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Mega Tips: Scientifically Tested Techniques to Increase Your Tips

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Mega Tips: Scientifically Tested Techniques to Increase Your Tips

Abstract

This booklet for servers provides instruction in the psychology of tipping as well as specific techniques that can be used to earn larger tips. All the suggested techniques have been scientifically tested and the evidence of their effectiveness is described along with the techniques. Using even a few of these techniques should increase servers' tips by 10 to 30%. Managers are free to download the file, print out the manual, make hard copies of it, and either post it on employee bulletin boards or distribute copies directly to their servers. Managers who distribute the manual to their servers should benefit from: Increased sales Greater Customer Satisfaction Lower labor costs due to reduced server turnover

Keywords

Cornell, tools, gratuity, tips, servers, sales

Disciplines

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Comments

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MEGA TIPS



*SCIENTIFICALLY TESTED TECHNIQUES TO
INCREASE YOUR TIPS*

by Michael Lynn, Ph.D.

“Mega Tips” is No. 2 in the CHR series

Tools for the Hospitality Industry

The Mega Tips

(1) WEAR SOMETHING UNUSUAL

(2) INTRODUCE YOURSELF BY NAME

(3) SELL, SELL, SELL

(4) SQUAT NEXT TO THE TABLE

(5) TOUCH YOUR CUSTOMERS

(6) ENTERTAIN YOUR CUSTOMERS

(7) REPEAT CUSTOMERS' ORDERS

(8) CALL YOUR CUSTOMERS BY NAME

(9) DRAW ON THE CHECK

(10) USE CREDIT CARD INSIGNIA (ON TIP TRAYS AND

CHECK FOLDERS)

(11) SMILE

(12) WRITE "THANK YOU" ON THE CHECK

(13) FORECAST GOOD WEATHER

(14) GIVE CUSTOMERS CANDY

SCIENTIFICALLY TESTED TECHNIQUES TO INCREASE YOUR TIPS

If you are among the nearly two million people who work as waiters or waitresses in the United States, you depend on voluntary gifts of money (that is, tips) from your customers for the vast majority of your income, but you have probably never received instruction in ways to increase the tips your customers leave. This booklet is written for you. It provides instruction in the psychology of tipping along with specific techniques that can be used to earn larger tips.

Before I offer my recommendations, which are based on specific research studies, let me note another book typical of those written on how to earn larger tips. Patti Farnham's book *Gratuity Ingenuity: The Secret Art of Bigger Tips* (gratuityingenuity.com) sells for \$20.00. I found this book to be fun to read with lots of worthwhile ideas about how to earn larger tips. However, Patti's book is based on her personal experiences. In essence, she tells readers: "I made really great tips as a waitress, and here is what I did." The problem with this approach is that readers have no way of knowing which of the specific strategies and tactics she describes were actually responsible for her success. In addition, Patti comes across in her book as a charismatic individual with a fun personality, which makes you wonder how much of the success of her techniques depends on her personality and how well the techniques would work for less extroverted servers.

Patti describes her approach to bigger tips as an art. While I believe that there is merit to her approach, I also believe that servers would benefit from a more systematic and scientific approach to earning larger tips. That scientific approach is what I will present in this booklet. Social scientists in such diverse fields as communications, hospitality management, psychology, and sociology have conducted experiments and quasi-experiments on ways to increase tips. Those scientifically tested techniques that proved to be effective are described below, along with the theory-based explanations for their effectiveness and the evidence supporting that effectiveness.

The techniques described below were mostly tested in low- to mid-price, causal-dining restaurants. Thus, these techniques should work in such informal operations as Applebee's, Bennigan's, Bob Evans, Bucca di Beppo, Chi-Chi's, Chili's Grill & Bar, Cracker Barrel, Denny's, Friendly's, Hard Rock Café, IHOP, Joe's Crab Shack, Lone Star Steakhouse & Saloon, Max & Erma's, Olive Garden, On the Border, Outback Steakhouse, Pizza Hut, Pizzeria Uno, Red Lobster, Ruby Tuesdays, Shoney's, and TGI Friday's. On the other hand, these techniques may not work in more formal, upscale restaurants such as Chart House, Morton's of Chicago, or Ruth's Chris Steak House. In fact, most of the techniques would be inappropriate in the more formal atmosphere of fine dining restaurants.

All of the techniques in this booklet are simple actions that are easy to adopt. You do not have to change your personality or engage in some elaborate and difficult routine to make these techniques work. So read on! You will be surprised how easy the road to bigger tips really is.

A NOTE TO SKEPTICS



Even though the techniques presented in this booklet have been scientifically tested and the evidence supporting their effectiveness is described along with the technique, some readers will have doubts. The simplicity of the techniques can be misleading. It just doesn't make sense to some people that simple little actions can have such a big effect on the amount of money that other people give away. For those readers who are not persuaded by the scientific evidence offered here, I provide the following testimonial sent to me by Joshua Ogle, a restaurant worker who read and shared with coworkers one of my earlier articles on ways to increase tips. He wrote:

Here's how it all happened: I was browsing around the Cornell website, Hotel School section, and came across your article. I read it, acknowledged it as a nice piece, and continued reading through the site. When I went to work (I work at a restaurant, by the way, called Texas Roadhouse), I started to notice, after reading your paper, that people kept on and kept on complaining about not making lots of tips. I remembered some of the tips that you had in the paper, and I looked around to see if I saw people doing what you said worked: writing messages on the back of checks, using check-holders with credit card symbols on them, etc. I told a few people about the ideas, and two said that they would try some stuff out, because they were tired of making no tips. The other couple said that they were fine how they were and that the information in the article was "bull crap."

So, Bailey and John (their names, naturally) proceeded to follow your teachings, and at the end of the night, both came out between 8 and 10 percent higher in tips. I'd say that's very impressive, and they thought the same, but the others who did not believe me said it must just be a coincidence. Bailey and John again the following night, brought in more tips than they had been doing before. Then the others started talking to each other, and giving hints to each other, and telling about how I'd told them about it, etc. So, I went to the site, printed it [the article] off, and hung it up on our nightly news board, for everyone to see. Of course, I gave complete credit to you (I printed it with full "Cornell" symbols at the top, as well as your name on it and whatnot), and people have thanked me about once a week since then, about three months ago. Overall, everyone was happy and definitely saw an increase, thanks to you.

Skepticism is good. It keeps you from falling prey to empty promises. However, too much skepticism can also make you miss out on worthwhile opportunities. That almost happened to some of Joshua's coworkers. Those skeptics who decided without evidence that my article was "bull crap" and refused to try the techniques would have continued making lousy tips if some of their lessskeptical coworkers had not been willing to give the techniques a try and then shared their experiences. Don't let that fate happen to you. Keep your skepticism intact, but read about these techniques with an open mind and, above all, give them a try! The techniques are easy to implement and will not interfere with your existing service routines. Not only that, but you received this booklet free of charge, somewhat like shareware. As I explain later, all I ask is that you to send me a monetary tip if (and only if) you find that the techniques increase *your* tips, so what have you got to lose?



The techniques for increasing tips described above have all been tested and found to be effective. I have no doubt that many of these techniques will work for you too. However, there is no guarantee that every technique will work as well for you as it did for the servers in the studies that I describe on the following pages. You are a different person than those in the studies, and you live in a different region of the country and work in a different restaurant with different customers. Therefore, both skeptics and believers may want to test the techniques to identify those that are most effective for them and their circumstances. Let me tell you how to do this in the paragraphs below.

To begin with, as you know, the size of tips varies from one customer to the next, from one work shift to the next, and even from one month to the next. This variability in tip sizes makes it difficult through casual observation alone to be certain about the effectiveness of techniques to increase tips. If you try a technique on one customer but not another, or on one work shift but not another, any differences (or absence of differences) in tips could be due to this natural variability in tips rather than to the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the technique. Therefore, you should conduct more systematic experiments to test these techniques.

To conduct a true experiment, you need to randomly determine when to use the technique (called the treatment condition) and when not to use it (called the control condition). Random assignment evenly distributes the various other factors that affect tipping across the treatment and control conditions, so that you can be certain that any large difference in tips between the treatment and control groups is caused by the technique being tested. The easiest way to do random assignment is to flip a coin. You will use the technique when the coin comes up heads but not when the coin comes up tails. This can be done on a customer-by-customer basis if you want. Such a customer-by-customer assignment to conditions will require you to keep records of how much each customer tipped. However, it is the fastest way to get enough data for a meaningful test. You will need 30 to 50 dining parties *in each condition* and this can often be obtained in just a few work shifts.

Alternatively, you can use a coin flip to randomly assign entire work shifts to either the treatment or control conditions. Under this plan, you will need to have 10 to 20 work shifts *in each condition*, so this approach will take longer to finish. However, it does have the advantage of allowing you to treat every customer the same way on any given day. It also allows you to keep records of your tips by the shift or the day rather than customer by customer, so this is the easiest experiment to perform.

Once you have the data, you can simply compare the average tips in the treatment condition with those in the control condition. If the difference is large enough, you may be satisfied with that simple comparison. However, if the difference is modest, you may legitimately wonder whether that difference is caused by the effectiveness of the technique being tested or by simple chance. In that case you would have to do a statistical test. Since many of you will be unfamiliar with statistics, I would be happy to perform such a statistical test for any server who sends me his or her data along with a description of how the study was conducted. Just send contact information and a copy of your records to me at the ground address at the end of this booklet. Alternatively, e-mail the information to me at wml3@cornell.edu. Even if you decide not to conduct a systematic test, I would love to hear about your experiences using the following tip enhancing techniques, so please write or e-mail me.

Mega Tip #1: WEAR SOMETHING UNUSUAL



Although you must usually wear a server's uniform at work, add a distinctive element of clothing, jewelry, or other adornment to your uniforms so that you stand out. This will help customers perceive you as an individual person rather than a faceless member of the staff. Along that line, I still remember one waitress at a NYC restaurant who waited on me several years ago. She wore a goofy hat that no one else in the restaurant was wearing. Wearing that hat made the waitress seem more interesting and personable, and it increased the tip she got from me.

More formally, similar effects of adornment on tipping were observed in a study by Jeri-Jayne Stillman and Wayne Hensley. For this study, six waitresses at an upscale restaurant agreed to record information about their dining parties for four nights and to wear a flower in their hair for two of those nights. Which two of the four nights the flower was worn was determined randomly for each server. Each night, those waitresses in the "flower condition" were "provided a selection of flowers from which one was chosen for the evening." The results indicated that the waitress' tips increased from about \$1.50 per customer in the control condition to about \$1.75 per customer in the flower condition. Thus, they earned 17 percent more in tips simply by wearing flowers in their hair.

The results of this study suggest that (if possible) you should wear something distinctive or unusual when you work. Whether it is a flower in your hair, a loud tie around your neck, or a funny button on your shirt, wearing something that stands out will personalize you to your customers and should result in larger tips. However, take care not to wear things with political, religious, or otherwise controversial messages and meanings so as not to offend those customers with different points of view.

Mega Tip #2: INTRODUCE YOURSELF BY NAME

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Introduce yourself by name when greeting their customers. If done properly, these introductions make you seem friendly and polite and make the customer feel more empathy for you. Both of these effects should increase tips.

Kimberly Garrity and Douglas Degelman tested this expectation in an experiment conducted at a Charlie Brown's restaurant in southern California. The study tested two-person parties who came to the restaurant for Sunday brunch. Each of these parties was randomly assigned to one of two conditions. In the "name condition," a waitress approached her tables, smiled, and said "Good morning. My name is Kim, and I will be serving you this morning. Have you ever been to Charlie Brown's for brunch before?."

In the "no-name condition," the waitress used the same approach, smile, and greeting, except that she didn't give her name. This manipulation had a large and statistically significant effect on tips. The waitress received an average tip of \$3.49 (15%) when she did not give her name, but she received an average tip of \$5.44 (23%) when she did give her name. So, this waitress earned almost \$2.00 more from each table simply by introducing herself by name!

The results of this study suggest that you should introduce yourself by name to your tables. Of course, these self-introductions need to be made with a genuine and professional attitude. Surly or insincere introductions are likely to backfire. The words "Hi, I'm ___ and I will be serving you this evening" can be irritating if said in an uncaring or automatic way—especially if they sound scripted. However, if you introduce yourself in a sincere and professional way, customers should leave you larger tips.

Mega Tip #3: SELL, SELL, SELL!!!



In most areas of the United States, it is customary to tip waiters and waitresses 15 to 20 percent of the bill. National surveys indicate that about 75 percent of restaurant patrons do base their tips on a percentage of the bill. Thus, dollar-and-cent tip amounts increase with bill size. In fact, a recent review of research on tipping found that bill size was *twice as powerful as everything else combined* in determining the size of tips left by different dining parties! This means that **the best way for you to increase your tips is to increase your sales.**

During a slow shift, sales can be increased through suggestive selling. Thus, during slow times you should recommend appetizers, liquor, wine, expensive entrée selections, and desserts. Although some of you may already see the link between suggestive selling and check size, others will question their ability to substantially alter their customers' orders and expenditures.

A server's ability to upsell was addressed in an experiment by Suellen Butler and William Snizek. They ran a study in which a waitress at an upscale restaurant in the northeastern United States tried suggestive selling on alternate weeks of a six-week period. In the "suggestive selling condition," the waitress did the following things as described by the researchers:

Upon initial contact with the group the waitress suggested, "Would anyone care for a drink?" After consumption of the first cocktail, groups subject to manipulative treatment were asked to consider a second cocktail. These initial steps were followed by the waitress-researcher prompting the group for the dinner order by asking first who would care for an appetizer. During the process of ordering dinner, the waitress recommended certain items to undecided patrons. At this point the most expensive items were always promoted. The waitress checked back twice during the consumption of the main course...at which time the waitress promoted further consumption of liquor. Finally, upon completion of the main course the waitress suggested dessert or after-dinner drinks.

Following these procedures increased the average tab by 23 percent (compared to when she did not suggest added items). That translates into a similar increase in tips. Thus, you *can* earn more money during a slow shift by practicing suggestive selling.

During a busy shift, however, suggestive selling may be counter-productive because add-on sales may increase the customer's meal duration and slow down table turnover. Your total tips at the end of the shift depend on your total sales. Since entrées are more expensive than appetizers and desserts, you should avoid suggestive selling of appetizers and desserts in favor of turning tables quickly as long as new customers are waiting to be seated. When turning tables is not possible, then sell more appetizers and desserts.

Mega Tip #4: SQUAT NEXT TO THE TABLE



Most servers stand throughout the service encounter. Instead, you should experiment with squatting down next to the table when interacting with your customers. Squatting down next to a table does at least three positive things: **(1)** it increases the congruence between your and your customers' postures; **(2)** it brings your eye level down to the customers' eye levels (which facilitates eye contact); and **(3)** it brings your face closer to the customers' faces. Research on nonverbal communication has found that these three factors, postural congruence, more eye contact, and greater proximity, are associated with greater rapport and liking. Consumers report that they tip

friendly servers more than they do less-friendly servers, so squatting down next to the table should increase tips.

Kirby Mynier and I tested this expectation at two restaurants in Houston. A Caucasian waiter at a Mexican restaurant and an Asian waitress at a Chinese restaurant, flipped coins to randomly determine whether they would squat down or stand during their initial visits to tables. Otherwise, the servers tried to treat all their tables identically. As expected, squatting down significantly increased the tips of both servers. The waiter received an average tip of \$5.18 (15%) when he remained standing throughout the service encounter, but he received an average tip of \$6.40 (18%) when he squatted down during his first visit to the table. The corresponding numbers for the waitress were \$2.56 (12%) standing and \$3.28 (15%) squatting.

Overall, the servers received approximately \$1.00 more from each table when they squatted than when they stood up. This is a substantial payoff for a simple, low-cost behavior. Squatting down next to a table is too informal for fine dining restaurants, but if you work at a casual-dining establishment, you should squat down next to your tables or even pull out a chair to sit at the table when taking orders. Of course, you need to exercise some judgment about whether a given table will welcome such informality. However, the research described here suggests that these actions are generally welcome and will result in higher incomes for those servers willing to engage in them.

Mega Tip #5: TOUCH YOUR CUSTOMERS



Touching is a powerful form of interpersonal behavior that can communicate affection, appreciation, aggression, dominance, social support, or other meanings, depending on the context in which it occurs. In commercial settings, casually touching customers has been shown to increase the time they spend shopping in a store, raise the amounts that they purchase, and make their store evaluations more favorable. These positive effects suggest that being touched may also increase the tips that customers leave their servers.

April Crusco and Christopher Wetzel tested this possibility at two restaurants in Oxford, Mississippi. Three waitresses at two restaurants randomly assigned their customers to one of three touch conditions. Customers either were not touched at all, were casually touched on the shoulder once for about one-and-one-half seconds, or were casually touched on the palm of the hand twice for about half a second each time. All touches occurred as the waitresses returned change to their customers at the end of the meal. Eye contact was avoided during this process.

The effects of the touch manipulation were significant. Customers left an average tip of 12 percent when they were not touched, as compared to 14 percent when they were touched once on the shoulder and 17 percent when they were touched twice on the palm of the hand. Subsequent research conducted by various other researchers has demonstrated that: **(1)** casually touching customers increases the tips of both male and female servers; **(2)** touching increases tips more when waitresses touch the female members of mixed-sex dining parties than when they touch the male members of those dining parties; and **(3)** touching increases the tips of young customers more than those of older customers.

The results of these studies suggest that you should reach out and briefly touch your customers. Many servers will feel uncomfortable with this recommendation, fearing that customers might object to being touched. However, the research suggests that touching customers can be done without upsetting them.

Here's how to touch customers in the safest manner possible. First, touch the customer when placing the check on the table. This provides an excuse for the touch while at the same time drawing the customer's attention away from the touch. Second, touch the customer on the shoulder rather than on other parts of the body. The shoulder is a less-private zone than most other parts of the body. Also, the shoulder is easily accessible when the customer is seated at the table, so it can be touched quickly and naturally. Finally, touch the customer for only a second or two. Brief touches are less intrusive than longer touches and research has found that they work as well as longer touches in increasing tips. However, don't worry that you might accidentally go beyond the two-second guideline, because researchers have found that even four-second touches are well received and increase tips. Additionally, touches can affect behavior even they are not noticed by the person being touched. So, relax and touch your customers briefly on the shoulder when delivering the check. Doing so will not upset them. On the contrary, it will make them think you are friendlier and that the service is better. It will also earn you larger tips.

Mega Tip #6: ENTERTAIN YOUR CUSTOMERS



People go to restaurants for entertainment as well as for food. That is why restaurants have a long history of hiring musicians and singers to perform in their dining rooms. It is also why recent years have seen the creation and spread of a whole new class of “eatertainment” and theme restaurants, such as Chuck E. Cheese, Hard Rock Café, Planet Hollywood, and Rainforest Café. Regardless of whether you work in one of these theme restaurants, your customers have come to be entertained, and that desire gives you an opportunity to earn larger tips. I’m not necessarily talking about singing or dancing, but research indicates that servers who recognize and satisfy their customers’ needs for entertainment are tipped more than those who do not.

In one study conducted in France by Nicolas Gueguen, waiters and waitresses at a bar gave half their customers a card with the following (admittedly weak) joke written on it:

An Eskimo had been waiting for his girlfriend in front of a movie theatre for a long time and it was getting colder and colder. After a while, shivering with cold and rather infuriated, he opened his coat and drew out a thermometer. He then said loudly, “If she is not here at 15, I’m going!”

Forty-two percent of those customers receiving the joke card left a tip as compared to only 25 percent of those not getting the joke card. Moreover, those customers who did tip left more in the joke-card condition (average tip of 23 percent) than in the no-card condition (average tip of 16 percent).

In another study conducted by Bruce Rind and David Strohmets, a New Jersey waitress gave half of her customers a card with the following words:

FINISHED FILES ARE THE RESULT OF YEARS OF SCIENTIFIC STUDY COMBINED WITH THE EXPERIENCE OF MANY YEARS.

She encouraged the customers to count the number of “Fs.” Most people tend to miss the Fs in the words “OF” because they are pronounced “V.” Thus, customers were often surprised when the waitress told them the correct number of Fs was six. They also gave her larger tips than those customers not given a card—an average tip of 22 percent versus an average tip of 19 percent.

As these studies testify, you don’t have to be Robin Williams or Kelly Clarkson to entertain your way into a bigger tip. So, collect jokes or simple puzzles to share with your customers and let the entertainment begin!

MEGA TIP #7: REPEAT CUSTOMERS' ORDERS



Being mimicked or copied can be irritating when it is obvious and prolonged. That is why mimicry is so popular among children as a means of tormenting their siblings. However, researchers have found that briefly and subtly imitating or mimicking others increases those others' liking for and interpersonal closeness to the imitator. This suggests that you may be able to increase your tips by subtly mimicking your customers' verbal behavior.

Rick van Baaren and his colleagues tested this possibility at a restaurant in the Netherlands. Two waitresses randomly assigned their customers to either a mimicry or a non-mimicry condition. In the mimicry condition, the waitresses repeated customers' orders word for word when taking those orders. In the non-mimicry condition, the waitresses did not repeat the orders but did indicate that they got the order by saying things like "okay!" or "coming up!" Mimicry increased the number of customers who left a tip from 52 percent in the non-mimicry condition to 78 percent in the mimicry condition. It also doubled the average tip of those leaving tips from 1.36 Dutch guilders in the non-mimicry condition to 2.73 guilders in the mimicry condition!

Tipping practices are much different in the United States than in the Netherlands, so mimicry may not produce quite as dramatic an effect in this country as it did in the above study. However, human nature is basically the same everywhere, so that study does suggest you can increase your tips to some degree by repeating your customers' orders. Given the low cost of this behavior, it is certainly a tactic worth trying.

Mega Tip #8: CALL CUSTOMERS BY NAME



Calling people by their names tells them that they are considered important. Most people find such recognition flattering and enjoyable. Thus, you should get larger tips when you call your customers by name (which you can learn from their credit cards or when they give their names while waiting for a table).

The effect of calling customers by name was tested by Karen Rodrigue at several restaurants in Kansas. The study focused on customers paying by credit card. Waiters and waitresses randomly assigned those customers to a name or a no-name condition. In the name condition, the servers noted the customers' names on their credit cards and thanked them by name (e.g., "Thank you, Mr. Jones") when returning the credit cards and charge slips. In the no-name condition, servers thanked the customers without using their names.

Customers left an average tip of 14 percent in the no-name condition and an average tip of 15.4 percent in the name condition. In this instance, saying just two words—the customer's name—increased the servers' tips by 10 percent. This finding suggests a new answer to the old question "What's in a name?" That answer is, "bigger tips."

MEGA TIP #9: DRAW ON THE CHECK



Occasionally, waitresses will draw a “smiley face” on the backs of checks. Perhaps, you or servers whom you know have done this. These drawings are likely to have any of three effects on consumers. First, they may personalize you to customers and increase their empathy for you as a person. Second, drawings of smiley faces may communicate to customers that you were happy to have served them, which would ingratiate you to the customer. Finally, seeing “smiley faces” drawn on checks may simply make customers smile themselves and, thereby, improve their moods. All of these potential effects suggest that drawing a smiley face on the backs of checks will increase tips.

Bruce Rind and Prashant Bordia tested this possibility in a study conducted at an upscale, Philadelphia restaurant. They had a waiter and a waitress at the restaurant conduct this study on lunch customers. Half of these customers received a check on which the server had drawn a smiley face and half received a check without the drawing. The decision about whether a table received a smiley face or no smiley face was made randomly at the end of the customer’s meal, just as the server was about to deliver the check.

This manipulation significantly affected the waitress’ tips, but had no statistically reliable effect on the waiter’s tips. The waitress received an average tip of 28 percent when she drew nothing on the check, but received an average tip of 33 percent when she left a smiley check. Thus, drawing a smiley face increased the waitress’s tips by 18 percent! In contrast, the waiter’s tips averaged 21 percent when he drew nothing on the check, but only 18 percent when he left a smiley check. This decrease in tip size was not statistically significant, but it suggests that drawing a smiley face may actually backfire for waiters. The study didn’t explain why this was so, but apparently smiley faces don’t seem normal coming from waiters.

Based on the results of this study, I suggest that waitresses can improve their tips by drawing smiley faces on their checks. Waiters may still be able to personalize their checks with drawings, but they will need to choose a different object to illustrate. Perhaps waiters at an upscale seafood restaurant could make a simple line drawing of a lobster on the backs of checks. Alternatively, waiters could try drawing a picture of the sun. Indeed, when Nicolas Gueguen tested this idea at a bar in France, he found that drawing a picture of the sun on checks increased the percentage of customers leaving a tip from 21 percent to 38 percent. The drawing also increased the average size of the tips that were left from 19 percent of the bill to 26 percent.

The lessons from this research are clear. You do not need to be Picasso to draw larger tips from your customers. So pick up a pencil and start doodling!



Restaurants often post signs informing customers that credit cards are accepted. These signs and other displays of credit card insignia can be seen on restaurant doors, windows, counters, menus, table tents, tip trays, and cash registers.

Although it is not clear why, research has found that simply seeing these insignia increases consumers' willingness to spend money. So, whenever possible, you should use those tip trays and folio booklets with credit card logos.

Michael McCall and Heather Belmont tested the effects of following this suggestion at two establishments—a family restaurant and a café—in upstate New York. The presence or absence of credit card insignia was manipulated in these establishments via tip trays, one set of which had credit card emblems on them while the other did not. These tip trays were randomly mixed, and servers were instructed to take trays as needed from the top of the stack. At both establishments, customers tipped significantly more when the bill was presented on a tip tray containing a credit card emblem. Tips increased from 16 percent to 20 percent of pre-tax bills at the restaurant and increased from 18 percent to 22 percent of pre-tax bills at the café. This effect was not due to an increased use of credit cards to pay the bill. In fact, all of the café's customers paid cash. Simply seeing the credit card insignia on the tip trays caused customers to tip an additional 22 percent!

In light of these results, you should ask your manager to make sure that all the tip trays or folio folders credit card emblems. These tip trays can be obtained at little or no cost from credit card companies and using them will increase your tips.

MEGA TIP #11: SMILE



Smiling is a well known tactic of ingratiation and social influence. It is a rare person who hasn't heard the phrase "Laugh and the whole world laughs with you," and smiling certainly works the same way. Research has confirmed the cultural wisdom on smiling and has found that smiling people are perceived as more attractive, sincere, sociable, and competent than are unsmiling people. These interpersonal effects of smiling suggest that you may be able to increase your tip earnings by smiling at your customers.

Kathi Tidd and Joan Lockard tested the power of smiling at a cocktail lounge in Seattle. Customers sitting alone in the lounge were used as subjects. The waitress in the test randomly assigned half of these solo customers to receive a large, opened-mouth smile and the other half to receive a small, closed-mouth grin. Those customers receiving the small grin left an average tip of 20 cents, while those customers receiving the large smile left an average tip of 48 cents. This represents an increase of 140 percent!

The average bill and tip sizes in restaurants are typically much larger than in cocktail lounges, so smiling probably will not have quite as dramatic an effect on your tips as it did on the cocktail waitress's tips. However, these results do indicate that smiling increases tips. You should try giving customers big, toothy smiles and see how much your tips improve.



Try writing “Thank you” and signing your name on the backs of checks before you deliver them to your customers. These expressions of gratitude will make you seem friendlier, which should increase your tips. Expressions of gratitude may also make customers feel obligated to earn that gratitude by leaving larger tips. Whatever the mechanism involved, expressions of gratitude are likely to increase the tips you receive.

Bruce Rind and Prashant Bordia tested this expectation at an upscale restaurant in Philadelphia (where they also tested smiley faces). A waitress, whom we will call Anne, conducted this study by randomly assigning her lunch customers to one of three conditions. On the back of the check she wrote nothing, “Thank you,” or “Thank you, Anne.” As expected, this manipulation significantly affected the size of the waitress’s tips. She received an average tip of 16 percent when she wrote nothing at all, but she received an average tip of 18 percent when she wrote “Thank you” on the back of the check. Adding her signature made no further difference in tip levels, compared to thanks alone.

Since there is little downside to expressions of gratitude, you should always write “Thank you” or some comparable message on the backs of your checks. To avoid time pressures during busy shifts, you can write these messages on your checks before customers arrive. Doing so will only take a few minutes of your time and should increase your tip income.

MEGA TIP #13: FORECAST GOOD WEATHER



Sunny weather puts people in a good mood, and people in a good mood leave bigger tips than those in a bad mood. Even the prospect of sunny weather elevates people's moods. This suggests that servers who live where the weather is highly variable can increase tips by telling their customers that sunny weather is on the way.

To test this idea, Bruce Rind and David Strohmets had a waitress at a mid-price Italian restaurant in New Jersey write a weather forecast on the back of some of her checks but not others. The favorable weather forecast read:

The weather is supposed to be really good tomorrow. I hope you enjoy the day!

The waitress received an average tip of 22.2 percent when she forecast good weather, but an average tip of 18.7 percent when she made no forecast. That is a 19-percent increase!

Although you should not mislead your customers, you too should try to profit from favorable weather forecasts. Simply keep up with the local weather forecast and remind your customers that good weather is on the way when the forecast really is positive. You can try giving these forecasts orally, but I would recommend writing them on the check as was done in this study. Speaking is quicker and easier than writing, but spoken words can be easily missed or ignored while written ones cannot. In addition, part of the effectiveness of the written forecasts in the study may have depended on the perceived effort of the server. If so, you will want to duplicate that effort.



People generally feel obligated to reciprocate when they receive gifts from others. You can benefit from this feeling by giving your customers mints or candies. Upon receiving such gifts, most customers will reciprocate by increasing their tips.

David Strohmets and his colleagues tested this expectation in two studies. One study conducted in Ithaca, New York, found that giving customers fancy chocolates increased tips from 15 percent of the bill to 18 percent. The second study, conducted in New Jersey, found that gifts of less-expensive chocolates also increased tips. The highest tips were received when the server gave dining parties one piece of candy per person and then spontaneously offered them a second piece per person. In that condition, the average tip was 23 percent of bill size, as compared to an average tip of 19 percent when no candy was given.

These findings suggest that you should “sweeten the till” by giving your customers candies of some kind. If your restaurant does not supply mints or candies to be given to customers, you should procure them yourself. Miniature chocolates, for instance, can be purchased at little cost, and the investment should more than pay for itself.

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Those interested in reading the original report of any study described in this booklet can find the complete references to all the studies listed in alphabetical order by author in the pages below.

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Most of the information in this booklet has previously appeared in two articles published in the *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly* and is used here with permission. The references to those articles are:

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Michael Lynn is a nationally recognized expert on tipping who has 29 in-press and published papers on this topic. His work on tipping has been covered by ABC's *20/20*, BET's *Nightly News*, and NPR's *Morning Edition*, as well as by the *Economist*, *Forbes*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, the *International Herald Tribune*, and numerous other newspapers and radio programs around the world.

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