

## **Alcohol in Your Office?...Think Back to the 60's**

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Generational differences are beginning to surface in my current Beverage Management course centering on the topic of drinking habits of 1960's restaurant patrons. The current HBO and AMC series *Mad Men* has been the focus of several of lectures. And, although many of my younger students do not subscribe to HBO; a more mature generation of students sometimes watches the series and has commented on the milieu that is presented. If you're not familiar with the show, it features the 60's lifestyles of New York advertising executives that wheel and deal with classic companies such as American Airlines, Proctor and Gamble, and Maidenform during an era where alcohol consumption at work was part of the culture and the notion of sexual harassment was not yet defined. The retro ambience of the series paints a landscape of secretaries in tight skirts, blouses with plunging necklines, sharp cornered furnishings, lengthy credenzas, grass-cloth wallpapered walls, electric typewriters, and cocktail bars in every top executive's office. An office secretary could be summoned at a moment's notice to get ice for her boss's bar in time for the 11 a.m. meeting with the president of Mohawk Airlines. Everyone appears to smoke cigarettes in and outside of the ad agency, including the priest at the nearby Catholic diocese and even the white-coated doctor of one of the executive's wives during a gynecological examination. The only brands of Scotch are the old stalwarts, Dewar's, Black & White, Teacher's, and White Horse. Cocktails such as Vodka Gimlet, Rusty Nail, and Old Fashioned are common terms in the dialogue at pre-dinner receptions. All the Stolichnaya is still in Russia.

In terms of perception of alcohol consumption in the workplace, in the restaurant world, and at home, where have we moved in the last forty years and for what reason(s)? Looking back, I grew up in the "counterculture" of the 60s that came about as a reaction to the political conservatism of the 1950's. As such, the younger generation focused on change and experimentation that included alcohol and drugs. In terms of the more mature corporate America of the 60's, a taste for alcohol was standard. Having waited tables in the 70's, I witnessed the two and three Martini lunches of the business corporate world, when executives spent up to two and a half hours eating, drinking, and smoking, but somehow made it back to the office to finish the remainder of the business day. Bartenders had drinks sitting on a bar waiting for the "regulars" to arrive. A DUI infraction was often paid for in cash and you may have been released on the spot. Business was done at some bars starting at 11 a.m. and finishing at 11 p.m. When asking colleagues and students whether they could imagine this scenario in the workplace today, they look at me strangely. However, one colleague recently mentioned that we have become more "repressed" since the 60's, morally and politically and she was a product of the 60's.

I have witnessed, firsthand, the evolution of alcohol consumption/supervision in managing restaurants over the years. Jimmy Carter campaigned against the "three-Martini" lunch, but his attempts to eliminate it as a tax deduction failed. It was finally removed from the tax codes about a decade later. Carter's initiatives, however, did help to instill more responsibility and austerity in the actions of the business world. Alcohol

sales changed over the years. We moved from the 2-3 oz. Martini of the 60's to the humongous 5-6 oz. Martini in the late 2000's. Interest in spirits has remained constant with special interest in beer and particularly wine.

Lower alcohol consumption has been promoted as one aspect of a healthier and safer lifestyle. However, we keep searching for the health benefits of grapes and wine, particularly the red varieties. The AMA (American Medical Association) annually reports on the pluses and minuses of alcohol consumption. Who needs to sit around and drink Martinis to do business in 2009 when the Internet can facilitate business at the speed of light? Alcohol consumption has moved away from business lunches to dinners and cocktail receptions. Many office parties now avoid alcohol altogether due to potential liquor liability litigation. Dram Shop laws are in effect in all states making all service staff, management, and service staff liable for serving intoxicated consumers. We, in the hospitality field, have become more accountable and liable for a guest's safety. We are still a nation of consumers but have become more conscious of the ramifications of drinking irresponsibly. We, as a nation, consume slightly less volume of alcohol than in the rise of the 1960's and seem to do so in more a conscionable fashion. The new added twists are binge drinking by youth and excessive consumption by some of the over 60 crowd.

For more information on trends in alcohol consumption, I would recommend the following links:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/8145100.stm>

<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2009/02/19/60minutes/main4813571.shtml>

<http://www.gallup.com/poll/121277/drinking-habits-steady-amid-recession.aspx>

[http://www.ahiatorneys.org/handouts/boston/AHIAPresentation\\_v1.doc](http://www.ahiatorneys.org/handouts/boston/AHIAPresentation_v1.doc)