

Media Relations

UNH Professor Offers Holiday Tipping Advice During The Economic Downturn

December 5, 2011

DURHAM, N.H. – With pocketbooks stretched even more during the holidays this year, Americans may find it difficult to tip their service providers as much as they would like to, but according to a University of New Hampshire professor who researches service expectations, consumers should do their best to give something.

“Giving a gift during the holiday is a fundamental part of every joyful season, and one such holiday extra is the giving of a ‘tip’ to those individuals that have provided a service during the year. However, extra money for many Americans has been tight this year due to the economic times which many have not recovered from. So this time of year, when we feel obligated to buy presents and tip our various service providers, it may be difficult to decide who to drop from your gift list or reduce in tips if money to spread around is limited,” said Nelson Barber, associate professor of hospitality management at UNH.

“During the holiday season, tipping is more a gesture of thanks to individuals who provide services on a regular basis to you and your family,” Barber says. “We all know that both gifts and tips are great, and for many, holiday tips can make a huge difference in their annual income.”

How important are tips? According to a survey by PayScale, personal-care workers, including makeup, barbers, hairdressers, nail technicians, and cosmetologists, receive 25 percent of their income from tips. Barber offers the following tipping advice:

How Best to Tip?

Prioritize your most important service providers by considering those who have provided you services and the extent of interaction with them, particularly those who may not be that obvious, even if you may not have tipped them regularly. “Do not make your tipping decision solely based upon ‘an implied obligation.’ At the top of your list should be those individuals that enhance your life considerably,” he says. Think about the valued housekeeper or the barber that squeezes you in or the individual that delivers your newspaper to the front door when it is raining or snowing saving you the walk down the driveway. “These are the people that should receive the top dollars rather than infrequently used service providers,” Barber says.

How much should I tip?

When deciding how much to tip, remember that tipping is discretionary. Consider the length of time you have been receiving the service and whether you live in an urban or rural setting where tipping levels may vary. Consider the relationship to the service provider. Are you close? Is the relationship informal? “If you don't think tipping is necessary in a particular circumstance, then don't tip. The following is a guide and amounts have been adjusted for today's economic conditions. It is not implying a moral duty to tip. If you are using a service that is widely known to be a tipped service, such as hair salons and valet parking, then tip for good service,” Barber says.

Some suggestions for minimum tipping are:

- Day care provider: \$20 and a gift from your child
- Parking garage attendants: \$20 or a gift
- Housekeeper: no more than one week's pay or a gift
- Nanny: no more than one week's pay or a gift from you and your child

 
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- Newspaper carrier: \$15 or a gift
- Package carrier: a gift of no more than \$15
- Home caregiver: no more than one week's salary or a gift
- Pet groomer: 25 percent the cost of a session or a gift
- Baby sitter: no less than half one evening's pay
- Hairstylist for women: minimum half the cost of one visit. Tipping the owner who provides you the service: yes at your discretion.
- Hairstylist for men: minimum half the cost of one haircut.
- Manicurist: \$10
- Sanitation worker: \$5 to \$10
- Mail carriers working for the United States Postal Service may not accept cash gifts, checks, gift cards, or any other equivalent.

If consumers need to reduce their tipping amounts, Barber suggests adding a note of thanks with the tip.

"I find, depending on the service provider, including a note expressing how much you appreciate them adds value and can make the gift mean more even if the amount given is less," Barber says. "Service workers depend on these gifts as part of their income. So unless you've lost your own job, or are having financial troubles of your own, try to give."

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 12,200 undergraduate and 2,300 graduate students.

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Media Contact: [Lori Wright](#) | 603-862-0574 | UNH Media Relations



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