



BRUCE BARILLA

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## Tipping versus Non-Tipping

Generally speaking, I believe that clubs that don't allow and clubs with automatic service charges can discourage good service and be unfair to the members and employees.

However, an employee should do a good job whether they get tipped or not. Their service shouldn't be lax just because an automatic service charge guarantees their compensation. Unfortunately, human nature can set in.

### NON-TIPPING

I remember a member telling me that his Florida club was instituting a non-tipping policy. He said the locker room attendants would begin to receive Christmas bonuses. My initial thought was, how much is the bonus? Is it enough to make up for the lost tip revenue? \$15,000? \$20,000? \$40,000?

Some non-tipping clubs do allow employees to accept Christmas and birthday presents, which can be substantial. If an employee isn't happy, they should discuss it with the manager, count their blessings or look elsewhere. Salary and benefits can be a larger sum than even if tipping is allowed. If so, there should be no lack of employment applications at this club.

### FAIR TO MEMBERS?

Should members be told whether they can tip or not? Locker room attendants have told me that some members tip anyway and tell them to take the money. I worked at only one club that didn't allow tipping. In my first week on the job, a member handed me a \$10 bill. I told him I wasn't allowed to accept tips. I believe he was testing me.

At the same club, one of the members gave a cart attendant \$20 to show appreciation. The employee told him he wasn't allowed to take tips. The member said, "Says who?! I own the place. Take the money."

If I were a member at a non-tipping club, I'd tip anyway. Even as a guest, I've done so. I feel like I'm hypocritical if I don't, having made my living this way for so many years.

### SERVICE CHARGES

A service charge isn't a tip. A tip is voluntary while a service charge is not. It's a forced fee, although if the membership agrees to it, then it is a policy. I can understand why dining room operations do such – easier for the members, no perceived preferential treatment towards employees getting the better tippers, which can cause disharmony

among staff, employee payroll cost savings and the IRS isn't questioning whether income is declared or not.

However, what if the service isn't what it should be? One manager says it doesn't happen at his club. Good! But what if it did? I remember dining with my wife at a resort in Virginia. While the food was excellent, the service wasn't up to par with the 18 percent the resort charged us. Now what?

It just didn't seem worthwhile to say anything to either the server or the manager out of concern for an unpleasant ending to an otherwise lovely evening. Honestly, being allowed to decide if and how much to tip won't inconvenience me.

### FAIRNESS AND HONESTY

If "customers" are charged a specific percent automatically and it isn't divided equitably amongst the staff providing the service, it's very discouraging to the employees not receiving a fair share. It's not right if the place of business also gets a percent along with the cost of the "product" even though the member or guest thinks it all goes to the staff.

Most of my locker room experience has involved tipping clubs. Some members made up for others. We did a good job either way. Was there ever "favoritism"? Once in a while when the best tipper came off the golf course, all he had to do was stick his hand through the crowd at the bar and his drink was ready. But you know, no one said a word. They understood why and respected the best tipper knowing it could just as easily be them – or you. **BR**