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Tipping: Knowing When and How Much

by
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Recently in a downtown Washington restaurant, an Arab millionaire handed a waiter a hundred-dollar bill as a tip for waiting on his table of one. "Sir, do you realize how much you gave me?" the waiter gasped. "If you wanted more," the Arab told him. "Then maybe next time you could try to serve the food hot!"

That might be overstating it a bit, but tipping people for their services is an everyday occurrence. Whether you're in a restaurant, hotel, taxi or having your shoes shined, tipping the person who serves them is part of the process of payment. Knowing how to and how much to tip is the question.

"I don't mind tipping," says a traveler. "But the services I received in some cites was so bad that, on some occasions, I could not reward them with money." He went on to say a New York cab driver that took him from Kennedy Airport to the city refused to give him change from the $30 he presented to pay a $24.75 fare. "I thought you would let me keep the change," the cabby told him.

One of the problems is that there are no official rules for tipping. Sometimes the issue is complicated by cultural differences. In France, they include the tip for the waiter in the check. You leave a franc or two on the table if you are "really" satisfied with the food and service. In Japan and several other countries, there is no tipping. For example, in China, law officially prohibits tipping.

The custom of tipping comes from England where at Christmas time families would put coins in

a small box for those who served them throughout the year. At one point in time, English taverns were said to have displayed a little sign suggesting a "small gift" to the server would ensure promptness. Down through the years, this practice has become knows as a tip.

Today more than three million Americans depend on tips as apart of their income. Tips constitute about three-quarters of a waitress's pay, about half a bartender's pay and a quarter of taxi drivers pay. Because we contribute over $2-billion annually in gratuities, there's an adage that says, people who depend on tips can tell you the shape of the economy better than the high paid analysis by the tips people leave.

Leaving the Right Amount

How much should I leave? It depends, of course, on a lot of different factors. But the standard these days is 15 to 20 percent of the bill. But that could increase depending on the service and the number of people in your party. For large parties, some restaurants automatically add 15 percent to the bill.

"Fifteen percent is acceptable, and 20 percent is preferable," says a spokesman for the Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union. Many waiters are getting the minimum wage from their employers. They depend on tips for most of their livelihood. The amount waiters get varies from as much as $100 a day in expensive restaurants to 15 dollars in coffee shops. Workers at fast-food restaurants get no tips at all.

Even for breakfast or lunch, you should leave a percentage of your bill for the waitress. Bartenders should get 15 – 20 percent of the tab, more if they make you a special drink. Other people who might get tipped during your travels include the hotel; bellhop should get at least a dollar per bag. Room service should get at least a couple of dollars or 20 percent of the check. Depending on how long you stay, Tip for the maid is about $1.00 a day. Usually left on the last morning of your stay.

Taxi drivers in large cities make between $80 to 100 dollars a day, of which 25 to 30 percent

comes from tips. Leave the shoe shine person at least a few dollars, and you'll get quick service the next time you come to get your shoes done.

When Not to Tip!

One thing you should remember is that a tip is a monetary favor for services rendered. Slow, sloppy, or lousy service does not deserve a tip of any kind. "Most people tip not because they have received fast or courteous service. They do it out of habit," one restaurant manager said. "Believe it or not, they tend to leave better tips for servers who are said to be slow, haughty, or intimidating to their customers," he added. This is a mistake. In the case of particularly poor service, the offender should be reported to the management. Some restaurants have become locally famous because of their lousy service.

In a recent survey on tipping, most people disapproved of the practice but felt that it’s expected of them. Many people think that if they don't leave a big tip, friends and associates will label them as tightwads. On the other hand, if an employee has done an extra service to make your meal at the restaurant or stay at a hotel, this is one way of letting him know it. It's also good to let the management know how happy you were with the service from the employee. In both cases letting management know what you thought of the service will help them to serve you better next time.

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