

THE MEDIATOR

Mediation Offices of Michael Becker
Experience Matters

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It happened on...

September 6, 1870, when a woman cast a vote in the US for the first time, under a Wyoming law allowing women to vote in state and local elections only. It took the US government another 50 years to grant women the national right to vote.

Quote me on it

"If you are willing to look at another person's behavior towards you *as a reflection of the state of their relationship with themselves rather than a statement of your value as a person*, then you will, over a period of time, cease to react at all" [emphasis added]

— Yogi Bhajan

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Legal Update: Revised Court Orders in Divorce

Connecticut's Automatic Orders go into effect when a divorce is first filed. In a nutshell, the orders create a 'standstill' by prohibiting divorcing parties from doing anything out of the ordinary course during the divorce process. In my experience, they accomplish this well most of the time.

One area of focus for the orders is family finances. They attempt to create a financial status quo during the divorce — meaning that neither party can make major financial transactions which could disadvantage their spouse. Most people would agree that this makes logical sense.

Over time, a nagging question has arisen — to what extent do the orders forbid ordinary trading in investment accounts during divorce? In my experience, this becomes especially important when markets are dropping, and one spouse wishes to make changes to a portfolio to avoid losses.

A fix is on the way. Effective January 1, 2020, the Automatic Orders will be amended by adding a paragraph allowing either party to make investment decisions during the divorce without the consent of the other, so long as they are consistent with past practice.

Millennial Effect: Dropping Divorce Rates

Millennials have found a new way to do things differently from their Baby Boomer parents. It turns out that they divorce at a much lower rate, according to a University of Maryland analysis.

While Boomers got married young, then divorced, and then often remarried, Millennials wait longer to get married in the first place — when education, finances and career are a bit more figured out.

It seems that for Millennials, marriage isn't just something you do when you reach a certain age. Instead it is an "achievement of status," says the study's leader.

Millennials, as a group, also seem to be more selective in choosing their spouses in the first place.

And poorer Millennials, thought more likely to divorce according to the study, are often opting to live together and not marry at all.

Tax Stuff:

Expanded 529 Uses

A 529 account is a great way to save for education expenses. In a nutshell, once you set aside money in a 529, all earnings — think dividends, interest, investment gains, etc. — are Federally tax-free, as long as you use the funds for specific purposes. That's a great benefit, especially if you start the account when a child is young, so your gains can compound tax-free.

Recent tax law changes have expanded the purposes for which 529s can be used. In the past, you had to use the money only for post-secondary education, such as college. This remains true. But now, you can also use the money for qualifying education expenses *at any level*, such as private elementary, middle or high school tuition — not just for college. This is obviously an important new benefit for parents with children in private school.

There are limitations, and every situation is different. Be sure to consult with your tax and financial advisors before making any decision.

Tools & Tips

Can we 'catch' emotions from others? Elaine Hatfield, author of the acclaimed book **Emotional Contagion**, first published in 1994, said yes — and many others have come to agree. The rise of social media since 1994 makes this work even more useful today.



Recent research has focused on emotional contagion through social media. Facebook users exposed to newsfeeds with fewer negative words made fewer negative posts themselves, and those exposed to fewer positive words made fewer positive posts. Similarly, a study of YouTube viewers who watched positive videos experienced more positive emotions; the same held true for negative posts. Important learning, I'd say.

Though the book can be somewhat dense and technical, it's worth having on your shelf as a reference, if not to read cover to cover.

Michael Becker is a Westport attorney mediator/individual & couples counselor who holds a law degree, a Master's Degree in marriage and family therapy, and a Bachelor's Degree in accounting. 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 Nonadversarial Divorce, and a James W. Cooper Fellow of the CT Bar Foundation.