



Rodney's Take

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Please Tip... Because I Don't

A couple of weeks ago, I went through a car wash in Atlanta. There was a young man assigned to tend the machine, walking customers through the transaction. He was pleasant and helpful. At the end of the transaction, he asked if I wanted to leave a tip for the young lady directing people into the car wash. I asked, "What is she going to do?" He replied, "Direct you into the car wash." I asked, "Isn't that her job?"

I gave him my best "I-don't-understand" face and, exasperated, he waved me through. I knew the score. We all do. Every point-of-sale machine allows management to preset suggested tips, and a study at Harvard found that setting higher suggested levels boosts revenue. Business owners are hoping to persuade or pressure patrons into picking up more of their labor costs.

Remember, money is fungible. If I promise not to use any of your tip money to fatten my business profits, that might make you feel good. But I can always use some of the money I would have spent on higher wages, but now don't have to because of tips, to pad my profits. Those dollars are interchangeable, and I (politely) refuse to participate. From the "barista," which sure seems like a clerk or cashier, to the to-go counter help at my local barbeque joint, unless something spectacular happened, I'm very comfortable clicking, "No Thank You."

I've read but not seen that some stores offer patrons the opportunity to tip in self-check lines and kiosks. At that point it's not a tip, it's a call for extra

revenue. Like asking for tips for people just doing their jobs, this doesn't sit well with me either. When do we as consumers get tips? If we're doing part of the work, like scanning our groceries and bagging them, then why aren't we getting paid for that?

This doesn't hold at traditional restaurants and bars of course, but even then, I'm tipping less, not more.

Recently, my wife and I were at one of our local Italian haunts. It wasn't very full and the hostess told us to sit anywhere. It took a long time to get water, which was the start of a painfully slow meal. Our server was quite pleasant, as she had been in the past, but she also was mostly absent. She was the only server in the place and had eight tables. This might make some people sympathetic, but it makes me frustrated.

By seating so many tables that our server's attention was stretched, the manager shifted his shortcoming, low staff, to patrons. My tip was far short of the normal percentage, as I received far less than the normal level of service. That said, our server still likely made more in tips than usual because she had so many tables, but the experience will keep us out of there for a while.

There's no doubt that short staffing is bedeviling restaurants and bars, but this is a difficult way to deal with it. I understand that locations must pay their fixed costs, and spreading them over the highest number of clients is the goal, but it prompts me to order takeout. When that happens, I don't tip or order alcohol, which lowers my bill even more.

Of course, it also frees up a table on the floor where, one hopes, someone is generously tipping because the wait staff is so shorthanded. Believe me, management will thank you for it.

Rodney

Got a question or comment? You can contact us at info@hsdent.com.