

## Here's a tip: Use good judgment

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THE RECORD

No one wants to feel like Scrooge, short on Christmas spirit, but in tough times there might be the need to trim tips to doormen and building staff.



STAFF PHOTOS BY TYSON TRISH

**Katie Verhoest and Lauren Andes, both of Kinnelon and waitresses at Cedar Crest Village, signing a thank-you card for residents at the Pequannock retirement community after picking up appreciation checks.**

Those who have always been generous with the staff in their residential building may feel that continuing the practice is really a matter of whether to be naughty or nice this holiday season. (And we've all heard what the naughty ones get in their stockings.)

But before leaving on an extended guilt trip, or perhaps giving money that you really don't have (because it should go to cover bills), there's one thing you should know about tipping: It really isn't mandatory.

"Tipping during the holidays is a kind gesture based on what you're able to give, rather than what your neighbors are giving," says Faye Rogaski, a former Mendham resident and founder of socialsklz:-) — manners for the modern world.

"Gifts for building personnel and those who provide services can often add up to hundreds of dollars, and this act is not meant to put you in a precarious position, financially."

Rogaski's Manhattan-based business advises on manners and etiquette, and at this time of year, tipping and holiday parties can call for a strong dose of both.

Before deciding what to tip, she says, make an honest assessment of your financial situation.

"If you're not making the same income you did last year, or you're concerned about your future employment, it's time to make an adjustment from what you gave last year," Rogaski says.

"Give what you can, and use your card as an opportunity to mention that you're grateful for that person's contribution to the building this year and you're also grateful that you're able to contribute this year based on the given economic circumstance."

The card can also express the hope that the next year will be more fruitful for all, she said.

If you cannot afford to tip at all this season, she says, it's "even more crucial" to send a card as an expression of gratitude. "You don't want to let their work go unnoticed or let them hold a grudge," she notes.

Says Peggy Abkemeier, president of Rent.com: "Although tipping is never required, it is a nice way to thank those individuals who help take care of your home on a daily basis. If you are feeling a financial strain during these tough economic times, it's likely they are feeling it as well. Remember that it's the gesture that counts, and a little goes a long way, so don't feel like you have to break the bank to say thank you."

Sometimes folks are confused over whom to tip and how much. That should never be a reason not to tip, Abkemeier says. If funds are scant, she notes, consider tipping only the staff you deal with regularly — like your building super and doormen.

She says tips can range from \$30 to \$100 and depend on the building and city you live in, as well as how often you see the recipients.

"The best thing to do is ask your friends and neighbors how much they think you should give, and err on the generous side. Your super will remember this the next time you ask him to fix your toilet," she says.

Cash is generally preferred, but if a substitute is more within your reach, try a bottle of wine, holiday gift basket or gift certificate to a favorite restaurant. Just take care to match the gift with the person.

If you still feel bad about giving out a small tip this year, rain checks are acceptable. There's nothing to say that you can't provide a cash tip after the fact.

At Country Club Towers, a 403-unit apartment complex in Clifton, it's always the residents who decide about tipping, and employees know not to expect a gratuity.

But it's a nice building largely made up of people who care about each other, says Michael Beirne, executive vice president of the Kamson Corp., which manages the complex. There are those who even make or bake things as a way to say thanks, he says.

He predicts that cash tips will be down this year because of the economy. "Everyone in the industry knows this is an unusual year," he says. When it comes to how much to give, he adds, "all bets are off."

With many residents of Country Club Towers on fixed incomes, he says, "I've got to think people will be more conservative."

Residents at Cedar Crest Village, a Pequannock retirement community, won't be struggling with how much to give this holiday season.

The community's Staff Appreciation Fund, established in 2002, is made up of money donated throughout the year, and goes to thank the dining room staff, housekeeping, security and others who make up the site's 700 employees, says Cedar Crest spokesman Tony Ciavolella.

"The concept was created as a way to thank employees who are not allowed to accept gratuities throughout the year," he says.

Despite the economy, residents came through with almost a \$9,000 increase in staff appreciation funds, which amounted to \$289,591 this year, he says.

Another holiday season dilemma can be hosting a party without angering your neighbors. Experts suggest that inviting your closest neighbors can cut down on complaint. Otherwise, drop them a note to let them know the date of the party, as well as the starting and ending time. This gives them a chance to adjust their schedules if they'd rather not be around for your at-home karaoke session.

At Country Club Towers, the entire complex holds a holiday party, which builds on an existing sense of community and minimizes conflicts, Beirne says.

Another courtesy this time of the year is being polite about the delivery of packages to your building. If you lack a 24-hour doorman, deliveries during the day, in your absence, may require that fellow tenants sign for your packages. If possible, arrange to have packages sent to the job, saving neighbors the hassle, says Abkemeier.

With fewer renters moving to new apartments these days, she says, it's more important than ever to create long-lasting relationships with your neighbors.