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ETIQUETTE

Societal trends increase holiday tipping

As society depends more on service providers, we're having to give more holiday tips than before.

BY BRIDGET CAREY

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Your hairdresser, your gardener, your mail carrier, your dog walker -- the list of people we thank with a holiday tip gets longer each year.

At the Dream Hair beauty salon in North Miami, one of Jeffery Baker's clients always brings fresh homemade cookies as a holiday tip. And although they are delicious, he says, he prefers getting tips he can spend.

"A gift card is nice, but the mean green is always better," Baker says. His average holiday tip is double his regular 15 to 20 percent tip, he said, but any amount is appreciated.

The list of who to tip during the holidays is growing -- and getting more expensive -- pushing some people to opt for warm cookies over cold cash. Etiquette experts say there has been an increase in recent years of people tipping during the holidays, because as a society we are outsourcing more of our chores and spending more for service.

"We're giving people a lot more of the chores that we don't want to do, so we need to show our appreciation with a lot more people than it used to be," **Elena Brouwer, director of the International Etiquette Centre in Hollywood**, said. "Before, the husband cut the grass, and you cleaned the house on your day off."

For example, **Brouwer** said, years ago most people didn't give a holiday bonus to a dog walker, but now it's proper to give a tip of a week's salary or a gift.

And it's not just the list of who to tip that's increasing; it's also the amount. For years the standard holiday tip has been based on the cost of one payment to the service provider, such as the cost of one session for a personal trainer or one week's salary for a housekeeper. But in areas like South Florida where services can cost more, that could mean a tip or gift for a personal trainer can be well over \$100, and etiquette expert Cindy Post Senning says that can be too much.

Experts agree that it's not worth going over budget to try to adhere to tipping etiquette. But people do tend to tip more during the holidays.

Ed Ponder, concierge at the National Hotel in Miami Beach, says staff usually expects a little larger tip than the norm since it's a busier time and they hustle more.

"Generally speaking, travelers in the holidays are in a more cheerful mood and more generous," Ponder says, "and the service is a little more quicker at that point."

When the holiday spirit is in the air -- typically now until Christmas -- a bellhop can get between \$5 to \$30, whereas a normal tip is between \$4 to \$10.

To determine who to tip, consider people who perform a personal service for you, says **Brouwer**. For instance, the doorman who greets you with a smile every day should get between \$25 and \$50. And to be proper, don't just slap cash in their palm. Put it in a card, she said.

"Write a nice note making a comment about something special that person has done for you," **Brouwer** says.

For the person who wants to give something more personal than cash, Brouwer says to give a gift card from a place you know the receiver would normally visit, such as to Publix or a restaurant. It's also fitting to give a token gift along with the cash, such as a box of chocolates.

There are people who should always be given a gift. School teachers always get a gift -- never cash -- and a baby sitter should get a cash tip plus a gift from the child, **Brouwer** says.

But don't go nuts worrying about how much to tip people you don't normally see, such as restaurant waiters and the pizza delivery guy. **Brouwer** says giving a little more is typical, but it still should be based on the quality and promptness of the service.

The idea of holiday tipping is not to go into debt. It's best to incorporate tipping into your holiday budget so the costs don't seem like a surprise, she says.

And if you're no Uncle Moneybags, **Brouwer** suggests: ``You can just send a lovely note and say how much appreciate their work and how nice it is having known them throughout the year."''