

Julia Jensen
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Emotion, Economics, and the Idea of Being Essential

Not all jobs can be done from home. For the over [26 million](#) Americans working in the service industry, masks, physical distancing, and panic-buying are a part of the daily routine, and without them the general public would lack access to food, clothing, and household essentials.¹ Due to the pandemic, service industry workers have been facing more aggression from customers than ever before, and the instability of the job market has forced them into withstanding high levels of risk and discomfort in order to remain employed.



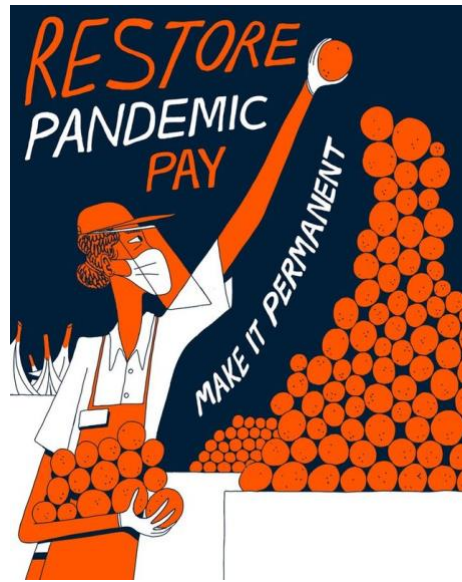
[Walmart Associate Checks Coworker's Temperatures](#)

Economic Stability

Employees in every field felt the effects of the rising unemployment rate, but jobs in the service industry are often hourly positions with little to no protection from being furloughed or laid off, leading to many losing their jobs at the beginning of the pandemic. Many stores have since rehired some employees, but store hours have yet to return to normal, meaning less hours to give to employees. What was once a full-time position may now be a part-time position, which not only results in less pay but also a loss of benefits that require a certain number of hours worked per week. Additionally, many stores that initially offered an increase in pay due to the higher risk of working in this industry during a pandemic then repealed it, despite the hazards of the job remaining the same. In food service establishments, [19% of Americans](#) say that they are tipping less than they did before the pandemic, which directly affects the employee's income.²

¹ "Service Occupations." <https://datausa.io/profile/soc/service-occupations#:~:text=The%20number%20of%20people%20employed,Occupations%20employed%20by%20various%20industries>.

² Zlati Meyer, "The Ugly Truth About Tipping Waitstaff During COVID-19," Fast Company (Fast Company, October 23, 2020), <https://www.fastcompany.com/90564662/the-ugly-truth-about-tipping-waitstaff-during-covid-19>.



Restore Pandemic Pay // Make it Permanent Poster

Beyond the initial struggles of the service industry, there are also projections that it will take up to four years for the industry to recover from the pandemic, at which point they would be able to afford hiring at fuller capacity.³ This lack of stability brings additional fear and anxiety to those who depend on these jobs.



Mask Required For Service.

³ Ignacio Felix et al., “The US Food-Service Industry May Take Four Years to Recover From the COVID-19 Pandemic,” McKinsey & Company, July 2, 2020, <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/coronavirus-leading-through-the-crisis/charting-the-path-to-the-next-normal/the-us-food-service-industry-may-take-four-years-to-recover-from-the-covid-19-pandemic>.

Emotional Stability

This uncertainty and risk, compounded with the general fear of living through a pandemic, makes service industry roles extremely emotionally draining. There has also been a pattern of [frustrated and angry customers](#) taking their aggression out on service industry employees, who often have no say in what policies and procedures they enforce.⁴ These situations have even escalated to racist actions, such as the situation at [a T&T in Mississauga, Ontario, Canada](#).⁵ This results in a direct threat to employees' safety, causing their place of employment to feel unsafe and threatening. Unfortunately, they are often unable to leave their position due to the challenging job market. This experience often leads to a sense of hopelessness, harming the mental health of those working in these environments.

It is unreasonable for this kind of experience to become commonplace. Working in this industry should not be a threat to physical, economic, and emotional health, especially not at the hands of customers. Next time you interact with a service industry employee, keep in mind the experience of those serving you; a little kindness can go a long way.



[Keep Calm and Coffee On](#)

Key Words: Service, industry, tip, economy, emotion, essential

Related Sources:

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⁴ *Covid-19 Rage: Customer Smashes Wine Bottles after Being Asked to Follow Shop's One-Way System*, YouTube (The Telegraph, 2020), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2J92Pw06B10&ab_channel=TheTelegraph.

⁵ Firenze Yeung and Hope Gresser, "'Anti-Mask Racist Rant at T&T,'" *A Journal of the Plague Year Covid-19 Archive*, July 9, 2020, <https://covid-19archive.org/s/archive/item/22982>.

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