

# Purpose to discover what it is like to be a bartender essay example

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## **Audience: General**

### Shaken and Stirred

The first thing you see upon entering the corner bar on Bourbon Street are gold Fleur-de-lis ornaments hanging down from the ceiling. Walking in, you see a few tables and benches occupied with a middle-aged audience listening to one of the famous jazz bands that play every other night. The cozy bar creates a warm and welcoming atmosphere with pictures and posters of musicians on the bricked walls. Usually, there are two bartenders working behind the bar. They joke around, flipping plastic cups over their heads, imitating “flair bartending.” I sit down at the bar in one of the few empty stools next to a couple of other girls. The bartender with a big smile and thick glasses turns to me, saying, “What can I get for you?” His name is Eduardo, I discovered later. He is casually attired in a yellow cotton polo shirt with a big bloody red stain on the front from one of his signature drinks, the Strawberry Margarita, black pants, and shiny black shoes. Eduardo’s oval-shaped face, stocky build, and dark hair with streaks of gray make him look a little younger than his forty two years. Before I met Eduardo, I thought bartenders were just “employees who mix and serve alcoholic drinks at a bar.” I did not realize that there is much more to the job of bartending than people typically realize; it is far more complicated than just serving drinks. It is not every day that I get to talk with a bartender who speaks intelligently. From the very start of our conversation, I knew that Eduardo was smart, not because of his thick eyeglasses, but because of the way he answered my questions concisely, meaningfully, and even humorously. “I have been doing this for almost twenty one years, and I am not tired of doing this. Working on

Bourbon Street is the best of things, and it is the worst of things,” says Eduardo, paraphrasing *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens. He speaks with an outgoing and friendly tone, as is expected from a typical bartender, and I laugh a lot between sips of my Strawberry Margarita as we talk. The business that he works at is hard to imagine as not having many challenges. Eduardo remembers his worst experience as having served a customer who then claimed that he had not received his change. Though the customer already had his change, Eduardo had been too busy to notice. The customer then started causing a scene, claiming that he had not received his change. The situation got so ugly that the manager had to be involved. However, the manager had faith in his employee, and knew that he was not capable of stealing from a customer. “ It felt really weird and frustrating,” remembers Eduardo, as if it happened yesterday. “ But, you know, I believe in saying, ‘ What goes around comes around.’ Whatever you do will come back to you,” Eduardo explained. Although the crowd here tonight is a little bit rowdy, nothing that crazy has happened here tonight, most people listening to the band and a few dancing. Snarky customers are not the only challenge Eduardo faces. The lows of the job include having to work long, odd hours. This means he misses many valuable family moments, like Thanksgiving dinners and Christmas Eve. “ I love my family. Some of them I want to strangle,” Eduardo says, smiling, “ But for the most part, I love my family.” The job, however, keeps him from spending time with his family. Most family occasions occur on holidays, which are also the busiest at the bar, especially in New Orleans where there are hundreds of different festivals and celebrations following one after

another. His job also makes him live an unhealthy lifestyle, especially when it comes to meals. The hours spent on the job do not allow him time to prepare healthy meals and he must depend on hamburgers, fries, and pizza. Inhaling second-hand smoke is also one of the bad aspects of his job. However, personal challenges are not the only part of the job; dealing with out-of-control customers is much more difficult.

One of Eduardo's most effective methods of dealing with intoxicated people is to "kick them out the bar!" Eduardo tells me, laughing. As he slides me my second Margarita, he explains that bartenders cannot serve patrons who come into the bar intoxicated, because the law does not allow it. However, there are cases when a patron comes in and looks fine, but becomes crazy after a couple of drinks. This happens usually when the patron had a little drink before coming to the bar. What Eduardo normally does is to get the drunk customer something to eat and offer them water, coffee, or a soft drink.

One of the greatest challenges bartenders face is the responsibility of having to deal with their customers who get extremely drunk after having personally served them. It is ultimately the bartender's responsibility to deal with the situation, but Eduardo believes the best thing to do is to ask friends to help, since people usually come to the bar with friends. The only time either a bouncer or the police have to be called is when the drunken patron is behaving so crazily that someone might get hurt. According to Eduardo, this is the last resort since "you don't want to call the police on somebody who came to your bar to spend money." Eduardo claims that he has never had to call the police since he always talks to his troublesome clients first, before

things get really bad. He tries to prevent problems because after a guest is drunk, “ It is just like talking to the wall,” he says.

One of the toughest cases for Eduardo is when customers come into the bar alone, sit at the bar, drink quietly at first, and end up either barfing or behaving badly. Most of the bar patrons who are seated alone are alone for a reason, Eduardo explained. They likely have a problem and claim that they want to face it alone by drowning themselves with alcohol. However, what actually happens is that they end up bursting out their pent-up emotions on the stranger nearest to them, and that happens to be the bartender. In these cases, Eduardo functions as a counselor to depressed patrons seated alone at the bar, and during extreme cases, he still tries to help, working as a philanthropist. Eduardo entered bartending to pay for his education; he remembers an incident from his first days at the job when he saw a patron sleeping by his car. He ended up bringing the patron home, and Eduardo never imagined that the first person he would bring home to his new apartment is an old man who was too drunk to go home.

Yet, it is not all doom and gloom on the job. You never know what is going to happen on Bourbon Street. He describes one of the funniest moments as the time when the door man Zack, took off his clothes and started dancing around in his frayed underwear. Unfortunately for Zack, his dancing was videotaped and posted on the Internet. The video posting remains the most hilarious moment in his long career. Looking across the room at Zack, I see he is a very large man, and it is easy to imagine the scenario as he dances around half dressed, attracting even more customers to the bar. I laugh at the image in my head that Eduardo described as he smoothly serves me a

third Margarita.

The passion that Eduardo has for the job ensures that he always enjoys it. He says the opportunity to meet new people is the best part of his job. Meeting new people gives him an opportunity to interact with them and learn many new things from them. He has met many famous people like Dizzy Gillespie; Eduardo said, " You know, the one with the big cheeks!" so I could look him up later. " When you listen to the music, when you see the way it affects the people at the bar, and you talk to them, I learn about them. I learn about myself, I learn about life," he says. " It's like traveling to a new world every day." The energetic environment ensures that time passes by quickly with many opportunities to learn new things. However, he however acknowledges, " It's like any relationship. There are going to be great days and you are going to make money, and there are horrible days. But it is just a part of the business."

Indeed, bartending is a multitasking job. Bartenders do not merely mix drinks. They also handle the cash register, they have to have good communication and listening skills, and they work as bouncers at times. Overall, bartending is a fast-paced, exciting job that keeps you active and in contact with all types of people; there is a lot more behind the profession of the bartender than I originally realized. Considering it was so busy, I am amazed he had time to tell me so much about his work, but I realize it is a skill he has learned over the years. I have been to places where the bartenders do not give such a personal touch to their service as Eduardo does, so his ability to do so made the experience much more fun. The next time you order a drink at a bar, remember that the person serving you that

drink is concerned and responsible for you, and not just there to fill up glasses. Drink it up, thank the bartender, and always remember to respect their hard work with a good tip.

As I stand up to leave, I thank Eduardo and leave a generous tip for him. The bar has become more crowded and rowdy since I first came in, and the band is feeding off the crowd's energy, playing faster tunes and exaggerating wildly during their solos. Feeling light-hearted and happy after my margaritas and conversation with Eduardo, as I open the door to leave, I turn back to see him flipping another plastic cup over his head, and the flash of his smile as he greets the patron who just took my place at the bar.