

5 SCIENTIFICALLY PROVEN WAYS TO INCREASE SERVER'S TIPS

Recently, I was approached by someone in the food service industry and asked if I had any insights from my study of the proven science of influence that could help servers increase their tips. Though there are many strategies that servers could employ to deepen rapport with their guests, the following are five scientifically validated behaviors that will both enhance a server's tips and also create a more enjoyable dining experience for the guests.

1. Servers should demonstrate to guests that they like them. One of the most powerful, yet often overlooked ways to positively influence someone is to reveal that you genuinely like him or her. It is a well-established principle of social psychology that we like those who like us. A psychological study published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* confirmed that when people find out that another person likes them, they will instinctively begin to look more favorably upon that person.¹ Likewise, if servers demonstrate to their guests that they like the guests their tips will rise. Though there are many ways for servers to demonstrate that they like their guests, one simple way is at the conclusion of the meal, when delivering the check to the guest say, "I enjoyed serving you this evening. Have a wonderful night."

2. Leverage the social norm of reciprocity. Reciprocity is the belief that one should repay others for what they have done. Sociologists have confirmed that reciprocation is a powerful motivator across all human cultures.² For example, research published in the *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* identified that when servers gave guests a piece of candy with the check, tips rose an average of 3.3%.³ However, the study also revealed that if the server gave each guest two pieces of candy the tip jumped up 14.1%. Accordingly, if servers give their guests something as small as some candy the guests will return the courtesy with higher tips.

3. Repeat a guest's order back to them. Behavioral scientist Rick Van Barren led a series of psychological experiments which revealed that when servers repeated an order back to guests their tips rose by over 68%.⁴ The reason that restating an order boosts a server's tips is because when a server confirms that he or she has accurately understood the guest's food order, the server is showing himself or herself to be competent. This will heighten the confidence that guests have in the ability of the server and also alleviate the guest's fear that they will receive something different than what was ordered. In addition, by repeating a guest's food order, the server is engaging in subtle verbal mirroring. This has also been proven to naturally amplify feelings of rapport.⁵

4. Compliment the guest's choice. Research published in the *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* analyzed the affect that compliments have on tipping.⁶ In the study, servers were instructed to compliment guests after receiving an order by stating, "You made a good choice." Those servers who expressed verbal approval to their guests received larger tips than those who did not compliment a guest's preference.

5. Utilize the persuasive power of the recency effect. The recency effect is the scientific principle that people are most influenced by what they have seen or heard last. There are a plethora of scientific studies that have proven that what is experienced last has a tremendous influence upon the brain's retention of an experience. Consequently, a server's behavior at the conclusion of the meal will shape the diners' perception of the server and impact the size of the tip the server will receive. For instance, a psychological study identified that servers who wrote "Thank you" on the back of guest's checks received larger tips than those servers who did not.⁷ When servers demonstrate their appreciation for their guests immediately before the guest decides upon the amount of the tip, the guest is primed to think highly of the server and reciprocate appreciation in the form of an improved tip.

In summary, by adopting the previously mentioned behaviors, servers will guide their guests in having a positive interaction with them. This will enrich the overall atmosphere in the restaurant and also significantly increase the tips servers receive.

About the Author

David Hoffeld is CEO of the Hoffeld Group, a research based sales training, coaching and consulting firm that is the leader in the integration of proven science and sales. The Hoffeld Group takes the repeatable and predictable principles, which science has proven to create and enable influence, out of the laboratory and academic journals and apply them to selling. For a deeper look at the Hoffeld Group's groundbreaking research and innovative sales strategies visit HoffeldGroup.com.

Notes

1. D. Kenny and W. Nasby. "Splitting the reciprocity correlations." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 38, 1980. p. 439 – 448.
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3. D. B. Strohmets, B. Rind, R. Fisher, and M. Lynn. "Sweetening the till: The use of candy to increase restaurant tipping." *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 32, 2002. p. 300- 309.
4. R. B. van Baaren, R. W. Holland, B. Steenaert and A. van Knippenberg. "Mimicry for money: Behavioral consequences of imitation." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 39, 2003. p. 393 – 398.
5. J.L. Lakin and T. L. Chartrand. "Using nonsconscious behavioral mimicry to create affiliation and rapport." *Psychological Science*, 14, 2003. p. 334 - 339.
6. J.S. Seiter. "Ingratiation and gratuity: The effect of complimenting customers on tipping behavior in restaurants." *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 37, 2007. p. 487 – 485.
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