

Bar & Bistro asia

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How to Build Customer and Server Loyalty to Ensure Success

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Fred Tibbitts



Wine Clubs & Wine Societies

One of the best ways to build customer as well as server loyalty for your bar, bistro or restaurant wine program is to establish a Wine Club for your customers and Wine Society for your servers. The idea is very simple: You invite your customers to join your Wine Club, while you invite your servers to join your Wine Society. Membership in the Club is free and everyone gets a monthly newsletter e-mailed to their home or business or both, plus you create a super attractive and user friendly Wine Club website. Every member gets a unique Username and Password.

While membership in the Wine Society is also free, it is only bestowed upon servers after they have demonstrated mastery of the material in Level One of your new Wine Training Program. Once you have enough Wine Society members to elect officers and help with planning monthly Society-only wine tastings and events, let the members take control; however, a member of the management team should always be on the Board of Directors of the Society. As your servers continue their wine education by passing higher level tests, let the Wine Society honour them with perks and special recognition. The Society should have

its own monthly newsletter, which you should let them organize and you fund. They should also have their own website, courtesy of your generosity.

As members of your Wine Club, your customers receive regular notices of visiting winemakers who are offering wine tastings in one of your private rooms or areas for Club members only; and of course, don't forget winemaker dinners; again, open on a first come, first served basis for Wine Club members only. Your Wine Club monthly newsletter should be educational as well as informative. You should include articles by some of your wine suppliers and / or the wineries on your wine list. You can also make your newsletter interactive by including comments from your club members. Creative graphics and colour pictures are very helpful. By all means, though, make it fun and informative.

Interesting, interactive wine education is vital to the success of your wine program in terms of both the resulting quality of your wine service as well as the loyalty of your wine consuming customers. Give your customers a reason to choose your bar or bistro over the competition: Be better than the competition. Give your customers more than discounted drinks to drive sales: Give them information that makes them better informed consumers and empowers them to be more comfortable when ordering wine

with their meals and as a cocktail with or without food.

If you have extra storage space, create a temperature and humidity controlled wine cellar with private bins for your best Wine Club members, where they may store wines they buy at a discount from your special "Collectors Reserve Cellar List" before the wines are ready to drink. When the wines have matured, you inform these customers, so they make a reservation for the special occasion. As you can see, there are endless opportunities to customize these concepts to maximize customer as well as server loyalty. You can imagine the effect on your bottom-line.

With respect to your new Wine Training Program, work with your wine suppliers to develop the best program possible. The most important consideration, however, is the ways in which you offer the education to your servers. The "millennials" as youths in their 20's are called, tune-in to iPods, iPhones, the latest technology in mobile phones and handhelds, Blogs and other state-of-the-art audio-video entertainment and communication devices. The old classroom style lectures with memorization and wine training outlines years out of date is no longer acceptable. You need to tune-in to whatever their wave length; understand their favourite devices and deliver your education in this manner. And hey, while you're at it, make me a member!

Inspiration: The Key to Inspired Customers & Servers

Although the right mix of the best beers, wines and spirits is important to creating an authentic adult beverage destination, it can only be "authentic" as such a

destination, if it is staffed by servers and their leaders who are inspired. Inspired leaders make possible inspired servers and inspired servers help create the "destination effect", which ensures customer loyalty.

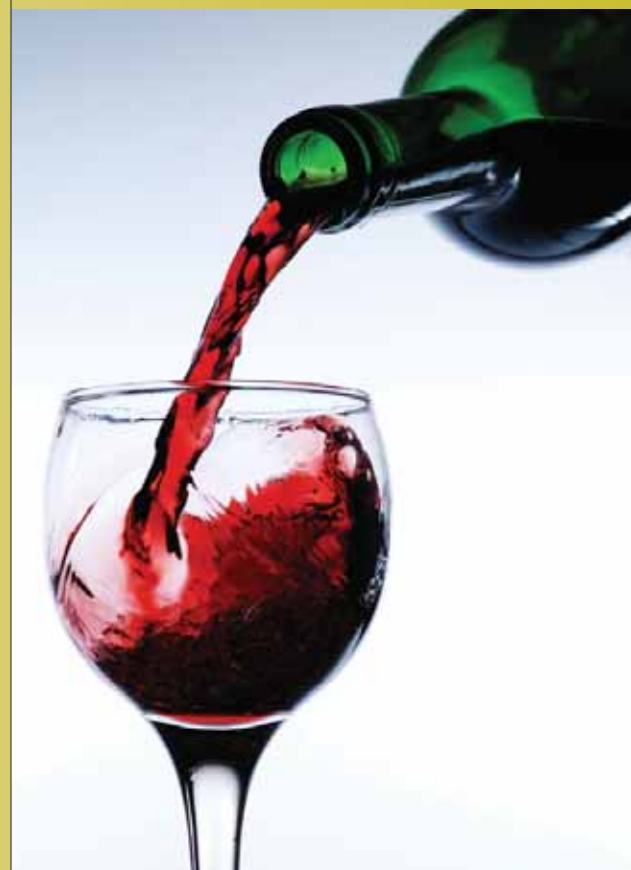
The technical aspects of wine service in particular will always be important: Wine server knowledge; proper storage; proper wine preservation, especially of all opened bottles; wine service at the correct temperatures; the artful pairing of wine and food as well as creative wine marketing and merchandising, however, the next frontier will be recruiting those who would become great wine leaders. These new team members will truly be our super stars of wine service excellence, bringing deserved recognition to the establishments that employ them and those whom they inspire to deliver wine service excellence with passion.

Passion always makes the difference in any relationship, be it personal or business or both. The passion that pours from the hearts of inspired wine leaders is not learned in the classroom or from the Internet or from reading books about wine: It is becoming One with one's wine program and creating a wine destination that seduces the guests such that they lose any inhibition that separates them from having a magnificent wine experience every time. The wine they partake becomes their communion with all that is beautiful, loving and that celebrates with reverence the hard work and artistry that made possible the fruit of the vine they enjoy.

In my global travels I have met sommeliers, food & beverage directors, beverage directors; in fact, every possible on-premise player type who is in part

responsible for his operation's wine service: But there is only one credential that stands above all others and that truly separates the wine technocrats from the wine patriots: Passion. Inspired wine leaders are passionate about wine, wine service and wine training excellence: Others may be more technically proficient than some of our finest wine patriots, but without passion, servers will never know how to become one with genuine wine service excellence.

Our inspired wine leaders come in a variety of flavours, colours and textures; they have no common heritage, nor are they found in the "Yellow Pages", yet you know them when you meet them: They make wine and wine service excellence come alive for anyone with the slightest inclination to embark on a personal wine path. They do not celebrate their wine magnificence, but the magnificence of »



the right glass of wine for each of us.

Loyal servers are by definition inspired by the bar, bistro or restaurant that employs them; it is as much their home as the place they give as their "home" address. Loyal customers cannot be purchased; they must be courted and shown that your establishment as well deserves to be one of their "homes". And when your management, your servers and your regular customers come together, everyone is truly "at home": Because you have become a family. A family whose hearts are open to one another, as a result of inspiration and service excellence that knows no bounds.

So, create your wine club, your wine society, recruit truly inspired wine leaders with passion and set your bar, bistro or restaurant far apart from the competition. Although I know not the name of each of your establishments,

I know that once you take my advice and make these changes, that if I was to walk into the most famous of all American bars, "Cheers" in Boston, it would be as though I had entered your place. Cheers!

■ BBA



Fred Tibbitts is a global wine consultant based in Bangkok, working with bar, restaurant and hotel chains to design their core wine and spirits programs. He writes for six publications in Asia and four in the United States and holds hospitality industry dinners in New York City and across Asia Pacific. Visit him on the web at www.fredtibbitts.com