Guests Shouldn’t Have To Do Math

Tipping Is Agency - Book · https://kb.jeffreysummers.com/docs/guests-shouldnt-have-to-do-math/

Misread.

The Guest hears: tipping forces every diner to perform an arithmetic ritual at the worst possible moment — full, tired, ready to leave, sometimes a little drunk, sometimes with company they're trying to impress. The tip is cognitive labor the restaurant should have absorbed. A service charge or an all-in price would let the Guest exit clean.

This sounds like a UX argument. It is actually two different arguments wearing the same coat.

Corrected Read.

Two sub-arguments live inside "the math." They get answered separately.

Cognitive Load Difference

The pitch: calculating 20% on $87.43 is hard. Guests resent it. Solve it for them.

What the room actually shows:

The check presenter on every modern POS prints suggested tip lines at 18 / 20 / 22 (or whatever the operator sets). The Guest reads a number and signs. The arithmetic is done.

Card terminals do the same with on-screen buttons.

The Guests who actually do the math are the Guests who want to do the math — overtippers checking they hit their personal floor, undertippers checking they cleared the social minimum, splitters working out per-person share. Those Guests are doing math they want to do.

The "cognitive load" objection describes a friction that the technology removed a decade ago. It's a 1995 complaint surviving on inertia.

The math isn't the problem. The math hasn't been the problem since the printed suggestion line showed up on the check.

Decision Load Difference

The pitch: even if the arithmetic is solved, the Guest still has to decide — 18, 20, 22, more, less, none. That decision is the cognitive load, and it carries social and moral weight. Make it go away.

This is the real version of the objection. And on Road 2, the operator's answer is: the Guests themselves don't want it to go away.

Ask them. Operators have, for decades. The answer comes back the same way every time: Guests want the tip line because it gives them control over the remuneration they think the service deserved. The decision is not a burden they're asking the operator to lift. It is a lever they are telling the operator to leave in their hand.

That's the part the "spare the Guest the decision" pitch gets exactly backwards. The decision isn't friction the Guest is enduring. It is agency the Guest is exercising. Take the line away and the Guest doesn't feel relieved — the Guest feels disarmed. The room that earned a 25 doesn't get to be told it earned a 25. The room that earned a 12 doesn't get told that either. The Guest loses the voice. The operator loses the read. Nobody gains.

The tip decision is also a feedback instrument on the operator's side. The Guest's choice on that line is data the room reads in the aggregate — across shifts, servers, sections, nights. The operator who runs the line as a signal sees which servers move it up, which sections move it down, which standards earn it. Collapse the line into a flat service charge and the signal goes dark. One number — revenue — and no read on what the Guest thought of what happened inside it.

Two parties want the line kept open: the Guest who wants the voice, and the operator who wants the read. The objection asks the operator to overrule both of them in the name of sparing the Guest a decision the Guest is not asking to be spared from.

Operator's Read.

The math is solved by the printer. The decision is the instrument. The Road 2 operator keeps the decision in the Guest's hands because the Guest is asking for it there and the room is reading it there. Two instruments, one line. Disable it and both go dark.

The cast member who earns the line knows they earned it. The cast member who didn't, knows that too. The operator who reads the line across the room knows where the room is strong and where it's soft. None of that exists in a flat-percent service charge.

Road 2 Close.

"Don't make me do math" is a complaint about a problem the check presenter solved. "Don't make me decide" is a request to disable a lever the Guest actually wants to hold. Road 2 keeps the lever where the Guest put it.

Closing Position.

The math is done. The decision is the point — and the Guest is the one asking for it. Guests who want the decision removed have rooms that removed it; the market sorted that already. The Road 2 room keeps the line open because the Guest wants the voice and the operator wants the read.

Related Terms In The Framework

- [Tipping Is Agency]
- [Two Roads]
- [The Guest Contract]
- [Guest Experience]

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