

## Hospitality Review

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Volume 7

Issue 1 *Hospitality Review* Volume 7/Issue 1

Article 10

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1-1-1989

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### Recommended Citation

Crafts, Daniel Doyle and Sanders, Ray E. (1989) "Manager's Perceptions of Alcohol Server Staffing and Training Methods," *Hospitality Review*: Vol. 7: Iss. 1, Article 10.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/hospitalityreview/vol7/iss1/10>

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# Manager's Perceptions of Alcohol Server Staffing and Training Methods

## **Abstract**

Over-consumption of alcoholic beverages is a concern of managers of hotels and motels with a club/lounge, restaurant, and tavern. The authors surveyed members of two industry associations in Oklahoma to ascertain alcohol server training methods and managers' perception of the value of such programs.

## **Keywords**

Daniel Doyle Crafts, Ray E. Sanders, Managers' Perceptions of Alcohol Server Staffing and Training Methods, Abuse, Dram Shop, Common Law, Tort, Negligence, Beverage

# Managers' Perceptions of Alcohol Server Staffing and Training Methods

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*Over-consumption of alcoholic beverages is a concern of managers of hotels and motels with a club/lounge, restaurant, and tavern. The authors surveyed members of two industry associations in Oklahoma to ascertain alcohol server training methods and managers' perception of the value of such programs.*

It can be said that man has had the problem of over-consumption of alcoholic beverages since they were first discovered. Likewise, the warning signals have been flashing and worthy advice as to the over-consumption of alcohol has been with us equally as long as the alcoholic beverage itself. Lord Chesterfield gave advice to his son in a letter dated March 27, 1787:

Were I to begin the world again with the experience I now have of it, I would lead a life of real, not imaginary, pleasures. I would enjoy the pleasures of the table and of wine; but would stop short of the pains inseparably annexed to an excess of either.<sup>1</sup>

Certainly those pains mentioned by Lord Chesterfield still exist today. In addition, as sellers of alcoholic beverages, hotel and restaurant managers face a more current phenomenon, the potential pain of over-consumption of alcohol by guests. This is known in legal terms as dram shop and/or common law negligence (third party liability).

The growing public awareness of and insistence upon responsible alcoholic beverage service has forced the industry to accept responsibility for negligent service, typically identified as selling alcohol to a minor, selling alcohol to an intoxicated person, and allowing or encouraging excessive alcohol use.<sup>2</sup> This public force has grown in the shadows of dram shop and common law negligence litigation and is

promulgated by attorneys selling fear to the public while seeking justice for their clients. Alfred B. Cenedella III, an attorney speaking to a group of restaurateurs gathered at a National Restaurant Association alcohol awareness program, declared:

I sue bars, and when they serve a guest to a point of intoxication and beyond I will take their insurance money, their liquor license, their establishment, their money, their savings, their home. I will take them to the cleaners.<sup>3</sup>

If the hospitality industry does not abide by its duty to serve alcoholic beverages in a reasonable manner, and if the industry does not answer society's call to work to solve the problems of drunk drivers, there will be more attorneys representing clients whose interests have been breached due to negligence.

Negligence has been held to be tested by whether the reasonably prudent person at the time and place should recognize any foreseen and unreasonable risk or likelihood of harm or danger to others.<sup>4</sup>

In court cases across the U.S., attorneys have established expansive liability against the hospitality industry.<sup>5</sup> In this vein, the public's concern has evolved from a concern for drinking and driving to a point where intoxication has become socially unacceptable along with a trend of less or no alcohol consumption for the ever-increasing segment of today's health conscious public.<sup>6</sup>

#### **Training Becomes a Challenge for Management**

Given these circumstances, it would not be difficult to persuade a jury of the liabilities created by the alcoholic beverage server. Likewise, it would not be difficult to receive vast sums in settlements against the server as a result of this force which has surfaced and continues to grow, a force which will have a permanent impact on the business of selling alcoholic beverages. Therefore, management's training challenge for alcoholic beverage service has been established, and as a result there is a smorgasbord of training programs and general information available from which managers must choose.<sup>7</sup>

With the emergence of a myriad of alcohol server awareness training programs, the decision-making process of selecting the right program for a particular operation has become more complex. Amidst this complexity, a decision must be made concerning a commitment of human and capital resources for alcohol awareness training.<sup>8</sup>

Just as a savvy restaurateur would not invest thousands of dollars in a new piece of equipment without evaluating the need or studying alternatives, a similar process is necessary for the development of a comprehensive hospitality program.<sup>9</sup>

Alcohol server awareness must be an integral part of a responsible hospitality program. It is no longer a question of will the alcohol server be trained, but rather how will the server be trained and by whom.

There are many well-known programs such as TIPS (training in intervention procedures for servers of alcohol); TAM (techniques for alcohol management); Alcohol Awareness Seminars (sponsored by affiliates of the National Restaurant Association); Alcohol Server Awareness Seminars (sponsored through affiliates of Miller Brewing); Metron Program (sponsored through affiliated of Adolph Coors); Alcohol Awareness Seminars (sponsored through affiliates of the AH&MA Educational Institute), and all state association-supported programs. In addition to these programs, there are a number of sources of general information on alcohol awareness such as American Automobile Association, National Education Media, Wine Institute, Distilled Spirits Council, Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, MADD, SADD, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (FARRS report), and the Alcohol Research Group, to name a few.<sup>10</sup>

With the threat of alcohol-related lawsuits so prevalent, the hospitality industry faces a high risk factor imposing ever-increasing operating costs by way of rising liability insurance premiums; the latter have increased by as much as 1000 percent in some cases.<sup>11</sup> There is a lack of information on alcohol server awareness training programs as they relate to specific hospitality operations and to how hospitality managers perceive their effectiveness. This study proposes to identify alcohol server training methods of hotel and restaurant managers and to determine their perceived value by management.

#### **Hotel/Motel Owners Surveyed in Oklahoma**

The study consisted of 440 participants who were randomly selected from a population of 2,962 members of the Oklahoma Hotel and Motel Association (OH&MA) and the Oklahoma Restaurant Association (ORA) and mailed a questionnaire; 364 questionnaires were completed, for a return rate of 82.73 percent. Respondents were owners of hotels/motels with a club/lounge, restaurant, and tavern.

The questionnaire solicited personal data and information concerning alcohol server training. The personal data section asked questions concerning the type of establishment which best described the respondents' business, the population range of the city in which the establishment operated, the style of ownership, the type of customer served the majority of the time, whether the establishment operated in a wet or dry county, the type of alcoholic beverage served, and the hours of operation. The second section asked questions related to alcohol server training programs.

The questionnaire was field tested for clarity at the 1987 Oklahoma Hotel and Motel Association annual conference in Oklahoma City and at the annual Mid-Southwestern Regional Food Service Convention and Exposition in 1987 in Oklahoma City. No reliability coefficients were determined.

Managers of hotels/motels with a club/lounge comprised the largest number of respondents (n = 175, 48 percent) followed by managers of clubs/taverns (n = 98, 27 percent), and managers of restaurants (n = 91, 25 percent).

**Table 1**  
**Demographic Data of Respondents**

	n	Percent
<b>Type of establishment:</b>		
Hotel/motel (with club/lounge)	175	48.00
Club/tavern	98	27.00
Restaurant	91	25.00
<b>Population of city:</b>		
Less than 9,000	38	10.44
9,000 to 19,500	33	9.06
20,000 to 29,500	22	6.04
30,000 to 49,500	44	12.09
50,000 to 74,500	11	3.02
75,000 to 100,000	17	4.67
Over 100,000	199	54.67
<b>Style of ownership:</b>		
Partnership	165	45.33
Sole proprietor	52	14.26
Chain/franchise	38	10.44
Other	38	10.44
<b>Type of most frequent customer:</b>		
Professionals	123	33.79
Working class	95	26.10
Family	90	24.72
Transient (travelers)	17	4.67
Singles	17	4.67
Groups	22	6.04
<b>Wet/dry status of county establishment:</b>		
Wet (liquor by the drink)	347	95.33
Dry (bottle clubs)	17	4.67
<b>Method of training used:</b>		
In-house training	235	85.14
Contracted agency training	24	8.69
Other	17	6.16
<b>How servers are trained to communicate alcohol policies to customers</b>		
Posters	189	51.92
Table tents	88	24.18
Servers	47	12.91
Lapel buttons	34	9.34
Other	6	1.65