

February 2026

THE SERVICE WORKER

“Interview on rampant wage theft, managerial harassment at Chicken Salad Chick”

In collaboration with the Tri-Cities Worker



In response to reports of wage theft and managerial harassment at a Chicken Salad Chick restaurant in Johnson City, Tenn., we are publishing the following interview with two local rank-and-file workers, anonymized as Worker A and Worker B. We hope this interview can expose these issues and give guidance to other Chicken Salad Chick workers in their struggle for better working conditions.

Tipping and wage theft

The Tri-Cities Worker (TCW): Thank you so much for meeting with us today. You all have reported multiple instances of wage theft to us. Could you give us more information about what exactly this tip policy is?

Worker B: How it works is that when cash tips are put into the tip jar in front of all of our registers, the tips are not split among the staff at the end of the pay period, but are instead put into the safe until it “reaches an amount that makes a difference” about every two months. That is where all the cash goes. All the coins are put into a big jar. And we are expected to guess the price of the amount of coins in the jar. Whoever guesses the closest, they get 10% of those coins...

Worker A: Which is usually ranging between \$350 to \$500. So they're only getting \$30 or \$50 out of that. And then all the debit tips go to everybody-- split evenly.

TCW: And the actual “game” itself happens infrequently?

A: Yeah.

B: Yes. It does not happen on a regular basis.

TCW: With tip laws, owners do have the right to pool tips and keep them for up to a pay period, which is one to two weeks. But by the end of the pay period, they have to distribute all the tips. So not only are they not distributing all the tips, they're only doing 10% of the coins and only to one person. They aren't doing it at the end of every pay period. They're only doing it... say once a month?

A: Maybe every three or four months.

TCW: What do you think they do with the tips that they steal?

A: They are instructed on occasion to, if they're running low on the drawer, to pull from the tips and put it into the drawer. The rest, I have no idea. They probably take it home or it just sits there.

TCW: So is this a corporate or local policy?

B: Local policy. Pretty much every single [Chicken Salad Chick] is locally owned, so it makes it easier for the owners to have an abusive tip policy.

TCW: Could you give us an estimate on how much you think has been stolen from tips?

A: I'd say maybe around \$1,500 are stolen per year.

Managerial harassment

TCW: Also included in your reports were instances of managerial harassment. Which manager is doing this and how are they violating the personal boundaries of you and your coworkers?

A: Right. So one of the big issues that [the District Manager] has been doing is providing one of our 16 year old coworkers with [nicotine] vapes when she has expressed that she wants to quit. [The DM] also loves to go around showing people her sexting with an AI chatbot, an 18+ chatbot...

B: While on the clock...

A: When they are very visibly uncomfortable with the situation.

The Service Worker (TSW): You also mentioned that many of your coworkers are teenagers and students?

A: Yes.

B: [The] majority of our back-of-house staff are all under the age of 18.

TCW: What do you think should be done about this manager?

B: We believe that she should be terminated from her position. She doesn't operate well as a manager and all of the shift leads and assistant managers do her work for her, so they don't even need her there.

Co-worker reactions and demands

TCW: How have your coworkers reacted to these issues and how do you think they should react?

A: The ones that I've talked to are upset about the situation, but I have not gone as far as to bring up possibly rallying together. But yeah, everyone I've talked to has expressed they're not happy with how much they're being paid in the tip situation and just the workplace in general.

TCW: And what would you say to your co-workers that might be more apathetic about these issues?

B: We would want them to understand that, though it may not seem like it affects them (though it absolutely does), there are many, many more of us that work at Chicken Salad Chick who need this money and need to be able to work in a space where we don't have to worry

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about harassment. Or unfair wages and the illegality going on within our own store.

TCW: So in regards the tip policy, what demands or reparations do you think should be fought for?

A: Higher pay, the tips need to be distributed, and we need competent people in the manager positions.

TCW: You guys have a Chipotle right next to you. I think you said that they pay a much higher minimum wage?

B: It's a \$17/hr minimum wage for their team members.

TCW: So really you all should be paid close to that, plus [the] tips which you aren't currently getting. That would go a long way to give reparations for the tips that have been stolen.

Other workplace issues

TCW: Are there any other issues besides the tip policy or managerial harassment that you think should be resolved?

A: Guaranteed full-time, because they essentially try to make it to where everyone is working part-time so they can justify lower wages. It's practically impossible to get full-time hours there if you aren't the assistant manager...

B: And even our assistant managers [are] not guaranteed 40 hours.

TCW: Which also makes it impossible to get things like overtime and full-time employee benefits. You guys don't get healthcare for part-time work?

A: Only the assistant managers get [healthcare].

TCW: What are the gender dynamics like between your co-workers?

B: I would say they're all relatively normal. No one has any sorts of issues with each other.

A: It's a very LGBT positive workplace. Everyone's very fluid in there.

TCW: So the main source of harassment is just that one manager?

B: Yeah.

Moving forward

TCW: How do you envision you and your coworkers moving forward and winning y'all's demands?

B: I believe that when acting as a united front, there's nothing scarier to owners of a business than a bunch of your own employees saying, “Hey, give me the money I rightfully fucking deserve!” I think that my co-workers and I are very much capable of getting what we deserve and we will definitely benefit from it. We will work happier as a team because we know that we'll be getting the pay and the respect that we deserved in the first place.

TCW: What sorts of actions do you think should or could be taken?

B: We will be starting a shop organization to better organize everybody and writing a demand letter that states exactly what we're needing and why. If that isn't met within the time that we need it to be then we will have to further escalate the situation.

Concluding thoughts

B: This is definitely something that we are capable of doing, even as a smaller store. No one should be letting a corporation or even a smaller business fuck them over.

TCW: Absolutely. And you all have so much leverage due to the illegality and horridness of the stuff that's going on. Obviously, this wage and tip theft is extremely illegal and needs to be taken care of, but so does this managerial harassment: illegally giving underage workers vapes, illegally buying vapes for underage workers, taking advantage of your managerial position to get away with inappropriate behavior.

TSW: These demands are really valid to have and it's reasonable to be really angry and do something about it. Just know that this is the right cause and be kind of pushy when you're trying to get people on board because this is something that doesn't just affect you guys, it's most likely already affecting the other [Bristol] location, and will continue to affect other workers if nothing is done. This is very important struggle to have.

TCW: And remember that you all are the laborers. You're the ones creating all the value, and all the profits for the owners. If you all band together and decide that you're not going to work, or you're going to not work as well, or you're going to refuse tips, until these demands are met, then there really isn't much they have the power to do if they want to continue making profit. You all are more powerful united and that is how you will gain the leverage to win the demands that you need.

If you live in the Tri-Cities and would like to submit a report to The Tri-Cities Worker, please email tricityworker@proton.me and visit tricityworker.wordpress.com for more local and regional news.

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