

The art of tipping

EDITORIAL

TO TIP OR NOT TO TIP? It's an age-old question that has been discussed and debated for years and years. The obvious answer is, almost always, to tip. But how did we get here?

The custom of tipping dates all the way back to the 1500s, according to the Online Etymology Dictionary. It is believed the practice, first defined as 'to give a small present of money to an individual for services rendered', originated in England, during the Tudor period.

An article written by Paul Wachter in the New York Times back in 2008 noted, 'It was expected that overnight guests to private homes would provide sums of money, known as vails, to the host's servants. Soon afterwards, customers began tipping in London coffeehouses and other commercial establishments?.'

Fast forward half a century and the art of tipping has taken on a whole new meaning. While, in some parts of the world, most notably parts of Asia, think China, India, South Korea and Japan, the custom is not practiced and is seen as something of a negative by the majority of the population, tipping has become a part of everyday life for most of us here in North America.

Tipping is almost exclusively reserved for those working within the service industry, a way for one to show appreciation for a job well done. Today, we tip those who bring us our food at a restaurant, individuals who cut our hair, and people who drive us from Point A to Point B.

Expectations surrounding how much we should tip differ from situation to situation, service to service. At restaurants, it is now generally expected that diners leave a tip of at least 15 percent. Hair stylists typically expect a \$5 tip from their male clients, and \$10 from women. Cab drivers and hotel staff, for the most part, will take whatever they can get, ranging from a few bucks, to a green, red and, sometimes, even a gold coloured bill.

While tips are, largely, a token of appreciation for a service given, we feel their true meaning has been lost over time. You see, a tip, by its very definition, should be something given over and above provider's wage - bonus, if you will. Instead, today, many workers rely on tips just to make minimum wage.

Large corporations have, over time, convinced us to accept responsibility for paying part of their employees' wages. Those working in industries where tipping is the norm are often paid well under minimum wage, with the expectation that the general public will cover the difference. That, to us, is inherently wrong.

In essence, a tip today really isn't a tip at all. They are a necessity employees rely on. At some restaurants, it has become customary for servers to give kitchen staff five percent of every bill they're responsible for, even if the customer did not leave a tip. So now, people already working under minimum wage sometimes have to pay out of their own pocket. Does that seem fair? No, we didn't think so either.

Some establishments avoid those sticky situations by applying a mandatory gratuity. Fair enough. We'd like to see that sort of thing applied industry-wide. That way, people know ahead of time what the expectations are, and those who already aren't earning enough money, don't have to worry about potentially earning even less.

When you really think about it, it is interesting that tipping only applies to a handful of industries. The general idea of a tip is to show our appreciation. So, what would happen if, after calling 911 to respond to a robbery, or assault, you offered the investigating police officer a tip in appreciation? They aren't allowed to take it. That goes for firefighters and paramedics too.

Yes, those particular vocations are, typically, high-paying, so tipping is almost redundant. Still, it begs the question ? why are we so okay giving away free money to people simply for bringing us a plate of food and re-filling our drink, but are shocked at the suggestion of offering a reward to those who protect us and save our lives on a daily basis?

We don't have an answer outside of 'because that's what we have been conditioned to do'.

Let us know what you think about tipping by emailing us at shelburnefreepress@gmail.com