

# THE MEDIATOR

Mediation Offices of Michael Becker  
Because Experience Matters

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## It Happened Then

On May 19, 1926 Thomas Edison spoke on the radio for the first time.

## Quote Me on It

"Happiness often sneaks through a door you didn't know you left open."

— John Barrymore, Actor

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## Contact us @

t: 203.454.4270  
e: [info@michaelbecker.net](mailto:info@michaelbecker.net)  
w: [www.michaelbecker.net](http://www.michaelbecker.net)

All articles written by Michael Becker

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## Alimony Modification in CT: Now Harder to Get Increases?

In a unanimous decision the Connecticut Supreme Court seems to have made it more difficult to get increases in alimony in certain circumstances.

In many situations alimony is modifiable if either party's financial circumstances change significantly after the divorce. Some practitioners had thought that this meant that if the payer had a big jump in income after the divorce, the recipient could apply for an alimony increase.

However, in *Dan v Dan* the CT Supreme Court held that the court has no authority to grant an increase in alimony based solely upon a substantial increase

in the payer's income, without a showing of other exceptional circumstances.

The court reasoned that the purpose of alimony is to provide the recipient with enough support to enjoy the same standard of living as he or she had during the marriage — and not to allow him or her to receive additional benefits by participating in the payer's post-marriage success.

If the original alimony amount remains sufficient to meet this purpose, then, the court stated, "an increase in income, standing alone, does not justify [an increase in alimony]."

## Under Pressure: Women Better Decision-Makers

When the going gets tough, it seems women may be better at making decisions than men.

Researchers at USC and Duke University have found that in normal situations, men and women are equally good at making decisions about risk. But when stress is added, men and women part ways.

Male and female research subjects participated in different activities involving gambles, or risk.

Across a series of gambles, when men were more stressed they took more risks than did women. They focused on big wins, even when they were costly and less likely.

A Netherlands neurobiologist says the difference is because of cortisol, a stress hormone. Men tend to take more risks when they experience a spike in cortisol. But women with a slight increase in cortisol actually seem to improve decision-making under pressure.

## **Retirement Savings:** **Rollover Changes**

Did you know that you can take money out of an IRA tax free and use it for any purpose, so long as you put it back into an IRA within 60 days? In the past, the IRS allowed each of us to do this once per year per IRA. So if you had five different IRA accounts, you were able to do this five times a year, once for each account.

This proved handy for people who were in a temporary cash crunch but had substantial IRA balances. They would make an IRA withdrawal, receive the funds, and use the money any way they liked. And so long as they put the money back into an IRA in 60 days, it was all tax free!

Now the IRS has changed the rule to limit this practice. In the past, the IRS allowed you to do this once a year for every separate IRA you owned. The new rule allows this only once per year per taxpayer. So each of us can do this only once a year, regardless of how many different IRA accounts we may own.

Of course, one downside of this practice remains — the money withdrawn usually does not earn a return while it is out of the IRA.

## **Tools & Tips**

I'm always looking for new resources, and have recently found the Divorce Source Radio podcast. I recommend it as a resource for clients and practitioners alike.



This podcast offers really practical advice. Recent episodes addressed topics such as financial tips for divorcing couples and families, and a demystification of the divorce process itself. I found especially useful an extensive interview with a woman who had multiple affairs. She discussed the damage this caused to her marriage, her former spouse, and to herself.

Most important, the information comes in a non-preachy and easily accessible way. And there's no pretension.

While the podcast seems aimed at those going through divorce, it is equally informative for those of us who work with divorcing people, such as attorneys, therapists, and financial professionals.

**Michael Becker** is a Westport CT attorney with a Bachelor's Degree in accounting and a Master's Degree in marriage and family therapy. An ACR Advanced Practitioner and an APFM Advanced Mediator, Michael is one of the most experienced mediators in the area. He is also founding Director and twice President of the Connecticut Council for Divorce Mediation (now CCND), and a James W. Cooper Fellow of the Connecticut Bar Foundation.