



An awkward moment in tipping.

Gratuitous Behavior

If only your hairdresser knows for sure, you must be a good tipper.

Thom Gutierrez, an owner of *Ménage à Trois*, a salon in Beverly Hills, has a special drawer near his chair—there is no sign that says “Put tips here,” but customers know. The pervasive don’t-tip-owners rule, he says, emerged out of the sliding scale of fees that exists in many salons, in which the price of the proprietor’s service may be double that of an employee’s. Gutierrez is not offended by tips (though he is occasionally astonished by extravagant or unconventional gestures, such as the time one of his partners admired a client’s diamond bracelet and the woman took it off her arm and presented it as a gratuity). But he also concedes that a client may want to reward his assistant for spending more time with her, from shampooing through coloring through spritzing of hair spray. “It’s like in a hospital,” he says. “You see the nurse more than the doctor.”

Roger Thompson, the man behind the salon at Barneys New York, refused tips even as a lowly shampoo assistant in England years ago. “I’ve always been embarrassed by it,” he says. “If a new client asks, I explain that I don’t accept tips, and if someone leaves money, I send it back. I feel that I charge enough for my work. And part of me is still thinking European, where a nominal tip is the norm. In Japan, it’s offensive to offer a tip.”

Rosemary Fremolaro, who works with her husband, Charles, at the CFA salon in New York, remembers a client who wanted a dye job during the Christmas holiday crunch. When told there were no appointments available, the woman begged, “Please, I’m desperate. I’ll give you a fabulous tip.” She arrived at the salon with an eight-pound filet mignon.

Indulgence is also an excellent inducement

for tipping. In full-service salons such as Bergdorf Goodman’s Frederic Fekkai Beauty Center, it may seem as if there’s an entire retinue of hopeful and expectant people lined up for tips. There, the man or woman who shampoos your hair, the hairstylist’s assistant, the colorist, the expert who conditions your hair, the manicurist, pedicurist, facialist, and the woman who applies the wax may all be on your mind as you exit. Don’t forget the woman who fetches your lunch from the café, or the one who presses your dress after you get caught in the rain. “There’s a lot of confusion about what’s appropriate,” says manager Margaret Didier. “Some people will look at the printout of their bill, figure 15 or 20 percent, and hand me the money, saying, ‘Will you just distribute it?’”

Madi Mantell, a psychotherapist in the Philadelphia area who specializes in business relations, says we are more inclined to tip for an intangible something beyond the service rendered, something akin to nurturing or emotional support, like the manicure that soothed our nerves as well as our cuticles on the day of a big meeting. “Where I get my nails done,” says another woman, “the manicurists, even the ones who don’t speak English, are primed with all the right questions. They know to ask, ‘So what happened with your son at Thanksgiving?’”

One woman explains her tipping habits this way: “I’m most generous with people who have a vested interest in my maintenance.” Another feels more secure paying extra for what she deems degrading activities, such as waxing or pedicures. Still others place a high value on shared confidences. One woman pays extravagantly for her colorist’s silence, and with good reason: “I don’t want her to tell my mother.” ●

Tipping is a wacky and discomfiting custom—an art, not a science. The rules are fluky and arbitrary and dubious in origin. Who decided that you should tip cabdrivers but not bus drivers, or waiters but not butchers? Who decided that you should tip the fellow who shines your shoes but not the shoe salesperson who helps you sort through ten different pairs of black pumps at Bergdorf’s? In the field of beauty services, as in the restaurant industry, consumers have accepted what management decrees: Part of an employee’s salary will be derived from tips. But if you’re *expected* to pay 15 to 20 percent more than the listed price, doesn’t that constitute false advertising? Or false something?

The subject of tipping is personal and secretive, even among friends—many of us feel either like cheapskates or chumps, imagining that we tip much less or much more than everybody else does. The beauty pros and providers sense our discomfort—that’s why some offer those little white envelopes at the front desk, so the entire transaction can be done without human beings touching or speaking to one another. But if you leave the tip at the desk, how do you know it will make its way into the pocket of the woman who just waxed your legs? And will she remember that you’re Allison?

TIPPING

There are no set tipping standards for beauty services. The following information was gathered from a variety of salons in each city.

	HAIRCUT PRICE	HAIRSTYLIST TIP	SHAMPOO ASST. TIP	COLOR PRICE	COLORIST TIP	MANICURE PRICE	MANICURIST TIP	LEG WAX PRICE	LEG WAXER TIP	PEDICURE PRICE	PEDICURIST TIP
	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$
NEW YORK	65-175	10-25	2-5	75-90	8-15	15	2-3	55	8-10	30	4-6
BEVERLY HILLS	40-60	5-15	1-3	50+	5-7	15-18	3	25	3-5	25	4-5
PHOENIX	25-30	3-7	1-2	35-40	4-7	15	2-3	28	4-6	25	3-5
BOSTON	25-65	4-10	1-2	30+	5-6	15	3	25	5-6	25	10
KANSAS CITY	25-35	4-5	1	25-30	4	10-13	1-2	30	5	21-25	2-4
PHILADELPHIA	30-35	3-5	1-2	26-30	3-5	13	2	35	3-5	24	3-5
TUSCALOOSA	15	2-3	1	25-45	3-5	10-12	2-3	55	5-6	20-25	2-5