

THE ORDER

NEXT UP IN THEIR SERIES OF ARTICLES ON PERFECT SERVICE, JARED BROWN & ANISTATIA MILLER ARRIVE AT THE ORDER. IT'S ALL IN THE LISTENING

Your customers have been welcomed. They have settled in. Now it's time for the business transaction that makes the social aspects of the bar possible. The order. However, first you must communicate your offers to your guests, and you must do it in such a way that they don't feel rushed or abandoned.

There are a number of effective ways to convey your menu. One that's fallen by the wayside is a chalkboard or other signboard. Signboards reach an entire room. They turn your menu into a billboard for your drinks. They force you to keep your list short and sweet – or at least limited to the best from your menu. Mounted on the wall, they also keep your drinks in customers' consciousness. Signboards may not work for every bar, but there are endless ways to display or promote your list for any level of service.

A menu filled with obscure or wholly original drinks must be carefully designed. People look for a bit of familiarity, a toehold for understanding what is offered. If they don't find that key element they will order a Manhattan, a Martini, a G&T, a beer, or wine.

But this is only the preliminary stage in taking a drink order. The second stage is to be an active listener. If you're not familiar with the concept, Google 'active listening'. This will not only help you to be a better bartender, it will

make you a better lover, a better human being. (Right here, it's time to give a serious nod to an outstanding article, 10 Steps to Effective Listening, by Dianne Schilling that appeared in *Forbes* magazine.)

"SIGNBOARDS MAY NOT WORK FOR EVERY BAR, BUT THERE ARE ENDLESS WAYS TO DISPLAY OR PROMOTE YOUR LIST FOR ANY LEVEL OF SERVICE"

Step one: Face the speaker and maintain eye contact

When you're taking an order, nothing else is more important. The customer has their time slot to speak to you. You were talking to other people before. You'll be speaking to others (and making drinks) after. For this moment, you need to give your full focus and attention.

Step two: Be attentive. Be relaxed

You may be three deep and dying to get back to churning out masterpieces. But at this moment you must focus and relax. In doing so, you allow your customers to know you feel they are important.

Step three: Keep an open mind

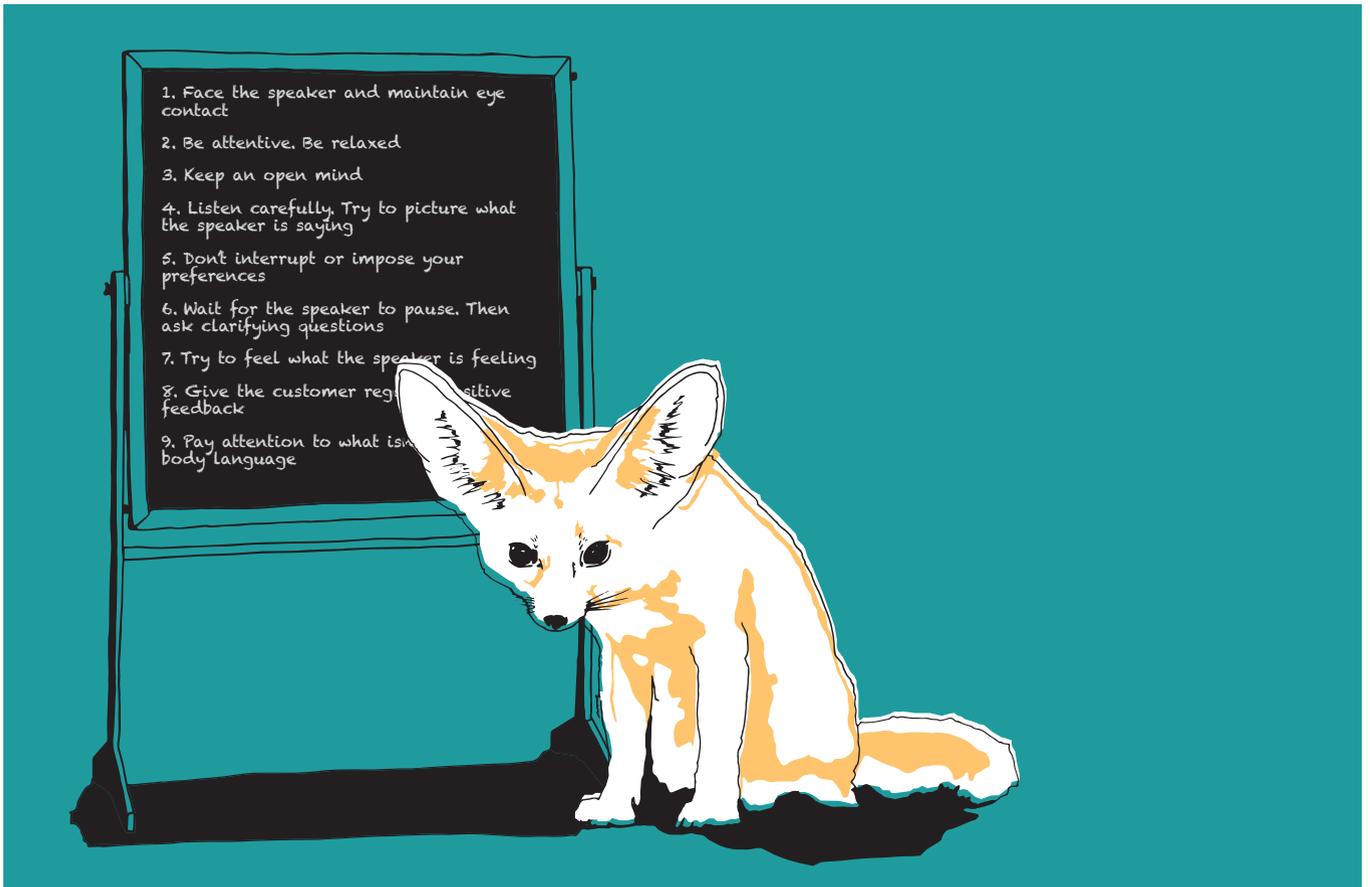
True story. These words were once spoken by a bartender to a customer who ordered a vermouth on the rocks: "I could never respect anyone who drinks straight vermouth." On another occasion, in another country, a customer asked what the bartender would do with a certain spirits brand. The barman replied: "I wouldn't even wash the floor with it."

Did either of these bartenders get a second order from the customer? No. Did either of them have their job the next week? Not that we know of. Serve what the customer wants. Do it with a smile. If you want the customer to try something you feel is far better, offer a free taste or buy them that drink. While we all have strong feelings about some products over others, ordering time is not the forum for taking a stand. Service is service. It is the act of assisting or doing work for someone.

Step four: Listen carefully. Try to picture what the speaker is saying

Have you ever walked into a bar, ordered a rye Manhattan and watched the bartender pull a bottle of bourbon? It should be enough to give your order, then you get what you ordered, right? This will only happen when the person taking the order focuses entirely on the speaker. A customer wants a rye Manhattan. You picture a Manhattan and the order has already gone wrong. Picture a rye Manhattan and you get it right. Also, with a group order





remembering which drink goes to which person separates the good bartender or server from the great one.

If you're writing an order down, get used to marking seat positions on the order. If not, try to remember them. You wouldn't believe how many times the man ordering the slightly less-manly drink than his date gets her straight spirit while she ends up with his Grasshopper.

"YOU CAN ONLY GIVE APPROPRIATE SERVICE – THE BEST SERVICE – BY BECOMING AWARE OF THE CUSTOMER'S FEELINGS AT THAT MOMENT"

Step five: Don't interrupt or impose your preferences

Seriously. When someone is talking to you, shut up and listen (words I occasionally hear when I look in a mirror). How many people have you wanted to say that to when you're talking? So, of course, you have the patience and respect in return to wait and listen and make eye contact and smile.

Step six: Wait for the speaker to pause. Then ask clarifying questions

This is your chance to speak. Ask questions only to ensure understanding. This is the only thing you should ask.

Step seven: Try to feel what the speaker is feeling

Empathy is a quality shared by all great bartenders. It

is the ability to put yourself in the customer's place, if only for a moment. Is this someone who wants celebration or commiseration? You can only give appropriate service – the best service – by becoming aware of the customer's feelings at that moment.

Step eight: Give the customer regular, positive feedback

We take it for granted that everyone knows the difference between Angostura and Peychaud's bitters. After all, our friends all know. Encouraging customers to learn more, praising them for the bar knowledge that they do absorb, encourages them to learn more, to order more drinks, and to come back more often.

Step nine: Pay attention to what isn't said – to body language

Probably the most important non-verbal cue in the order process is the customer waving a hand or waving cash. While that can be perceived as annoying, remember you're also trying to feel what the customer feels. If they exhibit overt attention-getting behaviour they may have been ignored elsewhere in the past. They may have been neglected and developed these habits as a result. You can break them of this by being a bit over-attentive for the rest of the evening.

Now that you're listening, could I get a couple of Negronis on the rocks with orange twists? And I hate to sound rude here, but your vermouth is fresh isn't it? Oh, you've got it in the fridge. Perfect. Cheers! ©