

## TIPPING

A friend of mine called the other day inquiring whether, when you split a meal at a restaurant, you should tip on the cost of that meal or on twice the cost, since it required extra work. I blithely replied that your tip should be 20% of the bill; it is the bill that determines the tip. You should throw in something extra for really good and/or extra service, and splitting a meal does involve extra service. But double? That is really generous.

This got me to thinking about tipping, and caused me to do some soul-searching. Like Michael Dukakis, I am frugal, but being concerned about workers, I will try to do what is right. And when you realize that service workers are among the lowest paid workers, and the extra few bucks mean very little to you, but a lot to the worker, be a sport.

I looked up the minimum wage law and found that though the current Federal minimum is \$7.25, the Federal tipped minimum is \$2.13. Currently, Massachusetts has an \$8 minimum, and a \$2.63 tipped minimum. That is a lot to make up just to get to minimum wage. The average wage of tipped employees is about \$12. In Massachusetts, which has the highest paid tipped employees, it is \$13. Not a lot of money. (The minimum wage will go up in Massachusetts to \$11 by 2017, and will hopefully go up nationally.)

Other than big spenders, people who once worked for tips, are usually good tipppers. Unless they have short memories. For three summers in my late teens, I worked as a bus boy at a small hotel, as a camper-waiter, and as a camp counselor. Tips were expected. Of course, the people with whom I interacted did not have a lot of money, but with rare exceptions, they all came through. The ritual of proffering the tip was to approach the bus boy-waiter-counselor as if you were going to say goodbye, thank him, and shake his hand; the cash, folded in the palm of your hand, was transferred to the recipient in the act of handshaking.

The amount of the tip was generally known. If not, there was always someone to ask. Some places provided "guidelines." I don't remember when they first appeared, but in most hotels these days, there are envelopes in the hotel rooms soliciting tips for the chambermaids. Some are personalized with the chambermaid's name. It is expected that the guest would leave \$2-\$3 a night. Many restaurant statements have printed on the bottom 10%, 15% and 20% of the bill. It is there to help the customer who is weak in math. However, it gives the impression that 10% and 15% are acceptable. It is not. On more than one occasion, I had a check of around \$10, gave the server a \$20 bill and was asked if I wanted change. Keep the change, my foot! Still, my kids leave a \$1 tip when getting a cup of coffee. A lot of take-outs employing young people often have jars on the counter. Some are labeled tips, others, gratuities, and the more innovative ones are labeled college fund.

Having taken a few cruises, I do not believe there is anywhere else that you are more waited upon. Your stateroom is constantly being fussed over, in the dining room a dozen different servers hover over you, wherever you walk on deck, there is someone who

inquires how they might help you. And they all expect tips, whether you dole it out individually, or the cruise line includes the tips in the total charge. Tipping has become part of the culture of cruising. A friend told me a joke about a man who wanted to take a cruise, but had a limited budget. He asked a travel agent for the cheapest cruise around, and signed up. When he went to board the ship, he was led to the hold, chained into a seat, and given an oar. At the end of the cruise, he turned to his fellow oarsman and asked, "How much do we tip the whipper?"

I once observed that I drink more around Christmas than I do all the rest of the year. And I tip more around Christmas than I do all the rest of the year. There is the Christmas fund for the maintenance staff of the condo, the newspaper deliverer, the housecleaners, and when David was going to school (up to high school) gifts for teachers. Fran has a special relationship with her hairdresser and manicurist, which she feels obligates her, though she tips them after each haircut and manicure.

Fran is more generous than me, but she now has a service for which she cannot tip enough: the person who pushes her wheelchair through the airport. From the time we arrive at the terminal and the wheelchair and the wheelchair pusher arrive, a close bond is established. There is a steady conversation that goes beyond what airline, gate and departure time. Fran learns where the pusher is from, where the pusher presently lives, she learns about the pusher's family, the pusher's short and long term plans, and the pusher's view of life in the country from which the pusher came. At no US airport was any pusher American born. However, when we transferred to Air Canada going to Vancouver, the pusher was a young Canadian man who was also very forthcoming. When Fran offered him a tip, he refused, saying he is well paid and does not take tips.

"Take a trip and give a tip." I just made that up, but it is more truth than poetry. First, the cab driver, then the bag checker, then the wheelchair pusher, then the baggage handler, then the cab to the hotel, and at a decent hotel, the doorman, the bellman, the concierge, and again, the usual suspects. Go sightseeing, tip the guide. If you rent a car, tip the garage attendant. (You save a few bucks in hotels that provide baggage carts and have self-parking. Apple is experimenting with robot delivery to guest rooms. You give the robot a review instead of a tip.) On my first big overseas trip, I took a couple of cartons of cigarettes, and gave packs of cigarettes as tips. More precious than money.

I once heard that TIP is an acronym standing for "To Insure Promptness." Just as NEWS is an acronym for the four points on the compass: North East West and South. Neither is true. I am sure all wait staff would like to serve their tables promptly, but they are dependent on the kitchen. (I don't know where I picked up the term "wait staff." It is said instead of "waiters and waitresses." We used to say actors and actresses; we now say actors for both.) The wait staff that get shortchanged are those in buffet restaurants. Please give them 10% of the bill. They work hard too. If you really want to make sure that the person who serves you gets the tip, leave cash. There are too many stories of restaurant owners stiffing their staff. And I read somewhere that when you go to Japan, don't tip. They consider tips insulting.

Tipping also applies to street entertainment, buskers. You can keep walking, but if you stop to watch or listen, you are expected to tip. Again, my children have taught me to tip appropriately. I used to drop a quarter in the hat; they gave a dollar. We went to a restaurant with a piano player. We didn't listen, but as we left, my daughter urged me to put something in the tip glass on the piano. Tourists are expected to tip if they take a picture of costumed characters posing in touristy places. Which brings to mind meeting Benjamin Black Elk when Sylvia and I visited Mt. Rushmore in 1952. He was dressed in full Indian regalia. We must have spent a half hour talking with him about the history of the Sioux, and his life today. He was fascinating. As we left, I asked if I could take his picture. He said, of course. When I offered to tip him, he was offended. We had become friends. You don't tip friends, unless they are serving you a meal in a restaurant.

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