

# HIS VIEW: Restaurant tipping point - the reprise

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Posted on: Tuesday, July 21, 2009



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Last week, my partner Alex and I went out for a nice dinner at a local restaurant. It was a lovely evening and the food was spectacular. Our server did exactly what is prescribed in his job description - he took our order, delivered our meal, checked in on us a time or two and recommended dessert.

The final check for that dinner out came out to roughly \$70. The prevailing social convention states that 15 percent to 20 percent is an appropriate tip for a restaurant server. So, at 20 percent, an appropriate tip would be \$14.

Fourteen dollars for a collective 30 minutes of work? Fourteen dollars for what I would consider the most basic of service? Fourteen dollars because we chose to order expensive entrees and consume copious amounts of alcohol?

I don't think so.

Isn't the level of skill required to take my order, deliver it to the table and remain attentive to our table the same regardless of the price of the food?

Every other business in town (with the exception of car dealerships) has the price that I'm going to pay clearly marked. I then make my selection based off of the posted price,

compare other products on the shelf and complete the transaction. I do this with employees who are compensated at at least the minimum wage.

Now, I do know that servers in Idaho are only paid a measly base wage for the service they perform. But it's not as if they weren't aware of that fact when they accepted the job. Servers knowingly give up the right to a minimum wage in hopes that they can impress customers enough to leave them an appropriate tip.

But it is still the duty of the consumer to establish how "appropriate tip" translates to dollars and cents.

Unfortunately, that determination can only be made fairly when the consumer knows that they're not responsible for making up the difference between what the restaurant owner is paying and what the server needs to make a living.

To make things fair, restaurant owners should start to pay a fair wage to their employees and pass that cost on to the end consumer. By charging more for my meal and paying their servers a fair wage, they would be solving two problems.

First, the standards of what is expected of a server would change. All the basic functions that add the automatic 15 percent would simply become part of the basic requirements of the job. The assumption that tips will be forthcoming would stop and servers would work extra hard to impress customers above and beyond the basic "take order, deliver food, collect tip" mentality that already permeates the restaurant business.

Second, it would make it easier for the end consumer because the basic services would already have been paid for as part of the meal. Then, if the consumer feels it appropriate, they can tip for service that goes above and beyond the norm and the tip then becomes a gift of gratitude by the consumer instead of an integral part of the paycheck for the server.

The bottom line is the minimum wage should be the minimum wage for all workers, regardless of what they do for a living. It's time the Idaho Legislature to change the wage laws in Idaho so that servers aren't forced to rely on the generosity of their customers to scrape together a decent paycheck.

Maybe then we would see signs in restaurants that read "This restaurant pays a fair wage to its servers for performing the basic tasks required of them. Tipping is not required but may occur if you feel the service warrants."

**Henry D. Johnston** is manager of an area retail store.