



Local Case Study:



Responsible Beverage Service Training in Lincoln, NE

In 2002, the Lincoln City Council commissioned the NU Directions Campus-Community Coalition to research the viability of a city ordinance mandating server training for every server at licensed on and off-sale establishments within city limits. Managers and owners flatly rejected the idea in discussions, citing several key concerns: Most server training programs were expensive, and required travel and/or valuable time away from the establishment. Mandating server training meant a huge investment on the part of managers and business owners. Given the fact that most licensed establishments faced high employee turnover, the investment seemed hardly worth the benefit. Most managers believed that complying with the policy would be a hardship for their businesses.

Taking these concerns to heart, coalition staff began investigating alternative formats, and found that web-based training eliminated the vast majority of concerns while still providing quality instruction. Through a grant from the Nebraska Liquor Control Commission and the Nebraska Office of Highway Safety, a task force of hospitality owners and managers, retailers, and RBS trainers guided the creation of two on-line training modules that allowed alcohol servers across the state to learn policies, laws, and techniques on reducing alcohol sales to minors and to intoxicated patrons at any location with internet access, at any time of the day or night, from any location. But there were other benefits of the on-line server training for managers, owners, and even the state Liquor Control Commission.

Server intervention is a strategy designed to minimize harms associated with the consumption of alcohol. Similar to other public health harm reduction strategies (e.g., seatbelts, helmets, and airbags), server intervention occurs independent from the drinker's actions. However, to be applied successfully, sellers and servers of alcohol must be exposed to the skills, knowledge and awareness necessary to intervene with problems before they happen and/or escalate. The most common strategy involves educating employees who sell and/or serve alcohol to intervene at the point of sale. This strategy is often referred to as server intervention education or responsible beverage service (RBS), which originated in the 1980's.

FROM THE RESEARCH

Research has shown both the need for RBS training as well as its effectiveness in reducing alcohol related problems. Common problems needing intervention by alcohol servers and sellers include:

SALES TO MINORS:

- Approximately 20% of 12-20 year olds reported binge drinking at least once in the past 30 days.
- Approximately 52% of all junior and senior high students reported using alcohol at least once during the past year.
- Over half of the students surveyed reported that it was "fairly easy" to "very easy" to get alcohol (SAMHSA, 2000).

■ A comparable survey in Lincoln, Nebraska found that 223 retailers, representing five Nebraska counties, sold to underage customers 27% of the time. Rates ranged from a high of 41% in Adams County to a low of 21% in Scotts Bluff County. In 43% of the sales, the seller or server first checked the identifications (Duggan, 2002).

■ Underage college students report purchasing alcohol without the use of false ID 20.9% of the time, while 17.8% report using a false ID to obtain their alcohol (Wechsler et al., 2002).

SALES TO INTOXICATED PATRONS:

■ It is estimated that 50% of all legally impaired drivers consumed their last drink at a commercial establishment (O'Donnell, 1985).

■ Data collected at Cornhusker Place Detoxification Center found that approximately 34% of the individuals admitted to civil protective custody reported having their last drink at a commercial establishment. In 1992, the Lincoln City Council mandated that managers attend RBS training and created the Responsible Hospitality Council. The number of individuals reporting their last drink at a commercial establishment has dropped to 17%.

■ Studies across the United States and other countries using actors who demonstrated visible signs of intoxication found that visibly intoxicated individuals were served alcohol at the majority of the commercial establishments surveyed (Andreasson et al., 2000, Lang et al., 1996, McKnight & Streff, 1994, Toomey et al, 1999).

This Information Briefing is continued on the back of the page.

Local Case Study, continued:

- Managers are able to customize the training to include the policies relevant to their own establishment, which has served to be an important “prompt” to managers about state laws and rules as well as the importance of corporate policies in helping to reduce sales to minors and intoxicated patrons.
- Managers can “track” employee progress toward the completion of the training.
- Employees must pass 100% of final tests in order to be certified, ensuring their knowledge of the information.
- Employees can start and stop the training at their own pace, and can retake tests until they are able to answer all questions correctly.
- Employees can transfer their certifications to new employers if needed, reviewing only the changes in establishment policy.
- Certification records are accessible by the Liquor Control Commission, allowing for the discovery of prior training in adjudicating liquor rule violations.
- Because the training program was created by an inclusive task force that involved members of the hospitality industry, managers and employees felt assured that the materials presented realistic situations and expectations, while hospitality trainers, law enforcement officers, and Liquor Control Commissioners were assured that the training thoroughly addressed the laws and rules in Nebraska.
- Costs for the web-based training per establishment or employee are significantly lower for business owners, employers, or the state.

As of January, 2006, 351 establishments in 67 Nebraska counties have enrolled in the training, with 2600 employees enrolled. The training program has been adapted for use in Missouri and Georgia, with more states requesting information every month.

FROM THE RESEARCH (continued)

Studies measuring the impact of RBS Training has found that in states and/or communities where servers and sellers have received training, there were:

- Increases in server intervention with minors and intoxicated patrons (Buka & Birdthistle, 1999, Russ and Geller, 1987, Howard-Pitney et al., 1991, McKnight, 1991).
- Increases in the number of managers creating effective policies (McKnight, 1991).
- Increases in server knowledge of alcohol and its effects (Gliksman et al., 1993).
- Reductions in actual customer Blood Alcohol Level (BAL) (Saltz, 1985, Russ and Geller 1987).
- Decreases in the number of single vehicle crashes involving injury or death due to intoxicated drivers (Holder and Wagenaar, 1994).
- Decreases in the number of underage sales of alcohol (Grube, 1997; Holder & Saltz, 1997; Saltz & Stanghetta; 1997).

A recent study indicates respondents’ attitudes toward server intervention policies were positive, while attitudes toward traditional responsible beverage service were neutral. In addition, managers would be more likely to train their employees using web-based technology if they knew more about the program and its benefits, or if training employees would result in a reduction in fines and/or penalties (Major, 2004).

A NOTE OF CAUTION FROM ALCOHOL ABUSE RESEARCH:

Research suggests that, while providing server education is critical for reducing community harms, it is equally important that resources are provided for helping hospitality managers develop effective policies in their establishments (such as the elimination of high-risk promotions and creating incentives for employees who serve responsibly), as well as proper enforcement to help ensure that servers and sellers have significant consequences for not complying with policy or the education they have received. NU Directions represents this concept in a model applied to all aspects of the alcohol environment:

