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## OU Psychology study offers tips for service industry workers

Social-personality psychologist Virgil Zeigler-Hill, Ph.D., associate professor of Psychology at Oakland University, and colleagues conducted a study to examine how the personality traits of servers are associated with job performance ratings and the tips they received from customers. It was conducted in the southern region of Israel and included 259 servers from 25 restaurants who were evaluated by their actual customers.

See full study: **“Would you like fries with that? The roles of servers’ personality traits and job performance in the tipping behavior of customers.”**

### Background and findings

Nearly 80 percent of employed individuals in the United States work in some aspect of the service industry with nearly nine million working as servers in bars and restaurants. A large portion of a servers’ income comes from customer tips and generally reflects the quality of service provided.



*Being friendly and engaging to customers is key to better tips for service industry workers.*

“We were really interested in how personality features translate into real world experiences,” says Dr. Zeigler-Hill. “There are a lot of things that go beyond the actual service provided, so we were wondering what roles the servers’ personality actually play and the sorts of consequences they face in the workplace for good or bad performance.”

Job performance ratings were obtained from 1280 tables made up of 3992 actual customers who were asked to complete an evaluation that was based upon the servers’ personality traits and job performance after already deciding on the amount of tip. Customers were then asked to record the amount of their bill and tip that was left for the server.

One of the most important findings of the study showed that people who perform their jobs really well don’t appear to benefit from better unless they also have an extroverted personality and are conscientious. The combination of being really good at the job and also being outgoing, friendly and interacting well with customers is the combination that patrons responded to with better tips.

Other studies have also found the conscientiousness level of an employee is typically the best predictor of a lot of different occupational outcomes.

### Recommendations for better tips

Dr. Zeigler-Hill has a few recommendations based upon his team’s results that could benefit OU students who are currently servers or are looking for a serving job.

“Make sure that you are performing your job in a competent fashion so you are being responsive to the needs of your customers and that you’re doing it in a friendly and engaging manner. Don’t make the customer feel that they are a burden when they are making a simple request such as refilling a beverage.”

*by Kelly Martin, Communications and Marketing intern*