

# BARTENDER AND SERVER WORKBOOK

**VOL7**

## Assessing Patron Intoxication

Coaching the Experienced Bartender & Server



**Maj. Mark Willingham**

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Maj. Willingham is a PhD Candidate focused on responsible alcohol sales practices. He was the recipient of the Fulbright Fellowship in Police Studies to the United Kingdom where he conducted research on youth access prevention, regulation of the alcoholic beverage industry, and control of abusive drinking. Mark served as the International President of the FBI National Academy Associates and has authored four books and over fifty articles in state and national law enforcement journals on leadership, management, and alcohol related issues. Major Willingham is a national speaker on alcohol related risk, mitigation and responsible retailing issues.

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## **Assessing Patron Intoxication**

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## **Welcome and Introduction**

The Coaching the Experienced Bartender series is designed for bartenders and servers like you who are already skilled in the basics of serving alcoholic beverages. The objective of the workbook is to refresh your knowledge and awareness and build on your current skills and training to help you reach a new level of responsible alcohol service.

One of the most important duties you have as a bartender or alcohol server is helping your guests drink responsibly to promote a satisfying hospitality experience. It helps ensure the safety of your guests and others in the community. Just like first responders, bartenders, alcohol servers, and other front of the house staff have a responsibility to protect the community. You accomplish this task by preventing your patrons from becoming intoxicated, by not serving intoxicated patrons, and by not allowing intoxicated patrons to drive away from your location. Your knowledge of responsible alcohol service and your ability to apply this knowledge is absolutely vital to the success of your establishment and to the safety of your community.

**One of the most important duties you have as a bartender or alcohol server is helping your guests drink responsibly to promote a satisfying hospitality experience.**

Public safety must be a personal and professional consideration of everyone in the alcoholic beverage industry. Professionals in the retail beverage alcohol industry must adopt and employ a personal value system for the safe service of alcohol and commit to preventing the the sale of alcoholic beverages to underage persons, persons who are intoxicated, and/or persons habitually addicted to alcohol.

It may be counterintuitive to those in the hospitality business to deny someone alcohol service. Refusing service can place employees in a challenging and stressful situation. Sometimes putting limits on alcohol service is the best thing you can do for your patron. Alcoholic beverage service policies, practices, training, and management prepare and help you to provide your guests with a wonderful experience and help you to protect your guests, yourself, and others from alcohol-related harms. In the long run, guests and the community

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will be grateful for your concern and action. You have the right to refuse service to anyone you do not feel comfortable serving unless that refusal is based on the individual's constitutionally protected rights (i.e., race, creed, color, gender, sexual orientation, religion).

All front of the house and customer contact employees must be prepared to contribute to and support responsible alcohol service. This behavior applies to hosts/hostesses, servers, bartenders, bar-backs, bussers, valets, security, coat checkers, cashiers, managers, and food runners, and anyone else who comes into contact with guests.

The workbooks in this series are designed to provide information to help you understand and implement the law and rules in your community, recognize and prevent intoxication, recognize and prevent alcohol service to and consumption by habitually addicted patrons, checking identification and preventing alcohol service to and consumption by persons under 21 years of age, use of legal and illegal drugs with alcohol and the effect(s) of that poly-drug use on patrons, and difficult situations occurring in your establishment.

Engaging in responsible alcohol service is not a once-a-year or a once-every-5-years activity. It is a daily duty to your guests, your coworkers, your establishment, and yourself. By applying the skills you acquire and enhance through completing this series of workbooks, you will make a significant contribution to responsible alcohol service.

Some information presented builds on information presented in the National Restaurant Association's ServSafe program, the American Hotel and Lodging Association's CARE program, and Health Communications, Inc.'s Training for Intervention ProcedureS (TIPS) program.





## **Assessing Patron Intoxication Based on Behaviors**

Do some patrons exhibit signs of intoxication with as few as one drink?

Circle your answer: **Yes** **No**

How often should you reassess your customer's intoxication level?

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What is the presumptive BAC level for Driving Under the Influence DUI?

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Should your guests be allowed to drink more alcohol once they get to at this level?

Circle your answer: **Yes** **No**

## **Identifying Patron Behavior Zones**

Preventing customers from becoming intoxicated while they enjoy their visit to your establishment should be your primary goal. A number of responsible beverage service (RBS) training programs use what is commonly referred to as the traffic light system to help you do that. In these programs, various behaviors associated with intoxication are attributed to one of three colors of a traditional traffic light. A green light signals that you are OK to serve the guest. A yellow light means caution: you should stop or slow alcohol service until the guest's behavior returns to the green light zone. A red light means the guest is intoxicated and should not be served.

Your patrons are presumed to be intoxicated for the purposes of driving (and some other activities) at a 0.08 g% BAC. However, your patrons are actually beginning to become intoxicated at 0.04 g%. Their behaviors and judgments begin to change at that level. As a

result, your concern and interest in their intoxication should begin before they reach the 0.08 g% level.

## Guests in the Green Zone

If a customer is in the green light zone, should you focus on determining baselines for the patron's behaviors?

Circle your answer: **Yes** **No**

In the green light zone, should you monitor the number of drinks served to and consumed by each patron?

Circle your answer: **Yes** **No**

Guests who have just begun to consume alcoholic beverages are usually identified with a green light. Unless they have been drinking previously, They are good to GO for alcohol service.



Your alcohol service goal with patrons identified by a green light is to prevent intoxication and avoid alcohol-related harms. When customers are in the green, you can safely serve them alcohol, but you should pace the alcohol service by striving to keep them in the green zone during their visit to your establishment.

After as few as one drink, some customers become relaxed and talkative. Each time a customer in the green zone orders another drink, you should re-assess the customer to make sure he or she is still in the green. Monitor the number of drinks served to and consumed by each patron. Interview the customer each time he or she orders an alcoholic beverages by engaging in a brief conversation with him or her when you return to the table. It's easier to assess the guest's behavior if you are monitoring consumption and paying attention to

behavior on an ongoing basis.

Use your interaction with the guest as an opportunity to explain your designated driver program, policy, and specials (such as free non-alcoholic beverages for designated drivers).

If your establishment serves food, encourage your guests to order food or snacks with their drinks. An effective way to reduce the rate of alcohol absorption is for your patrons to eat foods high in fat. Do not increase the pace of serving alcohol just because a customer is eating or in the green.

### **High Fat Food You Can Suggest To Keep A Patron in the Green Zone**

- Items with cheese as a primary ingredient (e.g., pizza, tacos)
- Items with beef as a primary ingredient (e.g., burgers, steak, fajitas)
- French fries
- Deep-Fried Items
- Nachos
- Chips and Dips

Offer and serve water on the side with all drinks, especially with drinks ordered straight up. Food and water dilute the concentration of alcohol in the stomach, and food keeps the alcohol in the stomach longer, delaying access to the small intestine, where 75% to 85% of alcohol is absorbed into the bloodstream.

Serve only one drink at a time to each guest. Don't push drinks onto guests who do not want to drink; respect their wishes and offer non-alcoholic beverages or beverages with a lower alcohol content. Don't forget to offer food to accompany the lower alcohol content beverages, too.

You will probably find that slowing down alcohol consumption to avoid guests entering the yellow zone is easier than allowing them to enter the yellow zone, at which point you will need to discontinue alcohol service until they return to the



green. If someone needs to stop drinking, do not hesitate to stop serving him or her. If you want or need to slow down someone's alcohol consumption, consider some or all of these options:

- **Serve drinks served straight-up with water on the side**

This option helps guests slow their consumption, helps to maintain hydration, and helps dilute the alcohol already in the bloodstream.

- **Remove empty glasses before replacing them with fresh drinks**

The interval between removing the empty glasses and replacing them with fresh drinks allows you to pace guests' alcohol consumption. The guest must finish one drink before getting another, which extends the period of alcohol absorption. It also encourages the drinker to finish his or her ice as it melts, which further helps to dilute the alcohol and extends the period of consumption.



- **Avoid pitcher service when serving a group**

It is challenging to monitor the amount of alcohol each member of a party consumes from a pitcher, particularly if one person is drinking more than the others. Having access to a pitcher allows patrons to self-regulate alcohol rather than enables the bartender or server to do so. If your establishment regularly offers pitcher service, ask the manager if you can price individual beers at the pitcher price so that you can control the pace of alcohol consumption and the timing of drink service.

- **Slow down alcohol service**

One practice to slow alcohol service is to not be as accessible to a patron you believe may be close to the yellow zone. If your establishment offers table service, encourage wait staff to take an alternate path to avoid walking past certain tables as frequently. The goal of this method is to delay the process of reordering additional drinks until the drinker has transitioned back into the green light zone. Just because you have slowed down service does not mean you can or should stop monitoring patrons at the table

or bar. For example, the drinker may begin drinking from another person's drink. Monitor the behaviors of the members of the party, but do so from the safety of your position behind the bar. Remember, your goal is to control the timing of drink service and get the patron back into the green light zone.

- **Do not deliver a drink to one person at another person's request**

Only respond when the drinker himself or herself asks for a refill. Do not let another patron set the alcohol consumption rate for another guest.

- **Strongly suggest non-alcoholic or low-alcohol beverages in place of the alcoholic beverages**

Wait for the guest to reorder—don't suggest or encourage the purchase of additional alcoholic beverages.

- **Serve a large glass of water before bringing the next round of alcoholic beverages.**

- **Divert attention away from drinking to dancing, pool, or snacking.**

- **If one guest is rushing others into another round, try waiting until everyone is ready before taking drink orders for the next round.**

- **Deter buying rounds when there is more than one drink per person on the table.**



Don't forget to communicate with your fellow bartenders and servers if guests consuming alcohol move from your station to another. The strategy of slowing down consumption to allow the drinker's liver to do its job must be implemented on an establishment-wide basis. Guests may not always want to accept the situation but more often will often take your suggestion and slow their rate of consumption.



## Guests in the **Yellow Zone**

Are patrons in the yellow light zone intoxicated?

Circle your answer: **Yes** **No**

What behaviors do patrons in the yellow light zone often exhibit?

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Should you serve alcohol to guests while they are in the yellow light zone?

Circle your answer: **Yes** **No**

Guests who have begun to feel the effects of alcohol are identified by a yellow light. Once in the yellow zone, guests may show signs of relaxing and lowered inhibitions, which are indicators of intoxication. A quiet guest may become overly friendly or an outgoing person may become sullen and withdrawn. As inhibitions decrease, guests may seek to increase their alcohol consumption rate.

Guests in the yellow zone likely have a BAC level below 0.08%, but are intoxicated. You need to exercise caution in serving additional alcohol. Guests with a BAC below 0.08% generally exhibit some or more of the following behaviors:

### **The Yellow Zone:** *Low End*

In the low end of the yellow zone, guests will demonstrate a feeling of well-being, relaxation, lowered inhibitions, and might mention feeling the sensation of warmth. They may behave with some euphoria. They may demonstrate some minor impairment of reasoning and memory, and be less cautious. Their behavior may become exaggerated and emotions intensified. Good emotions are better, bad emotions are worse.

## The Yellow Zone: *High End*

At the high end of the yellow zone, there is a light impairment of balance, speech, vision, reaction time, and hearing. Like patrons in the low end of the yellow zone, those in the high end of the yellow zone behave with euphoria. Their judgment and self-control are reduced, and caution, reason and memory are impaired.

A patron at the high end of the yellow zone may have a with BAC of 0.08% and is legally impaired. It is illegal for your guests to drive at this level. Your guests will probably believe they are functioning better than they really are and may not understand your reason for intervening.

**It is much easier to deal with a guest at the high end of the yellow zone than if he or she transitions to the red light.**

As mentioned, guests in the yellow light zone are already intoxicated. Serving them more alcohol may easily move them to the red zone, where they are a risk to themselves and others. Your goal is to give that guest's system time to metabolize the alcohol he or she has consumed so that guest returns to the green zone. Remember, alcohol is metabolized at the rate of about 2/3 of a drink per hour. Guests' behaviors tend to lag behind their alcohol consumption because it takes as long as an hour to fully absorb the alcohol contained in a drink. Only after absorption will the behaviors associated with that level of intoxication become fully evident.

It is much easier to deal with a guest at the high end of the yellow zone than if he or she transitions to the red light. Before you serve him or her another drink, ask yourself if you noticed any change in speech patterns or pronunciation, appearance, or actions to indicate possible intoxication since you started serving him or her. Consider the guest's gender, body size, amount of alcohol consumed, and number of hours drinking. Can the guest safely have another drink based on the BAC chart?

Advise your manager about the situation to help prevent the guest from moving into the red. Strongly encourage the guest to eat. Although food consumption after a patron has become intoxicated will not slow absorption of the alcohol already consumed, it may slow any subsequent absorption. More importantly, it will give the drinker something to do and extend

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the time before the drinker may insist on another alcoholic beverage.

Strongly suggest non-alcoholic or low-alcohol beverages in place of the alcoholic beverages being consumed if the guest is in the yellow zone. Remember to serve water with every drink. In addition to helping to dilute the alcohol in the body, drinking water slows consumption by giving the patron something else to do and may help quench his or her thirst.

Remember, A guest in the yellow zone is intoxicated. He or she may be at or near 0.08 g% BAC. Ensure that the guest will be safe if he or she wants to leave by calling a taxi, suggesting that the guest call for a ride, assuring that someone in the guest's party will drive, or suggesting that the guest stay at the establishment or at nearby lodgings until he or she is sober.

### **Guests in the Red Zone**

Are guests in the red light zone at significant risk of injury to themselves or others?

Circle your answer: **Yes** **No**

Are guests at the high end of the Red Light zone susceptible to alcohol poisoning?

Circle your answer: **Yes** **No**

Guests in the red zone are intoxicated and are at significant risk of injury to themselves or others. Guests in the red zone are intoxicated to the point where they are a risk to themselves and others. They require immediate intervention. When guests are at the red light stage, your focus should be on their safety. Remember, you have a responsibility for your guests.

Alcoholic beverage service to a guest in the red must be stopped immediately. Don't try to go it alone. Guests in the red require a team effort. Know the procedures of your establishment thoroughly before you have to use them. Then, follow those procedures and inform your manager about the situation. You may want to have your manager or a coworker available when you talk to the guest and tell him or her you can no longer serve alcoholic beverages to him or her. It is your responsibility to protect guests in the red zone and others they may harm.



Drinkers in the red zone are likely to exhibit various behaviors depending on whether they are in the low end to mid-range of the red zone, in the mid-range to high end of the red zone, are in the high range of the red zone, or are at the high end of the red zone.

### **The Red Zone:** *Low End to Mid-Range*

Guests at the low end to mid-range of the red zone have significant impairment of gross motor coordination and loss of good judgment. Their speech may be slurred; their balance, vision, reaction time, and hearing will be impaired. They will likely demonstrate euphoria, but at lesser levels than in the yellow light zone. Instead of euphoria, they will likely exhibit an increase in anxiety and restlessness. Their judgment and perception are now significantly affected.



### **The Red Zone:** *Mid-Range to High Range*

At this stage, most drinkers exhibit a state of feeling unwell or unhappy. Anxiety, depression, and restlessness may predominate. The guest may begin to feel nausea. The drinker may also have the appearance of a “sloppy drunk.”

### **The Red Zone:** *High Range*

At this stage your guest is extremely intoxicated. He or she is probably feeling and behaving as if dazed, confused, or otherwise disoriented. He or she may need help to stand or walk. If he or she bumps into something or is otherwise injured, the intoxicated guest may not feel the pain. Some people experience nausea and vomiting at this level. However, the gag reflex can be suppressed at this level and people can choke if they do vomit. Blackouts are likely at this level, so they may not remember what has happened.

At the high end of the red zone, your intoxicated guest has substantial or complete impairment of all mental, physical, and sensory functions. The drinker often has little comprehension of where he or she is. Passing out suddenly is common. It may be difficult to awaken the person who passes out at this stage. At extreme BAC levels, coma is possible. This level of intoxication is comparable to surgical anesthesia. At this BAC level, the patron

may die from alcohol poisoning as respiration and other body functions begin to decline and fail.

Your responsibility for guests in the red light zone is to prevent further alcohol consumption and to take action to ensure their safety. Remember, they are at risk due to falling and other accidents. They should not be trusted to act in a responsible manner or even follow through on their stated intents.

Calmly and firmly state the policy and repeat it again if needed. Treat guests with respect, but be firm. Don't make any judgments. If you can do so safely, move the guest away from others. Do everything you can to minimize the confrontation. Offer options besides alcohol. Remove alcohol from reach. Don't make accusations or argue with guests. Just stay firm and stand your ground.

### **Dealing with a Guest in the Red Zone**

- Ask the guest to move away from others when speaking to him or her about the situation.
- Never touch the guest unless given permission by the guest.
- Avoid judging the guest, raising your voice, or arguing. Don't say, *"You're drunk"* or *"You've had too much to drink."* Do say, *"I'm concerned about you"* or *"I care about your safety!"*
- Strongly encourage the guest to get something to eat before leaving your establishment if possible.
- Ensure that the guest will be safe when he or she leaves by arranging for alternate transportation; ask someone in the guest's party to drive, ask the guest to call a friend or family member for a ride, or call a taxi. If your establishment offers lodging, suggest that the guest stay on the property.
- Make sure the guest has all of his or her personal belongings when he or she leaves. You don't want the intoxicated guest to leave and have to come back for his or her jacket, purse, or other item.

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Convince the guest that you are concerned about their welfare and safety. Aside from physically restraining someone, do everything you can to prevent an intoxicated guest from driving away. Do not let an intoxicated person drive away—or even walk away—even if that means calling the police. It's better to risk making the guest angry than to risk lives.

If the guest will give you his or her car keys, give the keys to the manager and help the guest seek alternate transportation. If the guest will not give up his or her car keys and insists on driving, call law enforcement immediately. Keep the patron in full view until authorities arrive. Fill out an incident report.

The safest course of action is to arrange for alternate transportation, which might include:

- Public transportation
- Taxis
- A designated driver
- A sober member of his or her party
- Having someone pick up the patron

Even if you have arranged for alternate transportation, your responsibility does not end when you put a highly intoxicated patron into a cab. The drinker could simply tell the cab driver to stop at the end of the parking lot and get into his or her car and drive off. A better response may be to find a sober, responsible person the drinker knows to care for the drinker.

There are instances when you simply must call the police to deal with an intoxicated drinker, even if the drinker is not causing you trouble. An intoxicated patron is a significant risk to himself or herself and to others. The police can assist in finding someone to care for the intoxicated patron. The police are also equipped to determine if the drinker is in medical distress and may need to be transported to the hospital. It is better to risk an angry guest than to risk lives.



## **Involve All Employees in Observation and Assessment**

Which employees in your business are responsible for identifying intoxicated patrons?

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Bartenders or alcohol servers alone may not be able to observe and track the behaviors of all bar or restaurant patrons. All employees and especially front of the house staff have equal responsibility to monitor patrons for intoxication and inform servers and management of their observations. Observation and communication are especially important if guests move from the bar to another location, such as a table in the dining room.

Depending on the number and type of staff at your establishment, the following employees are integral in identifying patron intoxication:

- Valets
- Wait staff
- Bus staff
- Bartenders
- Security, hosts, hostesses, and greeters
- Coat check and restroom attendants

### **Valets**

Valets often are the first people to make contact with guests upon arrival at the establishment. A valet should be able to identify intoxicated guests and alert management before the intoxicated person enters the establishment and attempts to obtain an alcoholic beverage.

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As the valet observes guests, he or she should ask themselves:

- Is the guest's driving erratic?
- Did they have difficulty parking between the lines in the parking space?
- Did the guest have difficulty getting out of the car or walking?
- Is the guest having difficulty talking?
- Does the guest exude the odor of alcohol?

If you can answer yes to any one of these questions, there may be cause for concern and you should notify your manager. If you suspect a guest is intoxicated, never ask him or her to leave the premises in that condition. You should take steps to keep that person from getting back into his or her car and leaving in that condition.

## **Security, Hosts and Hostesses, and Greeters**

Security staff, hosts and hostesses, and/or greeters often are the first people to make contact with guests once they have stepped inside the establishment. Security staff, hosts and hostesses, and/or greeters should use their encounter with the guest as an opportunity to talk to the guests and to observe the following:

- Are they speaking rationally?
- Is their speech slurred?
- Are they able to make eye contact and focus while talking to you?
- Can they walk without staggering, stumbling, or bumping into objects?



## **Bus Staff**

Bus staff are in a unique position to observe guest behavior. Bus staff work throughout the establishment and have the opportunity to listen to how guests speak and to observe the following:

- **Are they getting louder as time passes?**
- **Are they becoming overfriendly, or are they beginning to use foul language or becoming rude?**
- **Have they started spilling drinks or food on the table?**
- **Are they having difficulty talking?**
- **Are they beginning to look tired or sleepy?**

Each of these employees should be trained to recognize signs and behaviors of intoxication and be instructed to contact the bartender, alcohol server, and the manager if they observe any signs of intoxication.

It is interesting to note that at least one major national responsible beverage service training program has discontinued the use of the traffic light system. They found that the yellow zone was often misunderstood and some servers allowed additional drink service which quickly pushed their patrons into the red zone. The national training program substituted the green/yellow/red traffic light program with green vs. red or OK to serve / not OK to serve process. The OK to serve / not OK to serve process provides alcohol servers with a very simple procedure to follow and is recommended. In the OK to serve / not OK to serve process, the server uses the information in the green zone described above as the basis to provide alcoholic beverages. No alcohol is served to any patron in the yellow or red zone. Further alcohol service can resume when the patron returns to the green zone.

## Let's See What You Have Learned

Do some patrons exhibit signs of intoxication with as few as one drink?

Circle your answer: **Yes** **No**

How often should you reassess your customer's intoxication level?

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What is the presumptive BAC level for DUI?

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Should your guests be allowed to drink more alcohol at this level?

Circle your answer: **Yes** **No**

If a customer is in the green light zone, should you focus on determining baselines for the patron's behaviors?

Circle your answer: **Yes** **No**

In the green light zone, should you monitor the number of drinks served to and consumed by each patron?

Circle your answer: **Yes** **No**

Are patrons in the yellow light zone intoxicated?

Circle your answer: **Yes** **No**

What behaviors do patrons in the yellow light zone often exhibit?

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Should you serve alcohol to guests while they are in the yellow light zone?

Circle your answer: **Yes** **No**

Are guests in the red light zone at significant risk of injury to themselves or others?

Circle your answer: **Yes** **No**

Are guests at the high end of the Red Light zone susceptible to alcohol poisoning?

Circle your answer: **Yes** **No**

Which employees in your business are responsible for identifying intoxicated patrons?

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