



Proudly Presents:



THE SEMI-ANNUAL BEVERAGE MENU MAKE-OVER CONTEST

One lucky restaurant will win 2 days of hands-on staff and management training by master mixologist and renowned flair bartender Gavin MacMillan, focusing on:

- accuracy • speed • flair • cocktail synergy
- time management behind the bar • review of current menu and full menu makeover

Here's what to do: Complete the ballot below (one entry per establishment). Mail or fax your ballot to the coordinates listed below. We'll take care of the rest. Gavin will visit your restaurant to help your staff 'Raise the Bar.'

Name: _____

Establishment: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

5255 Yonge Street Suite 1000, Toronto, Ontario M2N 6P4 Or by fax 416.512.8344



Gavin MacMillan

Tipping POINT

I'm ticked off. You might even say I'm at the tipping point. I'm fed up with receiving mediocre drinks and dealing with snotty bartenders who think they deserve to get tipped for service that is average at best.

Each year, I'm lucky to be able to go someplace warm for the first week of January to unwind, recharge and set goals for the year. I usually look for a destination that has a namesake cocktail; last year I got to work with some amazing bartenders in Fiji. While I taught them a little bit about mixology, they schooled me how to make the perfect blue lagoon while standing in the Blue Lagoon in the Yasawa Islands.

Shortly thereafter I travelled to Miami in search of the best made mojito outside of Havana, Cuba. The offering up and down the Miami Beach strip was, quite frankly, pathetic. Most bartenders used mint syrup instead of fresh mint, lime and sugar. They also treated our party like an interruption rather than the reason for their employment. In Miami, I was told to "wait a moment" because the bartender was watching television. Then he not only charged me an 18 per cent automatic gratuity on the single mojito I purchased but had the gall to ask for an additional tip.

This year took me to Paradise Island in the Bahamas in search of, what else, the ultimate Bahama mama. While I found quite a few good cocktails, none were really fantastic and the service was less than impressive. For a place that spends millions of dollars on construction, decor, top chefs and great food, it seems strange that so little effort is put into the island's cocktail program. I appreciate cocktails frequently make up only a small percentage of beverage sales but spirits are among the most profitable items on a menu. The kitchen may be the economic engine of the restaurant but the bar (if worked properly) can be the profit centre.

My experience in Paradise Island made me think about cocktail culture in Canada and the U.S. For the most part, there are very few great bars in North America despite tons of good bartenders who have plenty of talent. The missing ingredient has nothing to do with a lack of options or support; it has everything to do with lack of ambition brought on by lowered expectations.

When was the last time you went into a bar and received really great service?

In the Bahamas, I ordered Bahama mamas at every bar I went to, which was more than a few.

What did I find?

Bars that added an "autograt" (or automatic gratuity) offered below-average to poor service while bartenders who had to work for

their tips offered better drinks, superior service and an all around exceptional experience.

Don't get me wrong. As a bartender who has taken care of a large party, I understand the importance of the automatic gratuity. Many establishments tack on a 15 per cent gratuity to parties of eight or more when tipping is often (conveniently) overlooked.

However, a bartender or server should never be allowed to add an automatic gratuity to a party of less than six. And adding a 15 per cent automatic gratuity to a single drink provides bartenders with no incentive to create great drinks or offer excellent customer service.

Why?

Because the bartenders already know they will get their money regardless.

Bartenders are like work horses — they are motivated by the carrot (the tip) and the stick (job security). If you take away the carrot (the chance of earning a gratuity) and just feed the carrot directly to the horse, they won't pull the plough (their weight) no matter how hard you hit them with the stick. Without fail, automatic gratuities take the ambition out of taking care of the guest.

The result: Service suffers.

As a bartender, I love that the guest determines whether to reward me (or not) with a tip or gratuity. After all, TIPS is an acronym for "To Insure Proper Service."

Good bartenders work hard for their money. They have a very difficult job in that they must possess the skills of a line chef when it comes to mixology and be able to balance that with the people management skills needed to deal with customers who are becoming increasingly intoxicated. An immense amount of responsibility rests on their shoulders. However, bartenders who believe they are owed gratuity by everyone who buys a drink have an overdeveloped sense of entitlement. Tipping should never be mandatory. Bartending is about driving a party, meeting new people, sharing experiences and creating relationships.

So the next time you're in a bar and you receive great service, make sure to tip the bartender. And the next time you step behind the bar, remember you're there to make people happy.

Gavin MacMillan is a master mixologist, bar chef and owner of BartenderOne Corp., Canada's fastest growing group of bartender training facilities. Gavin is an award-winning flair bartender and published author. He is also considered one of Canada's leading authorities on cocktails and mixology. Contact Gavin at gavin@bartenderone.com.