	ASSERTIVE (in control)	PASSIVE (weak)
Posture	Leaning forward	Upright / straight	Shrinking
Head	Chin jutting out	Firm, not rigid	Head down
Eyes	Strongly focused, staring, often piercing or glaring eye contact	Good, regular eye contact	Glancing away or downwards, little eye contact
Face	Set or firm	Expression fits the words	Smiling even when upset
Voice	Loud and emphatic	Well modulated to fit content	Hesitant or soft, trailing off at ends of words or sentences
Arms / Hands	Hands on hips, fists, sharp gestures, pointing, jabbing	Relaxed / moving easily, open palms	Aimless / still
Movement / Walking	Slow and pounding or fast, deliberate	Measured pace suited to the situation	Slow and hesitant or fast and jerky

How to get it right

It's not easy to get it right. You must try to be assertive, not aggressive or passive.

Don't give up. If you think carefully about your voice, your movements and being calm, everything else tends to follow.

Distance

You'll probably be aware that each person has a certain amount of "personal space". If a stranger stands too close, it is uncomfortable. In conflict situations, standing too close may be seen as a threat, so keep a comfortable distance from the person you're speaking to. Remember also that a person from a different country or culture may prefer a different amount of personal space (e.g., they may like to stand closer or further away than you do).

A barrier of some kind, such as a table, can help to keep this distance. The bar or counter itself is a barrier. You may have found that you feel more comfortable speaking with people when you are behind the bar or counter than when you are out on your own. This is because the physical barrier acts as a psychological barrier as well.



Reacting to Trouble

Most conflict can be prevented or controlled in the early stages. However, if a situation has gotten to a heated stage before you arrive, it can be much more difficult. Remember your own and others' safety:

- Keep calm and try to slow things down
- Try to find out what the problem is, making sure you listen

A good way to keep in mind all the essential stages is to use the word REACT.

REACT

R Request – ask the conflicting parties to calm down or leave

E Explain – that their behavior is unacceptable and list any rule or law that has been broken

A Appeal – say “please”, turn it around and say things like, “You don’t want me to get into trouble” or “If you keep this up, I won’t be able to serve you” or “I don’t want to call the police but will have to if you don’t back down”

C Confirm – if the customers still refuse to abandon the confrontation, repeat any potential consequences and ask them if there is anything you can do to get them to stop misbehaving

T Take Action – here you will have to ask them to leave again. If they refuse to do so, you will have to call the police. Physical force is the last resort and should never be used if you are on your own. Lead someone towards the door, but be careful about using any force and be aware of your own safety.

Once the trouble is over, it is important to apologize to other customers for any disruption and reassure them that everything is back to normal. Recognize that you have been through a difficult situation and take a break, if possible, to regain your composure.

It is also good practice to record the incident accurately, while information is still fresh in your mind.

Recording Incidents

You should record all incidents for a variety of reasons:

- It can be used as a learning tool and can assist in communication between staff and management
- It provides an accurate record for police, company or insurance purposes
- It can help prevent similar incidents from happening again

The record should include the following:

- Date
- Time
- What happened
- Who was involved
- How it was dealt with
- Whether police were called
- You may also wish to record the names of any witnesses and their contact information.



Skilled Servers

A skillful server will be able to work as part of a team to provide an efficient service, which makes customers feel noticed and welcome. This will include contributing to the good standards of a premises and creating the right atmosphere, so customers are aware that bad behavior will not be tolerated.

Servers will have to enforce their legal responsibilities and think about social responsibilities.

In refusal of service or conflict situations, you will need a lot of patience. Try to learn from your more experienced colleagues and observe what they do and say in different situations. Practice also helps you to get it right. Reading this information is a good first step, but putting it into practice and learning from your successes and mistakes are what this course is really about!

Summary / Action Points

1. Write down 3 key phrases you can use when refusing service to someone who is underage
2. Write down 3 key phrases you can use when refusing service to someone who is drunk
3. Speak to friends and colleagues about their experience of situations that have gotten out of hand and how they dealt with them. Would you deal with them differently now that you have read this guide?
4. Set up an incident book for your workplace or make sure you know where the current one is kept



Further Information

For further information on alcohol and responsible serving, see:

www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk

www.talkaboutalcohol.com

www.alkoholdebatt.se

www.icap.org

www.efrd.org

www.drinkaware.co.uk

www.fhi.se/alkohol/ansvarsfull

www.alcohol.org.nz

www.who.int

For further information on best practice and people skills, see:

www.beda.org.uk

www.portman-group.org.uk

www.icap.org

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