

# WORKING LIFE

## Sweet Success

Candy's handy  
(with a nod to  
Ogden Nash).

By Haidee E. Allerton

If I point out that waitpersons don't always get the tip they deserve, I should be on safe ground—safer, at least, than when I wrote in February about how they (and others) should stop calling me “ma’am,” but more about that later.

There is a way to increase tips.

A Monmouth University research team found that when waiters and waitresses (in collusion with the researchers) brought a piece of candy with the bill, tips were bigger—going from 19 to 22 percent. When the servers offered a second piece, tips rose to 23 percent.

However...

An Italian living in Washington, D.C., complains that restaurant service in America is “too familiar.” He advises waitpeople to stop interrupting the meal to ask, “Is everything is all right?” and to not “become threatening” when someone doesn't leave a tip.

«» Source/the Washington Post

This time, it's personal

I have been writing Working Life since 1992. In fact, the column won a National Clarion Award that year for

Excellence in Communication. In 10 years, I've never written anything that received mightier responses than "Stop the Ma'amness" in the February issue. There was no middle ground to the email flooding my inbox: It was passionately positive or scarily negative.

A group of women also age 35+ applauded me for speaking up; they hate being called "ma'am," too, and shared stories of their other peeves about how they're addressed, patronized, or otherwise discounted in the workplace. I felt like Oprah. The Stop the Ma'amness movement had begun!

But I also received heated messages telling me to "get over" myself, that I obviously had issues about aging, and that "ma'am" was simply a term of politeness to any age woman. Wow! Who knew this topic would touch such a nerve? I was just tossing off a rather trivial (I thought) personal rant. I beseech you: If you can't do that at least once in 10 years, what good is having your own column?

Some seriously reactive readers seemed not to realize that Working Life is meant to be humorous. Or maybe sometimes it's just not funny. *Nah*, that can't be it.

Now, when I go to lunch with my younger colleagues and the waitperson calls me "ma'am," they duck down into their menus and I

see thought bubbles rise over their heads: *Uh, oh*. True, my Ma'am-o-Meter is on. Mostly, I notice that being called "ma'am" by the store clerk, Starbucks barista, or café server has nothing to do with one's age—*what a relief*. Or perhaps it's just a reprieve if not a pardon.

Do you remember the episode of the *Mary Tyler Moore Show*, in which a twenty-something delivery guy calls Mary "ma'am"? She whirls around and asks incredulously, "Ma'am? You mean *me*?" It seemed to instantly catapult her 35-year-old self into an age sphere she had yet to even ponder. You know, the 35 to 50 galaxy.

Then there's the over-50 slot you hear about on TV, see in ads: "If you're over 50, you need...." What, 50 to infinity? One day you're 49 and the next day you're 50. I say, so what? Big whoop. Thirty-five is the new 25; 50 is the new 40. And so on. You heard it here first.

I'm thinking of having cards made up to hand out to ma'am violators. They would say, "Thank you for your great service. Here's an additional tip: Most women over 35 do not take kindly to being called 'ma'am.' Try saying 'miss' or using no title at all. Then watch your tips zoom." And it wouldn't hurt to hand out a few pieces of candy.

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