



Want A Tip? Here's A Hint: Get A Clue

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Valentine's Day strikes this month, and since I'll soon be married I feel qualified—if not obligated—to tell other people how to handle their relationships. Well, guys at least; I don't know much about women.

Men, the first thing you have to do to succeed in a relationship is to be in a relationship. This requires finding a woman. In a perfect world, this would entail little more than going to a bar and purchasing a daiquiri for an attractive female. Unfortunately, women aren't perfect. So you're gonna have to work a little bit harder. Put down the jug of GHB, Romeo, I'm talking about romance.

The best move to make on Valentine's Day is to ask your girlfriend/fiancé/wife/stalking target/office sex pal out for dinner. That way, you benefit as well. If you give your sweetie flowers or jewelry or a cat, those are just for her. But going to a nice restaurant means you should at least get to eat a good meal. Plus, if you buy some inane gift that you think she'll find cute, like a bowling pin with her caricature painted on it, you could get hit over the head with it later. But violence rarely ensues with a nice duck l'orange.

The only downside to going out to eat is that the quality of service in most restaurants has become as unreliable and annoying as a Carrot Top set. I mean, is it really that difficult to say hello and show a modicum of attention to people who want to give you money? Has something about the profession changed such that the scientists now needed to perform the work are unavailable? If so, can we get them out of the stem cell and cloning labs and back into Applebee's?

But never fear. The low level of service in restaurants today has spurred me to come up with a device that should bring the standard of service back to its 1930s heydays. I'm guessing. The invention is called Dial-A-Tip, and it's pure genius—like adding Italian beef to a sandwich that already has sausage. Dial-a-Tip is a display or screen of some kind on every table at a

restaurant. Diners use it to indicate how much they intend to tip. Need some attention? Turn down the tip amount to 6%. That should send the server scurrying over to help. Impressed with the professional courtesy and timing of your courses? Turn the tip up to 16%.

By the way, this is a huge breakthrough for me. I usually don't come up with stuff like this. You know who's going to be really proud of me? My fiancé. She doesn't think I'm very creative. A couple of weeks ago she asked me what my dreams were, and I told her that the other night I dreamt we had a humidifier. At the time I was going through a bit of a dry spell in ol' brain factory, but this'll really blow her socks away.

While the Dial-a-Tip should get diners the service they deserve, I'm also not advocating obsequiousness. Too much attention can be annoying, like when you're in a theater watching a play and all of a sudden Juliet waddles on stage, being played by a talking walrus. And the walrus mumbles. I hate that!

Getting back on topic: certain moments require a server to be at a table. For instance, when I sit down, bring me a glass of water within two minutes. It's hospitable, it's not too much to ask for, and it's not as if that small gesture is going to make me decline the beer and Manhattans I was planning to consume.

Second, give me a few minutes to make a decision on the entree. Don't rush me, I only get to pick one thing. And I never pick the thing I want, because that's just setting myself up to be disappointed, so I have to figure out what the second-best thing is and go with that. If it's a close call, it'll take me a little longer. So don't rush me, but don't make me get up and go looking for you either. It's embarrassing for both of us, me walking around until I find you and then yelling across the floor, "Hey! Hey you! Girl with the brown hair. I want the farfalle with salmon, but hold the capers, OK?"

Once I place my order, bring me some bread, and then I don't need to see you again until the food arrives unless: A) My water or drink needs refilling, or B) someone's hair turns up in the butter.

After the food arrives, don't wander too far away for too long, in case something is wrong and I need your help. For instance, I told you I was allergic to peanuts, but the kitchen hid a peanut butter-and-pickle sandwich under my beef Wellington. Not cool. Take it back and have them try again.

You don't need to stand over me to watch me eat, unless you're a really hot girl, in which case feel free to cut up some of my food and feed it to me. Also, is the napkin properly positioned in my lap? Don't you think you ought to check?

Another feature I'm thinking of adding to the Dial-a-Tip is a Dessert Indicator Switch. One of the toughest parts of waiting tables has to be approaching someone for dessert. On the one hand, you want to build that check as much as possible, and if someone wants dessert you shouldn't deprive them of their gluttony. On the other hand, if a person is completely stuffed, they could resent you for insinuating that they might be capable of eating more, when all they want to do is get back to the car and let their pants out. So let's avoid the whole ugly dessert confrontation and just add a switch to the Dial-a-Tip that will indicate one of two options: "No Dessert" or "Make Me an Offer." That way, everybody wins.

Now as great of an idea as the Dial-a-Tip is, you're probably wondering: where can I invest? Also, couldn't diners just turn the Dial-a-Tip to whatever amount they need in order to get great service, and then leave a different, much lower, tip? No, because what I forgot to mention is that the Dial-a-Tip will be electronically wired to their genitals, and diners will be given a shock that will make their hair fall out if they attempt to chintz out on what they indicated they would give. Or we could use the honor system. Either way is good.

The important thing is, servers can better respond to patrons' needs, diners can feel good about having

enjoyed a wonderful meal, and your sweetheart will be so enthralled at the wonderfully romantic evening you gave her, she'll ignore your toenails on the bathroom floor at least one more time. I'm guessing.