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A Few Good Tips

Should your presence at the salon be accompanied by presents?

BY STACEY OKUN

Yes, Virginia, this is another holiday tipping story. It seems that what—or how much—to bestow upon one's beauty-service people during the holiday season is not just a timeless magazine story idea but a perpetually perplexing dilemma as well. I always feel so inadequate when I leave what I think is a healthy tip at the front desks of my hair salons only to watch other women march in with big boxes tied with a bounty of red ribbons. *They'll probably get much better haircuts than I will this year, I think to myself.* This shouldn't be the case, according to Carmine Minardi, co-owner, with his wife Beth, of the Minardi Salon in New York. "Clients need to realize that in a good salon, you are never evaluated by the size of a tip," he says. "In salons where you're paying top dollar, stylists aren't pre-occupied with how much money a person tips. They're earning it anyway."

That said, most of us do feel, especially during the holiday season, that it's necessary, or appropriate, or pleasurable to thank a regular hair stylist or manicurist—or even the salon owner—with a thoughtful gesture of some kind. After all, if you see your stylist or colorist anywhere from several times a year to several times a month, well, then, this is the person who maintains your image; the one who helps

you look like you (only maybe even a little better). So what to give? There is no rule book, but *Miss Manners' Guide for the Turn of the Millennium* says a 15 to 20 percent tip is adequate during the year. And what about during the holiday season? Doesn't Miss Manners get her hair done for New Year's Eve? My own spot survey of salon owners across the country revealed that truly anything goes for the stylist or colorist—anything from double the usual tip to an all-expense-paid vacation in the Caribbean.

"Tipping is very personal," says Laurent D of the West Hollywood salon Privé. "It comes down to how you feel about the person. It's like gift giving." (Laurent has received everything from weekend getaways in Palm Springs to Versace ties.) Tip-

ping your stylist or colorist really *does* come down to how well you know him, how much you like him and how satisfying his services are. As for the rest of the salon's service staff: hike up the usual tip about \$5 for manicurists and hair washers; give your hairdresser's assistant anywhere from 10 to 20 percent of the bill. More, of course, is always appreciated. "And don't forget about the front desk," says Zoe Stark, who manages the Minardi Salon. "We're the ones who squeeze you in for appointments when you're desperate." If you are friendly with the salon manager, it is appropriate to tip a percentage, perhaps 10 to 15 percent, of your average bill. Think of the manager as a concierge in a fine hotel—one who takes good care of you.

But what actually is in those big boxes with the bounty of red ribbons? "I've received Armani shirts, a set of Lalique Champagne flutes, a Rolex watch, Hermès sweaters, you name it," says Paul Neinast, owner of the eponymous, chichi salon in the Turtle Creek area of Dallas. "On

the one hand, I appreciate the gesture. I've had clients who've been with me for eighteen years or longer. We're like family. But when I get an excessive gift, like the Rolex, I'm embarrassed." Neinast has since requested that clients donate money to charity (especially his favorite one, the Exchange Club for the Prevention of Child Abuse) in his salon's name in lieu of presents.

Still clueless about what to give? "The greatest gratuity," concludes Minardi, "is sending me additional wonderful clients like themselves." Wrapped, of course, in a big box, with a bounty of red ribbons. ✕

