

# Booznooz

## Higher Tips? Here's How!

Help your bartenders and servers increase their tips with these proven methods!

COMPILED BY IAN FOSTER, REGIONAL VICE-PRESIDENT

**R**estaurant and bar managers should take an interest in helping their staff earn higher tips. Perhaps the most important reason is that your staff rely on tips to earn a decent living – and higher income means higher job satisfaction as well as lower turnover. In addition, motivated servers do a better job up-selling – which means higher profit and revenue for your operation. And, indirectly, tip levels are one measure of the level of service at your establishment. Finally, Robert Plotkin has noted that “when bartenders are earning sizeable amounts of gratuities, they presumably won’t be as likely to put their jobs in jeopardy by ripping off the house.”

Here, then, are some ideas to share with your bartenders and servers that will help them grow their tips.

While at Houston’s restaurant chain last week, the bill included a “Quick Guide” that I have never seen before. The bill looked like this: ☺

At first I did not give this little section any thought – as a Bevinco auditor for 14 years, I am pretty good at calculating percentages. But the others at our table had quite a different reaction. “This is great,” said Sarah. “I hate trying to figure out how much to leave.”

|              |         |
|--------------|---------|
| SUB-TOTAL:   | \$49.25 |
| TAX:         | \$3.82  |
| DUE:         | \$53.07 |
| QUICK GUIDE: |         |
| 15%          | \$7.96  |
| 18%          | 9.55    |
| 20%          | \$10.61 |

That sparked a couple of others at our table to chime in with their sheepish admission that they, too, hated doing math at dinner! Here were three smart, successful business people and all were more than a little relieved that the restaurant had done the math for them ... that’s just good customer service.

But the brilliance of this little “quick guide” goes beyond that. It seems pretty clear that this alone is going to increase the average tip at Houston’s for a couple of reasons. First, studies have shown that when given three choices like this, most people are going to avoid picking the lowest of the three for fear of being perceived as “cheap.” Most restaurateurs are familiar with this psychology when setting up a wine list – often adding a lower priced wine will boost the sales of the next lowest

on the list. So by listing 15%, 18% and 20% in their guide, more people will use the 18% and 20% amounts. (And by not even listing 10%, Houston’s is sending the subliminal message that such a tipping level is too low). Second, the tip calculations are all based on the total bill – not the total before tax. We all know that some customers calculate the tip on the sub-total (before tax). Obviously they can still do so, but I suspect that most will

just find it easier to use the calculations already listed.

—Ian Foster, Bevinco West Coast

The easiest way to increase tips is by selling wine, and lots of it. The more knowledge you have about your wine list, the easier it is to get your guest a wine that they will enjoy. But whatever bottle of wine they decide on, there are a couple things that I always did whether it was a \$12 bottle or \$250 bottle.

1) I would never fill a glass more than half full. It seems to counter the notion that draining off the bottle on the first pass on a 4-top will increase wine sales, which in turn would increase tips. But it actually does the opposite: knowing that they have a full glass causes them to drink slower. No one wants to be seen as the “wine-o” of the table. So they keep pace with everyone else at the table. The guest knows you are “pushing” wine on them, and that all you have done is uncorked a bottle for them, and poured it off. What is that worth? When you fill a glass half full, you now have the opportunity to come back to the table a little later to “service” them by topping off their glasses back up to the halfway mark once again. Now the guest sees that you have uncorked their bottle, gave every one on the table a good taste, kept it chilled for them or wrapped it in some special napkin, and came back a little later to top off everyone’s glass. And they will actually drink faster when all they have left is half a glass of wine.

2) I would always make sure that the person who ordered the first bottle of wine got the last drop of the bottle he/she ordered. That is the person in charge. You are now standing in front of him and his friends with an empty

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bottle of wine in your hands. “Would you like a fresh bottle for the table? Or would you like to me to bring back the wine list?” Notice how I use the words “fresh bottle” instead of “another bottle”? It works every time...

Would I rather sell 10 drinks at \$5 each? Or a bottle of wine that sells for \$50? I would sell the bottle of wine every time, knowing the odds of selling a second or third bottle are in my favor.

—Reuben Balmores, *Bevinco Hawaii*

I was a bartender for 6 years before becoming a partner with Bevinco and I always found the best way for me to make my tips was to look my best and remember who I served. Even in my experiences at high-volume clubs, if you can tell someone, “You’re the Grey Goose and tonic with a splash of cranberry guy”, people eat that up and that tends to make them feel more like a VIP than giving them something. One last thing would also be to always recommend a “special drink”. All bartenders deal with people who don’t

know what they want and, with the perfect, uniquely mixed drink and enough charisma, you can get more money out of anyone.

—Ariyana Gant, *Bevinco Atlanta, GA*

In my experience in the industry, the best method for increasing tips is to increase sales with “suggestive selling”. When a server/bartender is able to up-sell a food or liquor item, they will increase their check average and increase their tip percentage. The key though, is to not give the guests the option to “downgrade” their order, by only giving them a choice of premium liquors or higher priced items.

For example, when you go out, you really aren’t anticipating having to make too many decisions; you want to be “served”. If you were to order a rum & Coke, for example, and the bartender said, “what rum do you prefer?”, you would probably respond with, “oh, your well is fine.” In that example, the bartender tried to up-sell but left you with the decision, rather than making the

decision for you. However, if the bartender responded with, “do you prefer Bacardi or Captain Morgan,” you are now going to respond with either one of those names. This “forces” the up-sell and generates a higher tip percentage for the bartender. Additionally, it creates a higher level of service standards, that you will see and appreciate, and will likely generate a repeat visit from you.

Bartenders and servers have two choices: to be an “order taker” or an “order maker”.

—Jason Bianco, *Bevinco Palm Desert, CA*

I believe the best way to get better tips is to wear incredibly revealing clothes!! Ha! Ha! Just kidding. I do have a bartender who does the most sales, and makes more tips than any other bartender. The reason? She tries to not serve just one single house product the whole night. She makes a game out of it and upsells, upsells, upsells.

—Katherine Davis, *Bevinco, NC*



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I’m always impressed by servers or bartenders who are paying enough attention to be able to *anticipate* what I might want – before I even know I want it.

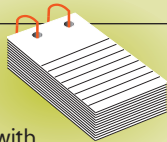
The obvious examples are refilling the water or wine glass or the bread basket before they are completely empty. But the less obvious things are even more impressive. Often my wife and I will split an appetizer and we absolutely love it when the server offers to split that onto two plates. That is simply better service than bringing the appetizer out on one plate along with another empty plate.

Even more impressive was the server at Buona Tavola in San Luis Obispo, CA, last week. When we ordered a small pasta dish for our 18-month-old son, our server thoughtfully asked us when we wanted her to deliver his meal: with our meals or just as soon as possible. I’m sure all parents will agree that this little touch alone can make the difference between a really enjoyable meal or one that has a little more drama than necessary.

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## CALENDAR OF UPCOMING events



Bevinco is excited to announce our recent partnership with SYSCO, joining their national iCare Program as full members. SYSCO, the leading foodservice marketer and distributor in North America, and Bevinco share in the goal of providing added value to their bar and restaurant clientele. Working together, we can directly improve the profitability of the hospitality industry one client at a time.



### TRADE SHOWS

**September 7 & 8:**  
RAM Show; Baltimore Convention Center; Baltimore, MD

**October 3-6:** Tavern League of Wisconsin; Paper Valley Hotel, Appleton, WI

**October 17-19:** Buck Eye Bar Expo. Buckeye Hall of Fame Café; Columbus, OH

**November 27-29:** Vancouver Hospitality Expo; Vancouver Trade & Convention Centre; Vancouver, B.C.

### SYSCO FOOD SHOWS

- Sept 20;** Newrock Financial Showplace; Novi, MI
- Sept 20;** Spokane Convention Center; Spokane, WA
- Sept 21;** Reno Convention Center; Reno, NV
- Sept 27;** Birmingham Jefferson Convention Complex; Birmingham, AL
- Sept 27;** St. Charles Convention Centre; St. Charles, MO
- Sept 27;** Embassy Suites Hotel; Albuquerque, NM
- Sept 28;** Lane County Fairgrounds;

- Portland, OR
- Sept 28;** Wall to Wall Soccer Center; Mason, OH
- Oct 5;** Cleveland I-X Center; Cleveland, OH
- Oct 5;** Greensboro Coliseum Complex; Greensboro, NC
- Oct 5;** Carlile on the Green; Farmingdale, NY
- Oct 5;** Northlands Agricom Hall C; Edmonton, AB
- Oct 11;** On Center; Syracuse, NY
- Oct 17;** Aliant Energy Center; Madison, WI
- Oct 17;** Doubletree Hotel; Santa Barbara, CA
- Oct 25;** Boise Center on the Grove; Boise, ID
- Oct 25;** Agri-Center at the Fairgrounds; Hamburg, NY
- Oct 25 & 26;** Orange County Convention Center; Orlando, FL
- Nov 1;** Connecticut Convention Center; Hartford, CT

When you think about it, anticipation is really just another word for thoughtful service – and is guaranteed to be rewarded with a larger tip from me.  
—Ian Foster, *Bevinco West Coast*

Bartenders need to understand that a stronger drink is not a better drink. Keep in mind that the more drinks a customer orders, the higher the tab will be which means the higher the tip will be.  
—R. Whelan, *Bevinco Ocean County, NJ*

Simple – however seldom done: introduce yourself by name and then repeat your name again later. Most customers will not remember your name with only one mention.  
—Louis J. Venafro, *Bevinco Sarasota, FL*

*Smile!*

Studies show nothing increases a tip more than smiling at a customer and making them feel comfortable. Count how many times this does not happen in a day. From the check

out at the grocer store to the fine dining restaurant.  
—Greg Crandall, *Bevinco of Virginia*

I think the biggest one by far would be for the bartender to acknowledge every guest as soon as they arrive at the bar. Even if they are slammed, they should toss a bev nap in front of them, say, “Hi! My name’s Ken. I will be with you in just a few moments.” Another one is to replace bev naps with new ones if the customer has been working on a drink for awhile.  
—Ken Gillie, *Bevinco Chicago, IL*

When I was serving, I always up-sold to the items that had the most amount of change. If a regular drink was \$3.95 but a double came to \$5.05, upselling to the double increased both my sales and my tips – especially because cash customers would usually leave the change. For the most part, the customers felt pretty good as they were getting a “deal”. This was before “responsible serving” became a huge concern. I guess the equivalent today

would be “suggestive selling” a product that has the pricing that works.  
—Gillian Blair, *Corporate Trainer, Bevinco Global Office*

Offer to refill drinks ( free refills like sodas or coffees ) when you drop a check, it shows that you care about them being satisfied even if you know they aren’t going to order anything else.  
—Post by *nuvola09* on the [www.tipping.org](http://www.tipping.org) discussion board (November 2004)

Product knowledge is very important. I usually tip well when a waiter or waitress can recommend a good meal, or a good bottle of wine to go with the meal. Knowing the menu not only increases the staff’s tips, but also increases the restaurant’s sales. Everyone wins...the customer, the staff and the owner.  
—George Jinargyros, *Bevinco Toronto, ON, Canada*

Establish a Connection with Your Guests: The value of treating people  
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## INSIDE:



# THE FINE ART OF Increasing Your Tips

Ian Foster polls the industry to serve up a compilation of proven tip-increasing techniques.

[Continued from inside] like welcome guests cannot be overestimated. After all, who doesn't "want to go where everyone knows your name?" This means that you need to connect with your guests and make them feel at home at your bar rather than being out in public, just one of a countless throng. Two effective ways of accomplishing this is maintaining good eye contact with people when speaking to them and acknowledging guests by their names. People appreciate being recognized. Not only that, but the process by which you learn a person's name is often through conversation, after which an invaluable connection has been formed between you and your guest.

Develop a Specialty: Some bartenders proudly let it be known that their Martinis are second to none; others boast of concocting unrivaled Margaritas or Mojitos. Whatever your interest, choose a category of drinks and make it your own. Become an

expert on the spirits used in your area of specialization. People will readily want to sample your specialties and then brag to their friends that they know the "King of Martinis".

Know What You're Talking About: You should be able to accurately answer guests' questions regarding the menu or a specific product quickly and knowledgeably. Fumbling for answers or searching for someone else to deal with the situation diminishes your credibility and that of the business. People like to know that they're in capable hands. With surging consumer interest in premium spirits, it is far easier to up-sell a guest when you can quickly articulate why a particular brand is worth its elevated sales price.

—Robert Plotkin from  
*Cheers Magazine, 2004*

**Robert is the past president of the National Bar & Restaurant Association and author of *Successful Beverage Management – Proven Strategies for the On-Premise Operator*. **

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