

**Heather
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Diversion tactics

Lifestyles of the inherently inefficient

My mother always told me that God has given each person a special gift. Some people were given beautiful voices. Some people were given athletic ability. Some people were given amazing minds, capable of innovation.

For years I have searched for my special gift. I believe now that I may have found it.

I can't sing. I can't dance. I couldn't pole vault if I tried, and my mind is only moderately amazing. But there is one thing I am inherently good at. I can waste time. I am the most inefficient person on earth. It's my special gift.

Given any task, I will find something to divert my attention and my time. I don't have to try. It's my talent.

I have a 15-page research paper due at the end of the semester. Every time I sit down to write it, my special gift takes over. I know I should be spell-checking and footnoting, but I would rather sort the Fruit Loops by color or teach my cat the Lambada. It's important that all pets know the forbidden dance of love.

My inner voice tells me that there is something attractive about bad television when you have something more important to do. Anytime I'm

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having company over and I need to clean the house, I can be guaranteed that TBS will run the 63rd annual Gilligan's Island marathon. To scour the toilet or to watch the Professor and Mary Ann?

Telephone calls also make nice diversions from any duty I may have. If I'm in the middle of reading "Merchant of Venice," I would be glad to discuss the positive aspects of vinyl siding with a telemarketer.

"Hello, Miss Lampe, could I take a few moments of your time to tell you about Anderson's vinyl siding? It would be a great asset to your home."

"Well, I live in an apartment, but siding might look lovely in my bedroom. Go on, please. Take up as much time as you'd like. And while you're at it, do you have any magazines or encyclopedias you can sell me?"

What I find especially amazing about people who excel at wasting

time is that we become quite irate when other people waste our time. We can spend hours avoiding laundry by learning the art of making little origami chickens. But if we have to spend more than 20 minutes in a dentist's waiting room, we're ready to poke his eyes out with the water pick.

"Excuse me, nurse, but I've been waiting 30 minutes to see the doctor. I do have better things to do, you know. I hate to see all my time wasted."

"OK, dear, why don't you just go sit down over there. It's obvious you can't keep yourself occupied by reading, but there are some coloring books on the table. Here are some crayons, honey. Why don't you go sit down before I have to sedate you."

To convince you of my special gift, I've compiled a list of the time I've wasted in the last week:

— Started to dust my living room, but was diverted by my husband's December issue of Men's Fitness on

the coffee table. Spent 30 minutes lusting at the half-dressed, sweaty men on the weight machines, and 20 minutes trying to explain to my husband why I was panting and drooling on the furniture. Total dust and drool time: 65 minutes.

— Started to study for my economics test, but was diverted by the Flashdance theme song on the radio. Spent approximately four minutes running in place, singing "She's a Maniac." Spent another 20 minutes trying to explain to my downstairs neighbor why her pictures fell off her walls. Spent 30 minutes cooling down on the couch from my flash dancing. Total study and flash dancing time: One hour and 54 minutes.

— Started to clean out my refrigerator, but was diverted by the food. Spent 20 minutes preparing a hoagie sandwich. Spent 20 minutes eating the hoagie sandwich. Spent one hour napping after eating the hoagie sandwich. Did not clean out the refrigerator. Total cleaning and eating time: One hour and 40 minutes.

My list is vast and I could go on for days, but for God's sake, I wouldn't want to waste your time.

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**Brent
POPE**

Here's a tip: Don't be cheap

I was in a restaurant the other day when I overheard a college-age couple arguing about how much of a tip they should leave for the waiter.

The lady said, "He did a good job.

At least leave him a couple dollars."

The guy replied, "I don't care if he tap danced to the 'Green Acres' theme song while hand-squeezing me fresh papaya

juice with one hand and magically sawing the perky hostess in half with the other, I ain't leaving him squat!"

Then they continued to argue for several minutes, eventually sinking to the level of hurling "Your mama's so fat..." insults at each other.

I'm not sure if they ended up leaving a tip or not, but it got me thinking: There's no one in our generation who gives advice on tipping etiquette. Miss Manners isn't a voice that the post-World War II crowd listens to, and besides, she's more of a guide for the rich and famous, not the typical college student.

And that's not to say that all DN readers are penniless paupers like

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myself, I just can't imagine that too many of you out there pick up the paper and declare, "Tally ho! This Pope fellow is smashing to read while I eat my crumpets and ready myself for a brisk game of croquet!"

In any case, I guess it's up to me to spread the word on what is and is not acceptable in the world of gratuities, especially in restaurants. So, li'l buckaroos, here are The Pope's Rules For Restaurant Tipping:

1. You should generally leave a tip of 15 percent when you are at a restaurant that has waitresses and waiters. (It is only acceptable to withhold some or all of the tip in extreme situations. For example: If your server sneezes in your food and then says, "I was just adding a little spice to your meal, deal with it."

Then it would be OK to not leave a tip. But anything less extreme is no excuse.)

2. Don't use the old "they already get paid" excuse, either. People who work as servers in restaurants usually get lower wages than the stress of their job merits, because they assume they will receive tips on top of their hourly pay. (Don't piss in their corn flakes!)

3. Leave a tip even if your server isn't quite a Fortitude of Friendliness, especially if it's late at night. You can't expect them to flash you a toothy Cheshire Cat grin after eight-straight hours of hearing customers splurge out phrases like "How much is your \$3.99 special?" and "Where are my cockadoodee flapjacks?"

4. Don't leave your waitress

hanging because you claim to be "broker than a mo' fo'!" That's a really lame excuse. Eating at a restaurant costs at least two to three times as much as making food at home. If you have the money to eat out, you have the money to leave a tip, Ebenezer. (Is it too early to bust out the Scrooge jokes?)

5. If at all possible, try to leave dollar bills instead of change. My Aunt Varicose, who used to be a waitress, says that there's nothing worse than working a double-shift at the Dead Skunk Diner and having to lug some 30-odd pounds of change around in your pockets. People used to hear her coming, think she was ringing the Salvation Army bells, and give her more change.

These rules should pretty much cover you in any restaurant tipping situation that you might find yourself in. And if you should happen to forget those guidelines, just remember this saying that my Uncle Ruddabaga recites every time we go to a restaurant: "They might drop your omelet on the floor, but who cares as long as they pick it back up and put free extra cheese on the dirty part." (Hell, that's good advice anytime.)

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