

## ***Interviewing process and skills***



Here is an explanation of the interview process in the hospitality industry and what beverage managers look for during the interview.

They know that bartenders are key employees.

They serve their clientele, dole out their inventory, and have their hands in the till.

Maintaining a qualified bartending staff requires time and a great deal of effort.

Selecting the right person for the job the first time around requires preparation and the ability to learn a lot about the potential bartender in a very short period of time.

Good beverage managers will be good listeners. It's extremely difficult for them to learn anything about you if they are doing most of the talking. They will watch your facial expressions and your body language.

The costs of hiring the wrong bartender can be staggering. It's better for them to operate short-handed for a period of time and rely on their existing staff to cover the bar than hiring someone unqualified or inappropriate for the establishment.

It will be more advantageous in the long run to delay hiring another bartender until the right candidate can be found.

### **Here are some of the things managers look for in an interview:**

**Appearance** — The appearance of a person's application for employment often reveals as much about his or her level of professionalism and attention to detail as does the written information it contains. Your neatness, correctness, and presentation reflect much about you.

**Scheduling limitations** — If you're handed an application, you will be asked a few screening questions, such as how many hours a week you need to work and how much money you need to earn a week. Also, you may be asked if you have reliable transportation, and if there are any scheduling conflicts you need to mention.

**References** — Prospective bartenders should be asked to supply three or four professional references, people who can testify directly about your abilities, character, and work ethic. They will ask for alcohol certification. Failing to do so may expose them to charges of negligence.

**Availability** — It's best for you to ask a realistic estimate of how many hours a week you might work, and how much you can expect to earn. A manager should not give you an overly optimistic impression of your advancement prospects within the company, so be alert for that. You could become disillusioned and resentful as the reality of the situation sets in.

**Eye contact** — When in an interview, it's advisable to maintain steady eye contact with the interviewer. The eyes often hint at the person's level of confidence, truthfulness, and character. If the person has difficulty maintaining your eye contact, it may provide some insight into his or her personality.

**Tips to do before interviewing:**

1. Checkout potential employers first. Visit them during the times you are considering working. See what the crowd is like (large, small, quiet, rowdy, etc.). Ask yourself - Is there any money to be made here and is this a great place for me to start? Be honest with yourself.

Can I learn anything here? Can I get along with the crowd? Do I like the way the employees dress and act? What types of drinks do they serve and what specials do they routinely have?

2. If you are new to bartending, then ***DO NOT*** apply to your "***DREAM JOB.***" The odds are you will not get the job. At this time you have little, if any experience interviewing for a bartending job, and if you do somehow luck into the job, the odds are you will have a hard time and possibly get fired.

You will forever be haunted by the bartending job that got away. Pick places you want to work at but will not be too upset if you lose the job. Also, you will gain experience interviewing. Never underestimate the importance of feeling comfortable about making a great first impression.

**3. When preparing for your interview or filling out an application – DRESS APPROPRIATELY.** You will make this decision based on what you observed in number 1 above. Under or over dressing can be a real turn-off to the person doing the hiring. Based on what the employees wear, you want to dress a notch above.

A manager has to assume the best you're ever going to look is when you are applying for a job. If you show-up in torn jeans, old tennis shoes and a worn out t-shirt, the manager has to assume it's only going to get worse. If the employees of the establishment dress in jeans, then you want to apply in casual dress slacks and a plain collared shirt.

If the bartenders are in "uniforms" such as collared shirts with ties and black slacks, then go with black slacks and a plain (preferably white) long sleeve, collared blouse or shirt. If the bartenders are in tuxes, then go with a business suit that is not too stiff or looks like you should be selling shoes or insurance.

You dress this way even if you only plan on walking in to grab an application. There is **NO EXCUSE** to say, "**Forgive the way I am dressed, I didn't think I'd be meeting with anyone today.**" Remember... **FIRST IMPRESSIONS** are **LASTING IMPRESSIONS.**

**4. When preparing for the interview or filling out an application, always carry a resume and a business card.** Though not appropriate in all cases, they will work for you in more cases than they work against, especially in corporate chains.

The resume makes your application stand out in a stack of fill-in-the-blank applications. Also, it addresses the "I can't find any applications right now, come back later." Even without direct bartending experience, 99% of previously employed individuals can make their past experience apply to bartending.

The card can work several ways. Many times an employer is disorganized and the applications tend to be thrown away within a day or two. If a potential employer says that they are not hiring right now, ask to leave your application and hand them a card and say, "I understand you are not hiring today, but I'm sure you know how quickly that can change. Here's my card. If you need someone unexpectedly, even if just for a busy night or two, please give me a call."

Many times an employer will place your card somewhere they can remember it and look for it when in a tight situation. For those with no bartending experience, there have been several who have made a business card which indicated they do private parties, etc. This gives the impression of experience when none or very little may exist. Use the application of the previously mentioned at your discretion. Bring your own pen to fill out any paperwork.

**5.** During the interview process - Keep telling yourself to speak slowly, take breaths, and do not talk too much. Employers like to feel like they are the boss and would rather hear themselves talk than you. When you speak, be confident and professional. Do ask questions about the establishment, not ones that pertain to how much money you will make or when you can have time off (not just yet.) Ask about the type of clientele, what will be expected out of you, how things are done in this establishment and what you would need (i.e. ServSafe or TIPS certification) to obtain the position.

**6.** During the interview process - Be ready to answer the most common interview questions.

**Examples:**

**Q:** Why do you want to work here?

**A:** Do **NOT** tell the interviewer you are trying to find a job and are canvassing. That will put you on the bottom of the list as I figure you are flighty and will take whatever job offers you \$.25 more an hour. **DO** tell the interviewer that you specifically want to work in this establishment. It is to your benefit and the interviewer will think you are going to take the job seriously.

**Q:** Are you familiar with our establishment?

**A:** This is where rule number 1 comes in again. Even if you only came in once before, answer "**Yes!**" enthusiastically. Tell the interviewer you have patronized the establishment and really enjoyed the atmosphere, crowd, and the service.

**Q:** How soon can you start?

**A:** This can be tricky. If you indicate you are working now but can start "right away" this indicates you are going to put your current employer in a poor situation. This in turn says you will probably leave this establishment on short notice when a better offer arises.

If this is the case, tell them you can start right away as long as you work around your current schedule, but will give notice that day and they may release you from the schedule. Otherwise, tell them you want to give your current employer a week to two weeks notice to allow them to find a replacement. This is important when interviewing.

If you are unemployed and you dressed appropriately then tell them you can start right now (and mean it). Have your liquor license, tools, Rolodex, change of clothes, comfortable shoes, etc. in the car and ready to go. You may be asked to start that minute.

**Q:** What is your experience?

**A:** If you have real experience then keep it straight forward and simple. If you don't, then **DO NOT** try and lie and fake your way through it. It is a small world and you will be found out just how small.

However, you may have more experience than you think. Ever had a job where you handled cash, worked with customers, had to abide by tough schedules, worked long hours, etc., then you have many of the qualities needed of a bartender.

**Q:** Are you willing to start as a server?

**A:** Unless you have lots of experience and find jobs fairly easily then always answer "Yes!" However, ask how soon you should expect to move into a bartending position.

**Q:** Why should I hire you? You have little or no experience and I have a stack of applications with people with 5-10 years experience.

**A:** This is where you catch them off guard by not crawling into your shell. You look them straight in the eye and reply, "I may not have 5-10 years of bartending experience, but I also don't have 5-10 years of bad habits you will have to un-train." Let them know that you want this job and you will do the job exactly the way the establishment wants it done, you don't know any other way to do it.

Remind the interviewer that they probably have the current opening because of bad habits they couldn't break a previous bartender of. Tread lightly with this reply though.

**Q:** I just don't know, I need someone, but I'm not sure you're it.

**A:** This is where you have to be a good salesperson and fill the interviewer with confidence. Tell them you understand their apprehension. Tell them to put you on the schedule for slow week night or weekend at whatever "station" they want , you will consider this a "try out" and are willing to work for tips alone. If you don't perform to expectations, then they have no obligation to hire you and have lost nothing.

**7.** After the interview - If you actually met with someone, make every effort to remember their name. I know you may be nervous, but get their name, even if you have to ask for it again. A great way to remember this is to first say it five times to yourself in your head, then say their name several times to them when possible. Example: Mr. Smith, so what your question is how do you think I will be an asset to you establishment? At the end of the interview thank the manager by using his or her name.

Then, mail a quick Thank You note to the person you interviewed with. This works and makes you memorable. If you didn't meet with anyone, or the manager told you they would be making a decision in a week, by all means follow-up with a phone call.

Also, don't hesitate to re-apply at the same place in the future. Very few employers keep resumes or applications on file and simply look to new applicants when vacancies occur.

**8.** You got the job! - Do not be in a hurry to make best friends with everyone you work with. Be friendly, professional, and likable, but most of all be observant. Every bar has its click group and drama that is always being played out. Figure this out before being known as "her friend" or "his friend".

Do not under any circumstance get into an emotional relationship where you earn your money! This is a professional job, NOT the movie "Cocktail." Getting involved with a co-worker can cost you your job fast. Most corporate companies have written policies prohibiting this for a reason. This also applies to customers.

And by all means, do not encourage or even allow your significant other to loiter around your bar. Would you invite your boyfriend/girlfriend to hangout in your office if you had a corporate job? Besides, your bar job is your escape, it's where you interact and converse with patrons, as well as make your living. Don't risk screwing up an opportunity that makes you money. A significant other can bring drama and scares away customers and even worse..... tips.

Employees who make their work place also their hangout place are not always looked highly upon. If you hope to go anywhere at your job, then you don't want your employer seeing you drunk or leaving with customers on your day off. You want to be seen in the best light possible, and as we know, bars and restaurants are not well lit.

**9. DO NOT** under any circumstance **DRINK ON THE JOB**. I know you may have gone to establishments where the bartender participated in the evenings events while on the job, even managers at time indulge. Some patrons may want to even buy you a drink or want you to participate in their festivities. You are a professional. If you were to drink on the job it impairs your abilities make rational decisions, watch patrons, count money, and worst of all could cost you your job.

**10.** Always be networking and quietly looking for your next job. Bartending is a very mobile skill and one of the best parts is working in lots of different environments. Do not get this confused with being flighty or flaky. Always make upward movements in your career.

Get to know other bartenders, restaurant owners, club owners, etc. This will make a change very easy and can actually make you in demand, eventually.

With respects of resume tips, unless you know somebody who knows somebody, your resume is the only thing that will convince someone to give you an interview! It must shine brighter than the others and float to the top for a chance at getting the job.