



TIRED OF TIPPING

What Went Wrong?



Chuck Trunks

Introduction

“Why am I even here?” I chided myself, thinking I could be at home, eating a grilled cheese sandwich with a bowl of tomato soup. Despite my better judgment—or perhaps due to a craving for empanadas—I decided to treat myself to lunch, a rare indulgence for someone like me, who no longer finds comfort or pleasure in public spaces. But there I was, lined up behind the other hungry sheep, preparing myself for the abuse to come.

I live in a society where culture is defined by soulless corporate executives who obey the first commandment of the god of profit, “Thou shall prioritize greed above human need.” Society used to be centered around God, community, family, fellowship, and contribution—now it’s been reduced to individuals pursuing any means of survival. Since the pandemic, the high cost of living has made it nearly impossible for most Americans to afford a spouse, children, a family, a permanent home, reliable employment, higher education, health, and leisure. Today, that includes going to restaurants, where the illusion of choice extends to tip-giving.

Sadly, I’ve grown accustomed to corporate deceit, high prices, and shrinkflation. Now, I *expect* to discover skimpy portions hidden within oversized packaging, fine print that contradicts the sales pitch, and a feeling of slowly being hollowed out, one tip request at a time. As someone who’s held several tip positions during high school and college, I understand the lure of opportunities to earn “on the spot” extra cash by going above and beyond what is required. But that’s not how it works in today’s restaurants, where customers are forced to face brainwashed, entitled servers; screens suggesting exorbitant tip amounts attached to rotating bases; and credit card receipts asking for tips before your order even reaches the kitchen.

My formula for writing books—or, in this case, a rant about the scourge of tipping—is always the same: I attempt to not only convince the reader that there

is, indeed, a major problem but also to go one step further by offering a rationale for why a particular societal bane continues to plague our daily lives with no end in sight. In the following four sections, I'll take the reader to Starbucks for an afternoon coffee, lunch with a girlfriend, a first date, and Cody's Rib Ranch for takeout during a freakish springtime snowstorm to showcase how forced tipping disrupts the natural flow between customers and businesses. Finally, I'll offer my thoughts as to why I believe the surge of forced tipping cannot be defeated in a society moderated by a small number of people who control and own everything—and who can callously turn a blind eye to the plight and desperation of their fellow human beings.

As I shuffled closer to the front of the line at the Argentinian eatery, I began to notice the changes since my last visit. First and foremost, the owner wasn't behind the counter. And the overhead chalkboard menu was replaced with three digital menu boards mounted above two ordering lines that terminated in front of gleaming white iPads manned by two girls wearing matching red t-shirts and hats. I already knew the prices had practically doubled overnight, so I wasn't overly shocked when I saw the dollar amounts listed on the electronic screens, which, of course, didn't include the upcharges of sales tax and the forced tip. No, the shock came when I saw the shrunken size of the empanadas as a construction worker retrieved his order in front of me.

I was still looking at the meat-filled pastries when the smiling girl in front of me said, "Are you ready to order, sir?" At the same moment, I noticed the other girl swiveling her iPad toward the customer beside me for the customary tip-begging segment of the transaction. "Sir?" she continued. "Are you ready?"

Ignoring her, I turned to the man behind me. "You go ahead," I said, before exiting the small restaurant, feeling motivated more than ever to learn how to make my own empanadas.

No Room

I held my breath as I opened the heavy glass door, hoping that my preferred table—a rare two-seater pushed up against a solid wall instead of scorching hot windows—wasn't unoccupied. If it was, I'd look at my second option—a round bistro table in the far corner. Lastly, if my first two choices weren't available, I'd have to join the ranks of the mere commoner and resign myself to the long table in front of the counter, the equivalent of Siberia inside Starbucks. Luckily, the sunless two-seater was gloriously vacant, allowing me to plop my army-green backpack on its surface like a victory flag upon a conquered land. With only a smattering of catatonic people camped out with their phones and laptops and a vacant ordering line adding to my good fortune, I knew today's dreaded writing slog would result in journalistic gold.

My mood, which normally took an immediate nosedive while placing a coffee order with a deadeye automaton behind a cash register, remained inwardly upbeat as I asked for the cheapest drink on the menu—in the most robotic and succinct manner possible. “Tall Pike—no room,” I said brusquely.

“\$2.81,” sighed Renata, whose handwritten nametag was adorned with red hearts and pink flowers and stood out against her black t-shirt. Like the other four girls buzzing behind the counter, she wore a headset on top of a black hat and tied her long dark hair in a loose pony tail. Her pale arms were covered in more than a dozen random tattoos that reminded me of doodles I'd draw while on the phone: stars, a rainbow, dice, a gecko, etc. They made no sense to me—just like the screen that suddenly illuminated on my side of the counter. Bold white lettering against a black background prompted me to tip either \$1, \$2, or \$5. At the bottom of the screen—looking like an afterthought in its much smaller font—were the words “custom tip.” But I was prepared.

“Oh, okay,” she mumbled after watching me whip out my Starbucks gift card like a wooden cross to ward off advancing corporate vampires. “Scan it here,” she continued while gesturing toward a flimsy scanner behind rows of packages containing two tiny macaroons for \$3.49.

Years ago, I figured out that a gift card mercifully reroutes the transaction away from having to deal with the uncomfortable tip consideration. The audible beep from the scanner never fails to please me, as it signals the welcomed end of the soulless exchange. Whereas Renata heard the actual sound of the beep, I heard “\$2.81” instead of a ghastly \$3.81, \$4.81, or an insane \$7.81. “What is wrong with the corporate overlords at Starbucks headquarters?” I asked myself while waiting for my 12 ounces of brain fuel. When I first saw the \$1, \$2, or \$5 tip options, I was outraged by the underlying mathematics. Customarily, it’s understood that tip amounts should be based on the pretax subtotal, which in my case was \$2.65, making Starbucks’ suggestions even more absurd. Starbucks, whose CEO earned \$31 million in 2025, is essentially offering me the choice of giving a 44%, 82%, or 195% tip to an uninspired and underpaid employee to get me a cup of coffee in the one and only way possible—the nerve!

However, the coffee giant rarely loses. While my gift card helped me avoid the discomfort of having to select NO TIP in front of a barista who may or may not live in her car, where the bottom line is concerned, Starbucks always wins—and the proof is in my hand. The world’s largest coffee chain holds approximately \$2 billion in prepaid gift card sales at any given time, allowing the \$120 billion company to use the capital for operations without having to answer to traditional banking regulations. In other words, by purchasing the gift card, I, in essence, provided Starbucks with an interest-free loan, where I’m paid back with overpriced coffee if I don’t lose or misplace the card first. *Well played, corporate overlords!*

“Would you like anything else?” asked the woefully scripted Renata, placing my order on the counter.

I wanted to sarcastically say, “Actually, yes, Renata. Like most people, I prefer separate transactions for each item I’d like to purchase.” Instead, I ignored her and pulled off the lid to see how much coffee was in the cup. “Would you fill this up, please?” I asked, making no attempt to hide my annoyance.

“Oh, I thought you wanted room for cream,” she replied innocently, taking the cup back.

Having learned a long time ago that I live in a world filled with unteachable worker bees, I fought the urge to explain to Renata how the seemingly innocuous question, “Do you want room for cream?” is nothing more than a blatant money grab by the corporate overlords to sell 10 ounces of coffee for the price of 12. That’s like me offering to give you \$2.00 instead of \$2.81 so you can have more room in your cash register drawer. Here’s a thought, worshippers of the god of profit: serve the coffee in a bigger cup—duh!

Showdown

“What are you going to get?” whispered Tiffany while we both surveyed the giant menu board from our place in line.

“I think I’ll get the number 16,” I whispered back.

“Which one is that?”

“It’s a roast turkey club with sprouts and homemade cranberry sauce,” I replied.

“It comes with a side of macaroni salad, too. Drinks are separate, though.”

Tiffany looked back at the seating area and said, “I’m going to grab that table for us near the window. Just order a BLT and a Seven-Up for me, okay?”

Without my girlfriend beside me, occupying my headspace with playful touches and inside jokes, I was left alone with my thoughts, which at the time were centered solely on why I no longer enjoyed eating out. If I wasn’t meeting Tiffany for lunch, I’d be eating at home and avoiding this charade altogether. But Tiffany had a way of making me look past the ungrateful restaurant staff, ridiculously high prices, and customers who order and eat without disengaging from their phones. I looked back at where Tiffany was sitting and caught her eye. Always the jokester, she quickly looked away, pretending not to have seen me, and began texting wildly on an imaginary phone four inches away from her face. I laughed loud enough for the two people behind me to stop looking at their phones.

Facing the counter, I began the mental gymnastics in my head, adding up the \$13.95 for the turkey club, \$11.95 for the BLT, and \$2.95 for each can of soda. But before I could calculate the sales tax, the person in front of me veered off to the right, leaving nothing but the counter between me and Kirby, a rotund manboy whose fresh face offset his middle-aged body. His name was stitched whimsically on his dark-green apron in white thread. “What can I get for you?” he asked brightly, standing in front of the worst invention in the history of mankind: a computer tablet attached to a swivel mount. Stepping forward, I said hello and even personalized it by including his name, which prompted Kirby to nod and repeat himself, as if I needed to be reminded that time is money. “What can I get for you?” he urged again.

Reciting the order, I found my attention split between watching his stubby fingers tap against the screen and the two big-boned women in the kitchen behind him. They wore aprons like the green one in front of me, except theirs were white. The talkative duo appeared to be in mid-conversation about something they both found amusing, lumbering about the prep area at a pace that negated Kirby’s

sense of urgency. Their process was simple: They'd place a completed order on the pass-through shelf and shout, "Order up!" signaling the order taker to transport it to a pick-up area at the other end of the counter. Then Kirby would do one of three things. He'd either call out a name or number or bring the food to the appropriate party. Based on my current relationship with the world, odds were I'd most likely hear my number called.

"Okay. That'll be \$33.70," declared Kirby, who quickly spun the tablet around so that the screen was facing me. "It's going to ask you a question," he added.

"Gee, I wonder what it is?" I grumbled under my breath, fully aware that my relationship with Kirby, the man who had access to the food I was about to put in my mouth, depended on the financial decision I'd make in the next five seconds. I could feel the heat of my blood rise to a boiling point as I stared down at the greasy screen asking for an 18-, 20-, 22-, or 25-percent tip, with another grotesque button displaying the words "or higher." At the bottom, in much smaller font, looking like the obvious runt of the group, was the sad little button with the words "custom tip." It all happened so fast; I didn't even have an opportunity to figure out if the suggested tip percentages were based on the supposed pre-tax subtotal. But now that consumer protection agencies are the equivalent of rotary phones in America, I was confident these were after-tax calculations.

The way Kirby and I stared at each other reminded me of two high-plains drifters squaring off under the noon-day sun in the middle of town, their dusty fingers idling above holstered guns. In reality, my finger hovered over an option to leave no tip while Kirby's eyes were saying, "It's up to you, cheapskate, if you want your girlfriend to eat a BLT with a tomato we found near the floor drain or if you'd prefer to eat macaroni salad that may or may not have been in the trunk of my car since yesterday." But I envisioned a way out of the situation, where both gunslingers had no choice but to abandon the fight altogether: All I would have to do is show my phone to Kirby.

“It’s going to ask you a question,” I’d say in my fantasy.

“I don’t get it,” he’d say, leaning over the swiveled tablet screen, prompting the same requested actions.

“Can’t you see?” I’d continue. “It’s asking you for either an 18-, 20-, 22-, or 25-percent tip based on how competent of a customer I am. Keep in mind that I used your name when I said hello and didn’t waste your time asking a bunch of questions about the lunch special. I walked up and succinctly gave you my order without any substitution requests. Plus, I smell good.”

“Huh? I can’t give you any money.”

“Of course you can’t, Kirby, but you can subtract the amount from my total. So, what’s it going to be? A 25 percent discount or two free sodas?”

“With all due respect, sir, I think you’re crazy,” he’d reply. “That’s not how tipping works.”

“That’s where you’re wrong, Kirby. You see, the transaction between the business and customer requires two parties to perform their required roles, yet the business shamelessly begs for additional compensation for simply doing what is expected of them. To a reasonable person like me, that puts tipping requests somewhere between abject greed and extortion. So instead of giving you a big fat zero tip, why don’t you give me a 25 percent tip, and I’ll do the same? That way, they cancel each other out and we can be finished with this nonsense.”

“Okay, I’ll play along,” Kirby would say. “Why would I give you a tip at all when I don’t even know if you’re the type of person who disturbs other customers, or leaves a mess, or doesn’t throw their trash away?”

“You’re making it too easy,” I’d say. “Do you see what’s happening here, Kirby? Predictably, as soon as the tables are turned, the business has the exact same concerns as its customers. As it stands now, customers are pressured and shamed into giving tips *before* the business has completed its portion of the transaction, leaving patrons to wonder if they’ll receive poor service or quality or even retaliation for not giving enough of a tip. Somewhere along the line, tips went from being given with discretion and, in many instances, with gladness, at the *end* of the transaction; now it’s an upfront, faceless, and joyless tap on a screen that’s nothing more than an insurance policy to avoid thinking your tuna melt contains some kind of nasty retribution.”

“People are waiting,” Kirby said dully, jolting me from my satisfying daydream. By his unwavering stare, I could tell he was practically daring me to select “custom tip”—the precursor to tapping “no tip.” I looked back at Tiffany and succumbed to adding a wildly undeserved 20 percent tip, thinking I’d survive if I ate day-old macaroni salad from Kirby’s car, but I wouldn’t be able to stomach the possibility that my precious girlfriend could be eating a BLT with a slice of tomato peeled off a floor drain.

No Tip for You

“Did you see that?” I huffed as soon as the waitress was safely out of earshot.

“See what?” asked Vivian from the other side of a bistro table that required me to jam a stack of cocktail napkins under one of its legs to keep it from wobbling. She agreed to a first date because, according to her, she liked that I used her full name instead of a monosyllabic “Vee,” which her friends and family preferred. She couldn’t tell me the difference between nuclear fission and fusion, but she was pretty, smelled nice, and laughed at my jokes.

“You didn’t see her roll her eyes after taking our drink order?”

“She did?”

“Yes, and I know why,” I replied, leaning over my folded arms on the table and congratulating myself on how stable the surface felt. “She was thinking about how low of a tip she’ll be getting from a lousy Diet Coke and an iced tea, which I can understand. What bothers me is that she’s willing to show us her annoyance. I don’t like that.”

“Should we leave?”

Because she didn’t say something like “Oh, just get over it” or “You probably imagined it,” I decided right then and there I wanted a second date with Vivian—but the evening was still young. Anything could happen. “No, let’s stay here,” I said. “Maybe she’ll lose the attitude after we order some food. Plus, I don’t want to leave after having performed an engineering miracle under this table.”

Listening to her giggle made me feel like the date was back on track. “I’m going to have a chicken Caesar salad,” I announced while closing the laminated menu. “A man needs to watch his girlish figure, you know.”

“There are way more calories in that than you’d think,” laughed Vivian. “You’d be better off getting a bacon cheeseburger with curly fries. I think I’m going to get an appetizer. I just want a small plate of something like the stuffed crab cakes.”

“That’s it?”

“That’s it,” she confirmed.

“Oh, boy.”

“What?”

“I don’t think our waitress’s attitude is going to change much after she’s heard our order for a \$14 salad and an \$8 appetizer, especially in a place known for its steaks,” I cautioned.

Vivian suddenly sat back on her stool—a telltale sign that someone was approaching—as she was facing the restaurant’s interior. “Why would she expect us to order steaks when we’re sitting in the bar?” she reasoned.

Before I could respond, Teresa reappeared with our drinks, wearing the same exhausted expression—a look of pained tolerance, like she was taking one for the team. She couldn’t have been more than 23 years old and gave me the impression she was a stressed-out single mom of a 3-year-old—the result of an ill-timed one-night stand in the guest room of a house party. I appreciated how carefully she placed our drinks in front of us, making sure not to spill either glass—but ruined it in the next moment by exhaling a little too loudly when I asked her for a couple of straws. She further exacerbated the situation after hearing our food choices, curtly saying, “Got it,” before collecting the menus and scuttling away.

“You’re right,” whispered Vivian. “She’s clearly not a fan of ours. Are you sure she isn’t a daughter of one of the women you dated and dumped?”

By her wry smile, I knew Vivian was joking. Still, I made a mental note to stop talking about my exes. “No, but doesn’t it seem like most servers are like her these days?” I asked.

“I haven’t seen hostility like that in a long time, Chuck. Maybe you’re doing something to attract the negativity. Didn’t you tell me most people ignore you and that dogs are constantly trying to attack you?”

“That’s true, Vivian,” I said with a heavy dose of sarcasm, “but you forgot to mention that small children are terrified of me and holy water burns through my skin like sulfuric acid.”

We spent the next few minutes laughing and exchanging self-deprecating jokes at my expense, which I didn’t mind ever since my ego no longer craved external validation. Besides, my flaws and eccentricities are like bright yellow ducks in a shooting gallery: you can’t help but want to pick them off one by one. Things were going so well between Vivian and me that we soon forgot we were the unwitting enemy of a war we wanted no part of—that is, until Teresa returned, bringing gloom and doom to our sunny little picnic. Without a smile or a polite “Excuse me,” she placed the crab cakes in front of Vivian and the salad in front of me. But when she put my plate down, it hit the table with enough force to cause a couple of lettuce sprigs to fall. There wasn’t a forthcoming apology or even an attempt to pick up the errant leaves.

After Teresa left without so much as a “Can I get you anything else?” Vivian, looking visibly upset, suggested, “We should talk to the manager. Her behavior is ridiculous. She didn’t even ask if we wanted refills.”

Although I was thrilled to finally have someone on my side for once, I cautioned Vivian about entering every battle—even the ones where you’ve been clearly wronged. “It’s not worth it,” I said. “Who knows what’s going on in her life at the moment? That doesn’t mean I’m excusing her behavior; it simply means I won’t be giving her a tip.”

Besides saving me roughly \$6 in unearned tip money, Teresa unknowingly served up excellent conversation fodder between me and my date, handing me the opportunity to tell Vivian how I financed more than half the cost of my college education on tips alone. Even as a teenager, I understood how tips were earned: you simply had to have a good attitude and look for ways to go above and beyond

what was required of you. That meant memorizing course distances and wiping club faces after every shot while caddying; being ready to suggest where the best bars, restaurants, and strip clubs were located in the city as a bellhop; and knowing when and when *not* to talk to guests while driving a limousine.

Eventually, long after my date and I had finished the salad and crab cakes, Teresa showed up with our refills, prompting me to ask her for the bill. When she returned with it 10 minutes later, I quickly checked the amounts and scanned it for any unwarranted fees, as I now live in a predatory society where hyper-vigilance is as necessary as a smartphone. I handed it back to her with my credit card and returned to the conversation with Vivian, who was in the middle of telling me how she, too, felt anxious around dogs. On her way back from a boisterous table containing a foursome of yuppies seemingly immune to the sticker shock of \$15 cocktails, a smiling Teresa slid a pleather bill folder on our table and said, “Thank you,” before returning to the group she just left. “Too little, too late,” I whispered to Vivian while I opened the folder to find her name in cursive and a smiley face at the top of the credit card receipt. I signed it and put the card back in my wallet before asking Vivian, “Are you ready?”

Outside, we were just about to step off the sidewalk and head across the parking lot when the door behind us flew open, startling both Vivian and I. She was clearly shocked, but a part of me was expecting a scenario like this to happen at some point.

“What’s *this* all about?” shouted Teresa, who was waving the credit card receipt containing two hand-drawn circles: one with a smiley face and one with a dollar sign next to it. “I knew you’d stiff me!”

I took hold of Vivian’s hand and walked toward the red-faced waitress and calmly asked, “Do you want to know why I didn’t leave you a tip?”

From her posture, I could see that Teresa wasn't afraid of me in the least and that she felt she was clearly in the right. She was probably thinking of herself as a heroine, a vigilante against the cheapskates of the world. But I had dealt with women like her before—the ones whose brand of boldness is fueled by a pathological need to cut men down to size, knowing they can act with impunity from behind a convenient double standard.

“Yeah, I do,” she snapped. “Waitresses don't work for free, you know!”

I fought the urge to explain the irrationality of her logic under the neon glow of adjacent businesses, recalling that her youth meant her mind was most likely warped from having grown up with a phone in her hand. “Okay, but let's go back inside and find your manager. If you're so confident that you were unfairly stiffed, then let's have this conversation in front of your boss. I'm willing to do it; are you?”

It was fleeting, but I saw it flicker across her face like a strobe light—a look of incoherence: someone wasn't stooping to her level of savagery, where impulsive boldness overrides thoughtful discourse. Her hesitancy to answer my question created enough of an opportunity for me to continue. “I must warn you, though: if you proceed, you will not only lose your case in under a minute, but it will also be thoroughly humiliating. You might even lose your job, while my girlfriend and I will probably leave here with a couple of dinner vouchers. If I were you, I'd go back inside.”

I watched Teresa's expression transform from bewilderment to utter contempt. Her eyes narrowed as she turned toward the restaurant entrance—the credit card receipt still flapping in her grip. “Good choice,” I said, still holding Vivian's hand. However, our waitress wasn't finished.

“Asshole!” she shouted while giving me the middle finger with one hand and opening the door with the other.

When she disappeared behind the dark tint of the glass door, I turned to Vivian and said, “Can you believe that?”

Vivian squeezed my hand and asked, “So, I’m your girlfriend?”

Takeout

My plan wasn’t complicated, but I still felt the need to write it down on the back of an envelope and jam it into my pocket, boosting my confidence that I’d be well prepared to counter their expected objections with irrefutable logic. Based on what the lady at the front desk told me, the walk from the Holiday Inn Express to Cody’s Rib Ranch would take no more than 10 minutes. Normally, I wouldn’t think twice about it. What’s a 10-minute walk to someone who runs every day? The problem wasn’t an unexpected snowstorm hitting Rawlins, Wyoming, in the first week of May as I was traveling to Boise, Idaho, from Raleigh, North Carolina—the problem was that *all* my winter clothes were packed away in the back of my truck, leaving me only a pair of sneakers, shorts, a t-shirt, and a windbreaker to protect me from the elements while slogging to the other side of the snow-covered business park.

There were no two ways about it; I was one of the lucky ones. I had a confirmed reservation for a hotel room at one of the last open exits before the Wyoming Highway Patrol was forced to shut down I-80 in either direction due to hazardous driving conditions. Plus, if it hadn’t been for all my worldly possessions weighing down my pickup truck—increasing the traction between the road and my rear tires—I might’ve had to spend the night in the emergency room instead of a junior suite with two queen beds and a walk-in shower. After having nabbed a prime parking spot in front of the hotel’s entrance, where the snow hadn’t yet

accumulated, I wasn't about to press my luck by getting back in my truck and driving to the popular rib joint.

I felt conspicuous walking into the busy restaurant wearing attire better suited for tennis than for foraging for food in a snowstorm in Wyoming. The smell alone was enough to warm me up—a mixture of barbecue sauces slathered on sizzling baby back ribs, pork spare ribs, beef ribs, and St. Louis-style ribs. The lady at the front desk was right; Cody's Rib Ranch was worth the trek. I brushed the snow off my shoulders and shoe tops without making eye contact with the half-dozen people waiting for their takeout orders or to be seated. I could easily guess what they were thinking about me—a shivering adult man, stepping out from the winter weather, dressed like a third grader ready for a game of kickball. Dripping hair and frozen hands forced me to postpone ordering to find a restroom, where I could blot myself dry with paper towels and thaw my fingers under hot water.

After reviewing my scribbled notes in front of the sink, I returned to the hostess station and placed my takeout order for a combo plate of brisket, baby back ribs, and pulled pork, with baked beans and coleslaw as must-have sides. With a cooler full of soda, beer, and Gatorade in my hotel room, I didn't need to add a drink.

“That'll be \$28.71,” chimed the blonde, blue-eyed hostess, who stood behind an old-school cash register—the kind that couldn't be swiveled toward the customer to beg for a tip or, as I like to call it, an extortion tax.

“Okay,” I replied, while gesturing toward the waiting area. “I'll be sitting right over there.”

“You have to pay before I can place the order with the kitchen,” she explained.

I looked behind me to make sure no one was waiting. I turned back to Denise and smiled. She smiled back, anticipating the appearance of my credit card, which,

unbeknownst to her, wouldn't be forthcoming until the order was ready. I knew it was pointless attempting to explain my rationale to someone who looked fresh out of high school, but I proceeded anyway—only to have her cut me off and say, “Maybe you should talk to the manager.” A few minutes later, a tall man in his early 30s, who I imagined had graduated from the same high school as Denise, approached me and introduced himself as the shift manager.

“What can I do for you?” he said.

I quickly recounted what I had told Denise, explaining that I had had some negative experiences with recent takeout orders getting lost in the kitchen shuffle, missing items, exceedingly long wait times, tepid food, etc.

“Well, that won't happen here,” he assured me. “I'll personally see to it that your order is assembled and packaged to your liking.”

“That's wonderful,” I said enthusiastically. “I'll be right here when it's ready.”

“However,” he continued, “we do ask that our takeout customers pay for their orders first.”

Although I was prepared for the debate, a part of me wasn't looking forward to having it with such a likeable and accommodating person. But what Brad, the manager, didn't know was that my noncompliance was geared toward avoiding the upfront tip request for a takeout order, which made no sense to me or any other customer, for that matter. It wasn't Denise's or Brad's fault; someone had to take a stand against this tipping nonsense.

“I heard someone call you Brad,” I began, doing my best to sound and act like my TV hero, Sheriff Andy Taylor from the *Andy Griffith Show*. “May I call you Brad?”

“Of course.”

“You see, it’s like this, Brad. Your policy is unfair because you don’t ask your dine-in customers to do the same thing. I’m literally perched on this bench, 15 feet from those sitting at a table, waiting for my food just like they are, and yet I’m singled out to pay *before* my order is prepared, making me feel like a second-class citizen. What am I missing, Brad?”

I wasn’t surprised when I saw his wedding band as he ran his fingers through his thinning hair; he looked like someone who married his high school sweetheart and had a couple of kids right away. I could imagine him mowing his lawn on Saturdays, attending church on Sundays, and coaching youth soccer, Little League, or both. I could tell he didn’t need a lecture on ethics at the cusp of the dinner rush—especially from a customer who was old enough to be his dad yet dressed like one of his kids.

“Or, I could simply ask to be seated in the dining area,” I continued. “Then, when my food arrives, I could orchestrate a fabricated emergency, asking the server for a couple of to-go boxes and a plastic bag because of an urgent text I just received from my imaginary wife, who’s about to go into labor with our third child. In that scenario, Brad, I’d accomplish my goal of leaving here having paid for my takeout order *after* it was prepared, which is what all your dine-in customers are permitted to do.”

Brad looked at the wall clock behind me and sighed. “Okay, we can do that,” he said.

“Thank you,” I replied. “For me, the policy makes sense if I were ordering over the phone or online.”

“I get what you’re saying,” Brad said dismissively while nodding at Denise. “I need to get back to work now.”

After Brad walked past the hostess stand and into the kitchen through a pair of squeaky saloon doors, I repeated my order to Denise and returned to the waiting area, feeling both vindicated and weary from my never-ending war against forced tipping, which is nothing more than an extension of exploitative corporate greed. I closed my eyes and imagined what would happen next. Denise would inform me that my order is ready, prompting me to pull everything out of the to-go bag to inspect its contents. She would be frowning at my blatant distrust as I hand her my credit card. I’d take the two paper receipts from her and pen the same three things on each one: zero tip, total amount, and a signature. Then, I’d hand her the merchant’s copy while saying, “Thank you,” before stepping back into the swirling snow.

“Your order’s ready!” shouted Denise from the hostess stand, jarring me away from my meditative state. She was holding a white plastic bag weighted down with enough meat to feed a family of four.

As I weaved through the growing dinner crowd toward the hostess stand, I questioned if it was worth it, going through this tiresome charade just so I could inspect what I was buying before I paid for it and putting the tip-begging back where it belongs—at the end of the transaction. Call me cheap, but I don’t believe in tipping a restaurant for *not* renting one of its servers or dirtying its tables, plates, glasses, or utensils. But Denise doesn’t need to know that—and neither does anyone else taking face-to-face takeout orders. Who knows what kind of retaliation awaits my baked beans after they see a zero scribbled above the receipt’s tip line?

Asking for upfront payments for takeout orders isn’t my biggest gripe—it’s when that payment *conveniently* includes the tip request when the transaction hasn’t

even started. That's like arriving to pick up your date, only for her to slide into your car and announce that a good-night kiss is already off the table. So instead of a lovely evening of effort and promise, both parties lose. He doesn't try as hard to charm her, and she wonders if he'll drop her off early. There's a simple solution: leave the mystery and potential of a tip at the backend of the transaction instead of killing the mood at the onset.

Conclusion

Nothing short of a complete breakdown of society will eradicate the toxic scourge of tip requests in the restaurant industry, where the question, "Would you like to leave a tip?" is asked by a machine rather than the human being in front of you. After seeing the suggested tip percentages, I can understand why they choose to hide behind their screens—nobody in their right mind would have the nerve to ask a customer for a \$15 tip on a \$50 takeout order without feeling like they were begging for charity. The cost of maintaining and driving a car has skyrocketed, and yet traffic congestion never subsides. Tickets for NFL games are ridiculously expensive; however, stadiums are filled to capacity every Sunday. And, lastly, restaurant dining areas bustle with frenzied activity as if it were still 2018 despite exorbitant menu prices and outrageous tipping expectations.

It's a simple and logical tenet, and yet, I sometimes think I'm one of the few who actually adhere to it: I only engage with the kinds of people, places, and things that *attract* me. However, when I look around, I see hordes of people participating in the very activities I no longer enjoy, making me think I'm either too picky or their standards are too low. But I know—and the reader knows—that human nature is more complicated than that. I haven't walked into a restaurant or picked up a takeout order in more than a year simply because the financial, emotional, and spiritual tolls are too much of a burden for a person like me, who's willing to walk away and seek other means of acquiring healthy food—a basic need ruthlessly turned into a luxury in the world's wealthiest country, no less.

When I first noticed menu prices and suggested tip percentages steadily increasing while portion sizes and friendly service decreased, I figured these offending restaurants would soon go out of business. Who could ignore such obvious and shameless grift? Shockingly, despite prioritizing gargantuan profit margins above customer value, these establishments remained open, full of diners willing to accept today's higher costs, smaller portions, service with attitude, and forced tipping—aspects of a new restaurant culture I'm no longer willing to tolerate. As I watch them order and consume their meals, I'm astonished at how calm and normal-looking they appear—as if they have no idea they're eating inside a machine specifically designed to strip them of what little money they have as efficiently as possible. For a while, I didn't get it, but I eventually figured out why I was witnessing this nightmarish phenomenon—one I wouldn't have predicted in my wildest dreams, where monopolies had yet to replace free-market capitalism.

The scourge of tip requests isn't new; it's been around for decades, shamelessly increasing in its persistence, boldness, and percentages over the years. How is this blight on society even possible when the vast majority of customers find tipping requests repugnant and waitstaff are paid 70% *less* than the standard federal minimum wage? If diners and servers aren't happy, then who is? Not surprisingly, the victors of this sad scenario are the restaurant owners; yet, they too are mere pawns of a controlling echelon whose intentions have never been more transparent: keep the working class impoverished, uninformed, and divided. There is no better example of the success of this diabolical strategy than the epidemic of tip requests.

Incredibly, the ruling class has created a perpetual influx of paying customers, who will automatically parrot the propagandized narrative, blaming steep menu prices on fictitious food shortages and higher production and shipping costs. In other words, they simply rationalize the ruling class's self-serving lies as “the cost of doing business.” Even more amazing is how they're able to consistently fill

open waitstaff positions with workers willing to rely on customer charity for the bulk of their compensation. Calling them out on their job choice only results in being labeled as a “cheapskate, cold-hearted, unsympathetic, selfish, or simply part of the problem.” If I were to press diners as to why they’re willing to pay \$32.75 for a lunch that cost \$21.25 in 2023—reflecting a 54% price hike and higher tipping suggestions—I’m sure I’d hear responses like, “What are the alternatives? That’s just what it costs now,” or, “I like to support my local restaurants. Plus, where else can I meet up with friends?”

But to sustain this level of corruption, the ruling class must print more dollars, manufacture more fake news, own the entire supply chain, remove consumer protection agencies, make customers believe it’s their civic duty to pay the salaries of waitstaff, and have waitstaff *enforce* the system by making them believe that a 30% tip is not optional. Choosing to withhold or provide too small of a tip at the front end of the transaction merely increases the customer’s chances of even worse service, hostility, and even retaliation. Conversely, leaving no tip or a minimal amount at the back end of the transaction can land a customer on a secret blacklist or lead to an uncomfortable parking lot confrontation with a server expecting to be better compensated for average, below-average, or non-existent service.

Instead of there being a war between the ruling and working classes over the tipping nonsense, the powers that be have carefully orchestrated a greed-inspired conflict between the slaves themselves—in this case, between diners and servers. Meanwhile, the ruling class not only accomplishes its mission of keeping the working class impoverished, uninformed, and divided, but they also bask in the bloated profit margins of the restaurant industry, contributing to what we’re all witnessing in America: the greatest transfer of wealth in the history of the world.

The End