

the new etiquette

GUIDE TO DINING

BY PAUL KUCK & SARAH KAI ACKER

No longer do the archaic rules of tableside manners apply. Unless you're dining with the queen, it doesn't matter if your elbows rest on the table or whether you've donned a proper dinner jacket. Some diners, however, have taken this loosening of etiquette codes a bit too far. So, for the benefit of humankind, we've written a guide directed at those lost souls who bring their unruly children to a restaurant known for its exotic food and romantic atmosphere on a Friday night, or, horror of horrors, stick their gum under the table. As veterans of the restaurant industry, we know there are a lot more of you out there than necessary.

chewing gum This is by far the most egregious of dining offenses. What reasonable adult sticks chewing gum underneath a table at a restaurant? Any troglodyte who commits this sin should be permanently marked and banished from all public settings. Maybe something like the scarlet letter A, but instead a minty green G in the offender's hair or some other pesky place. Unfortunately, these offenders are extremely difficult to detect and have developed advanced covert maneuvers in order to continue committing these vile actions. Please join us in the post-industrial world of tissues and toilet paper and stop your disgusting habits. You will be one step closer to enlightenment.

communication Don't snap, whistle or holler at your server. A simple glance, head nod or hand motion usually does the trick. And for god's sake, don't get up and interrupt your server while he or she is at another table. If your server seems to have forgotten you exist, nicely beckon the nearest employee. These people are

your "servers," not your "servants." Also, do not hit on your server. If you find a server irresistibly sexy, make light conversation (when it's not busy) and leave your phone number discreetly, accompanied by an enormous tip.

children You decided to create that adorable little demon. We did not. It is not your server's responsibility to corral your children or to clean up their puke because you wanted to broaden their horizons with a spicy curry. If your child (or you) throws up at a restaurant, the least you can do is ask for some napkins and clean up the majority of the damage. Some children are polite and well-mannered; others are not. You know what kind yours are. If they are the latter, do everyone a favor and order take-out or go to a kid-friendly restaurant. Resume dining out when the kids are old enough to not want to dine out with you anymore.

"camping" This is an industry term that refers to a group of diners that "pitches a tent" at a table and decides to stay long after they've worn out their welcome. Camping is usually OK on a Tuesday, but on weekend nights it's common courtesy to pay your bill in a timely but unrushed manner and leave. If there are people waiting in the lobby or you are the only ones left in the restaurant, take the in-depth conversation about philosophical approaches to existentialism or your musings on Britney Spears' crotch to the coffee shop or the bar.

split checks Do you ever wonder why restaurants print "no split checks please" on their menus? Mostly because it's a pain in the ass to split a check six, eight or 20 ways because every guest only carries credit cards. Old-fashioned cold, hard cash can fix this modern dilemma. As a bonus, using cash keeps

your money in the hands of the local service staff and restaurateurs. Credit card companies are charging merchants 2 to 4 percent of the total bill — including the tip you give your server — every time you use a card. Often the server has to pay this percentage back to the employer to compensate for the credit card fees the business incurs on the server's tips. If you are going to use a credit card, leave a cash tip. It's a nice, simple gesture.

tips Please leave them. Twenty percent is de rigueur these days, but if you a) had a server who went above and beyond the call of duty to fulfill your finicky request to remove all traces of gluten, refined sweeteners and animal products from your meal, b) brought your kids and they puked, c) camped or d) split a check, round up the total and leave a little more. Also, handshakes and showers of compliments (known as "verbal tipping" among industry folk) do not pay the rent. Keep the pats on the back and the admiration for your puke little kids. We want your money. Bad service? Leave something. Ten percent is usually considered a minimum tip. Only an abomination of service deserves nothing.

reservations A reservation is not a call 20 minutes prior to your arrival on Friday night. Calling ahead is usually nice and it's always appreciated if you have a large party, but don't expect to waltz in and be quickly ushered to your table. Common courtesy dictates that a change of plans requires a call. Also, sometimes you may have to wait a bit even if you have a reservation. Please be patient; it's often due to campers.

THE OTHER SIDE

To keep things fair, we thought we would add a couple suggestions for young, undisciplined service industry workers (and the old crusty ones who

still haven't gotten it). Good servers know good service, and far too often we find ourselves disappointed with our own kin.

marijuana Have you ever ordered something without onions and received it with onions? Stoned cook. Have you ever gone to get your take-out and the guy up front goes into the kitchen for several minutes, comes back out, sees you, says "Oh, yeah," then runs back into the kitchen only to return empty handed again? That was me, sorry. Many Eugeneans love a good toke now and then, but right before work is not the time. No matter how good a job you think you're doing stoned, you're not doing it that well. We've all dealt with the red-eyed idiot who just can't seem to remember to put the extra salsa in the take-out. It's time to move on ...

attitude/work ethic Stop whining, rolling your eyes and smoking bong rips before work and get your ass in gear. Your mommy doesn't work here, and you don't get "time-outs" in the real world. Stop bitching about your midterm grades or the shitty tip and move it.

tips Just because you literally dropped a couple of plates of food on a guest's table doesn't mean you deserve a 20 percent tip. Tips are still voluntary and a financial gesture for good service. Servers need to remember that a smile and some decent customer service will take them a long way towards a great tip.

These guidelines are the just the basics. If you feel these rules are too demanding, please immediately revert to hunting and foraging or drive-thrus to provide your daily caloric needs. There is nothing wrong with having high standards, but when you don't reciprocate with a little respect, your standards will never be met. The server/diner relationship is meant to be a symbiotic one. Let's make it so. ■

Paul Kuck has 14 years of experience in the industry. He thinks people shouldn't be allowed to dine out unless they've worked in the service industry.

Sarah Kai Acker is a freelance writer who recently escaped the restaurant industry to search for meaningful employment in San Francisco. She continues to be everyone's bitch as an editorial intern.

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