

Humor Me

By Ronald P. Culberson

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“It’s Just the Tip of the Iceberg”

I just returned from Council Bluffs, Iowa where I stayed in a riverboat Casino. Well, that’s not exactly right. I stayed in a hotel that was joined at the bow to a riverboat casino. Not having grown up near a big river, I’m fascinated with this concept of riverboat gambling. Apparently, it’s acceptable to gamble on the “international waters” of a river thus allowing the state to deny that they have *real* casinos – since the floating casino is technically not “in” the state. Of course, the states still have to explain the millions of dollars of tax income contributed by the casinos that don’t really exist. But that’s an issue for another column.

When I arrived at the hotel/casino/riverboat, I wanted to eat a quick meal before hitting the blackjack table. As anyone who likes to gamble knows, there is no better place to eat than the casino’s “All You Can Stuff Down Your Gullet” Buffet. It’s cheap, there’s every food imaginable, including some things that are not identifiable, and it allows you to fill your stomach before you empty your wallet.

I handed my credit card to the hostess to pre-pay for the buffet and she said, “Do you want to add a tip to this.”

Tip? I thought. For what? The waitress brings me a glass of water and removes my dirty plates but I’m the one fetching the food and hauling it back to the table. Why should I tip them?

I whimpered, “Sure, add two dollars.”

I was immediately ashamed that I had just tipped 15% at a self-service restaurant. What a wuss. But you know the real issue? I was afraid if I didn’t tip, one of the waiters would spit in my water while I was away at the gorging trough. I had clearly fallen victim to tip-peer pressure.

It occurs to me that we have all been similarly pressured into tipping and that this epidemic conspiracy is getting worse. We are being forced to pay twice for simple tasks that require no particular eloquence or expertise. And you know what? I’M NOT GOING TO TAKE IT ANYMORE!

OK, I am. But let me tell you why this drives me nuts.

The most obvious racket is the restaurant industry. The common tip for a waitress is 15% but we give 20% so we don't seem cheap – especially when we're having dinner with the in-laws. But in reality, the restaurant is only paying the waitress \$.50 an hour and expecting us to make up the difference. And unless the waiter can stack seventeen plates up his arm while refilling my water glass, I'm just not willing to pay.

Then there's the parking lot attendant. We turn over our keys to him and then we tip him when he brings the car back. Insane! What we're really doing is assuring that he doesn't wreck the car or worse yet, lose it. We rationalize that it's worth the two dollars now to avoid going to Maaco (beep, beep) later.

And what about the guy (or gal) that hangs out in the bathrooms of fancy restaurants and hotels? What's up with that? First of all, I'm pretty sure there are laws against loitering in bathrooms. In fact, I think that's how George Michael got arrested. Second, I don't need someone to hand me a towel after I wash my hands. I've been doing a decent job of getting my own towel since, well, kindergarten. But if I don't tip him, I'm sure he'll tell the waiter to spit in my water.

Tipping is out of control and it's getting worse. Before we know it, everybody will be getting tips. The teacher gives your kid an A on a test and you offer her a gratuity to make sure your child doesn't get left behind. The cop lets you go with a warning; you leave a five spot under his windshield wiper as an investment in your next visit to the speed trap. The funeral director makes grandma look "natural"; you give him a stack of small bills so he'll do the same for you when it's your time. And as if nothing is sacred, the pastor keeps his sermon under twenty minutes; he gets a cut of the collection plate.

Before this epidemic gets worse, I'm going to do my part to stop it. Next time I visit the Graze and Gamble Buffet, I'm going to stand firm and say, "I do not believe in tipping when I have to serve myself." Of course, I probably won't drink my water.

Until next time, just humor me.

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Ron Culberson, MSW, CSP, CPAE is a speaker, humorist, and author of four books including Do it Well. Make it Fun. The Key to Success in Life, Death, and Almost Everything in Between. His mission is to change the workplace culture so that organizations are more productive and staff are more content. He shows people how to have more FUN while preserving the integrity of the work they do and the lives they lead. For more information, visit www.RonCulberson.com.