

ELEVATING HOSPITALITY

WITH OVER TWO DECADES OF INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE, MURDO MACLEOD IS ON A MISSION TO REVOLUTIONISE BARTENDER TRAINING THROUGH BAR EXCELLENCE – BLENDING THEATRICAL SERVICE, DIGITAL LEARNING, AND COMMERCIAL IMPACT TO FUTURE-PROOF TEAMS IN A FAST-CHANGING INDUSTRY.

Murdo Macleod has spent over 20 years in hospitality, training teams from independent cocktail bars to international hospitality operations like Moxy Hotels and Compass Group. During this time, something became clear to Murdo: the most successful venues weren't always the ones with the most exquisite cocktail menus or glamorous interiors, they were the ones with teams that delivered consistently brilliant service.

"Training was always the difference," Murdo explains. "That's why I launched Bar Excellence. My focus is simple: helping venues develop good service into unforgettable guest experiences, while significantly boosting profitability. I combine theatre, service excellence, upselling skills, and now digital learning tools to future-proof hospitality training."

WHY TRAINING MATTERS MORE THAN EVER

The hospitality industry is under pressure like never before. Rising costs are one part of the challenge but the bigger challenge is people. Teams want to feel valued and guests want to feel cared for – training is where both of those meet.

"We're in an era where a bartender isn't just pouring a drink. They're curating moments, building loyalty, and driving sales. Guests today notice when service feels rehearsed or when the energy of the team is low. On the other hand, when a bartender confidently shares a signature cocktail story, upsells a premium spirit fluently in conversation or adds theatre to a serve, that guest will come back and spend more."

"Training isn't a 'nice to have' anymore. It's the fastest way to unlock consistency, sales, and guest loyalty."

WHAT MAKES BAR EXCELLENCE DIFFERENT?

A lot of training programmes fall flat because they're generic, one-off, or delivered in a lecture style that feels disconnected from the floor. That's where Bar Excellence is different – rooted in expertise and passion, Murdo's training sessions are personalised to each venue's needs.

"I have set training content available if requested but the majority of programmes I design are tailored to a venue's culture and commercial goals, whether that's lifting guest satisfaction scores, upselling premium spirits, or creating a theatrical cocktail service," says Murdo.

"I make training inspiring, not boring. We use role play, live demonstrations, theatrical presentation and cocktail storytelling. I also integrate AI-powered tools to make learning land and keep



Murdo Macleod

teams engaged. The results speak for themselves: most venues recoup my training fee within two months through increased sales and improved staff retention."

THE POWER OF THEATRE AND STORYTELLING

One of Bar Excellence's unique trademarks is teaching teams to bring theatre into cocktail service and storytelling into menu presentation – something that Murdo believes makes all the difference...

"Theatrical service isn't about being over the top, it's about creating moments guests remember. Think of the difference between a server simply delivering a cocktail at the table versus telling a 20-second story about the spirit or adding a theatrical moment that makes a guest instantly want to take a photo. That emotional connection builds loyalty," Murdo states.

"When the O2 London launched their new members' bar, I was brought in to train the bartenders on how to deliver incredible cocktail storytelling and theatrical service excellence. It gave the launch a real edge, suddenly drinks weren't just drinks, they were performances."

"For bartenders, theatre also builds confidence. It gives them permission to shine, to show personality, and to feel proud of their craft. That energy is contagious, both for guests and the wider team."



IN-PERSON MEETS DIGITAL: THE HYBRID FUTURE

Training has traditionally been delivered in workshops or masterclasses, but the industry is shifting fast.

"I believe the future is hybrid," says Murdo. "In-person training is irreplaceable when it comes to inspiration, theatre, and team energy. But digital training ensures that knowledge sticks and that it scales across multiple sites."

"For example, I'm currently developing a suite of bartender skills training videos for Moxy Hotels across the UK and Europe. These modules include hospitality mindset, knowledge and excellence in serving all drinks categories, cocktail confidence and includes digital certification, managers can track progress while teams learn consistently. This is where groups with 30+ sites see real impact: the same high standards delivered everywhere at pace. It's also easy to update the training with new additions and upskill new recruits quickly."

"Digital doesn't replace in-person training, it complements it. Operators who combine both get the best of both worlds: immersive workshops that spark change, and digital tools that embed it long-term at scale."

THE ROI OF TRAINING

Some operators still see training as a cost, but Murdo sees it differently...

"Training isn't a cost, it's an investment. A confident bartender doesn't just pour a gin and tonic; they suggest a premium serve fluently in conversation and make the guest feel valued. That directly drives sales."

"A recent hotel group I worked with saw cocktail sales rise by 34% and premium spirit sales climb 19% in the three months after training. That's a clear return on investment."

"On top of that, trained staff feel supported and are more likely to stay. Reducing turnover saves thousands per year in recruitment and onboarding costs. My clients regularly report that they cover my fee in around two months, thanks to a



combination of higher spend per head and improved retention. There aren't many investments in hospitality that deliver that kind of ROI so quickly."

PRACTICAL ADVICE FOR OPERATORS

Not every operator can book a two-day training programme immediately but that doesn't mean they can't start improving team performance today. Murdo offers venues some valuable advice...

"One quick win? Dedicate 15 minutes before service to a structured briefing. Cover just one skill, maybe upselling a cocktail or how to handle a tricky guest scenario. Consistency in small doses adds up. It keeps training alive daily, rather than something that happens once a year."

"The worst thing you can do is nothing. Staff turnover and guest expectations won't wait. Even a small step can transform culture and sales."

WHAT'S NEXT FOR BAR EXCELLENCE?

The future is bright for Bar Excellence, as Murdo explains, "My focus is twofold: continuing to deliver bespoke in-person training for bars and hotels across the UK, while building scalable digital training programmes that hospitality teams can access on demand."

"Alongside that, I'm growing my Hospitality Blueprint newsletter on LinkedIn, which has quickly become a free go-to resource for bar operators who want weekly insights into utilising AI within hospitality, along with thought leadership strategies on delivering service excellence within your operation."

"Ultimately, my mission is simple: cocktails might bring guests through the door, but unforgettable guest experience is what brings them back. If you're serious about elevating consistency, sales, and guest loyalty, training is the fastest way to make it happen."

Discover more at bar-excellence.co.uk

Subscribe to the free newsletter: bar-excellence.co.uk/blueprint

HIGH STANDARD SERVICE

MURDO MACLEOD, BAR EXCELLENCE FOUNDER, DIRECTOR, MASTER MIXOLOGIST & HOSPITALITY TRAINER, SHARES FIVE BENEFITS OF IN-HOUSE TRAINING FOR VENUES.

Running a great bar isn't just about drinks and décor, it's about the team. In-house training is one of the most effective ways to elevate service, boost sales, and keep staff motivated. Here are five benefits every operator should know:

1 CONSISTENCY EVERY SHIFT

Guests expect the same standard every time they visit. Training ensures that every team member, regardless of shift or experience level, delivers on that promise. It eliminates weak links and prevents off nights, creating a seamless guest experience that builds trust and loyalty.

2 SALES THROUGH CONFIDENCE

A well-trained bartender doesn't just pour; they upsell fluently in conversation. From suggesting premium spirits to recommending signature cocktails, training directly drives revenue. This kind of effortless upselling not only enhances the guest experience but directly increases your average spend per customer – and your bottom line.

3 HAPPIER TEAMS STAY LONGER

The hospitality industry is notorious for high turnover. But one of the clearest signals you can send your team is that they matter. Investing in staff training shows your employees they're valued and supported. It boosts confidence, reduces stress, and fosters a sense of pride in their work. When people feel equipped and empowered, they're more likely to stay – and to become passionate ambassadors for your venue.

4 MEMORABLE GUEST EXPERIENCES

Guests might walk in for the drinks, but it's the service that brings them back. Training equips your team with the skills to turn a simple transaction into a memorable interaction. From remembering regulars' orders to handling complaints with grace, your staff becomes the face of your brand. These moments of connection are what guests remember – and what they share with others, both in person and online.

5 FUTURE-PROOFING YOUR VENUE

The bar and hospitality landscape is changing rapidly. From emerging trends in mixology to the integration of digital tools and AI-driven systems, staying competitive means staying current. Ongoing training ensures your team is leading and staying ahead of the curve. By embracing continuous learning, your venue becomes more agile, innovative, and ready for whatever the future holds.

I've been training hospitality teams for over 20 years, from independents to international hospitality groups like Moxy Hotels and Compass Group. If you'd like to explore how in-house training can elevate your bar, book a complimentary strategy call at: www.bar-excellence.co.uk

Or join my free weekly LinkedIn newsletter, Hospitality Blueprint, for practical ways to enhance hospitality service using AI tools: www.bar-excellence.co.uk/blueprint

