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What to tip

Are you giving your bartender, server and delivery guy what they deserve?

By Erin Brereton
June 8, 2010

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What's an appropriate tip--and what makes you a cheapskate? After a recent post on Metromix dining blog [The 24-Hour Diner](#) sparked a heated debate on the topic, we decided to go straight to the source for the answer. We asked Chicago servers, bartenders and delivery drivers about tipping practices, and not only did they reveal what most people fork over for solid service, but they also let us know how much of that money actually ends up in their pockets.

SERVERS

Average tip: 15 percent of the pre-tax bill; 20 percent for superb service

What you might not know:

>> "Our income is based entirely on tips." --Anitra Srisuk, server/manager at [Opert Thai House](#)



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Illinois doesn't require restaurants to pay servers who are over 18 minimum wage because tips are factored into what they'll make. State law requires that employers pay servers at least 60 percent of minimum wage, or \$4.80 an hour.

>> "Because tips are claimed as income, the amount you make in hourly income covers your taxes, generally." --Louie Hickner, server, [Epic](#)

Servers are required to declare their tips, which are taxed just like any other form of income. At most restaurants, servers also are required to "tip out," or allocate a percentage of their income from tips, to other staffers such as bussers and bartenders.

DELIVERY DRIVERS

Average tip: \$2-\$4 (plus a portion of delivery charge, in some cases)

What you might not know:

>> "Every restaurant differs on how much [of the delivery charge] the driver gets, but it doesn't all go to the driver." --Josh Vavis, delivery driver, [Piece](#)

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A delivery charge covers costs associated with the service, but it is not a tip. "[Tips are] definitely more than half of what we get as base pay," says Vavis.

>> "I use my own car. Insurance and gas costs are incorporated with my expenditures." --Charles Byram, delivery driver, [Costello Sandwich & Sides](#)

Most drivers have to shell out for gas and maintenance costs--and constant stop-and-go driving can be hard on a vehicle.



BARTENDERS

Average tip: \$1 a drink; 20 percent for larger credit card tabs

What you might not know:

>> "If it's a cocktail-focused bar, and you're going to sit at the bar and drink, you probably should tip a percentage of the check." --Josh Pearson, bartender, [Sepia](#)

In general, if you charge a lot of drinks or linger at the bar, 20 percent of your tab is a more appropriate gratuity than \$1 a drink.

>> "[Stopping to run a credit card] takes a lot of time out of serving other customers and, in the long run, getting more tips." --John Moss, bartender, [Bernie's](#)

Many bartenders would prefer that you keep your tab open for a while instead of charging one round at a time. If you're there all night, says Vance Smith, a bartender at [Simon's Tavern](#), it's perfectly fine to tip as you leave instead of after each round, "Just as long as you don't get too drunk and forget."

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