

Yes, you can win by hitting singles

Consider what these numbers from the U.S. Census Bureau say about changing American families and households:

95.7 million — Number of unmarried and single Americans. This group comprises 43% of all U.S. residents age 15 and over.

63% — Percentage of unmarried and single Americans who have never been married. Another 23% are divorced, and 14% are widowed.

52.6 million — Number of households maintained by unmarried men and women. These households compose 48% of households nationwide.

28.8 million — Number of people who live alone. These one-person households compose 26% of all U.S. households.

43% — Percentage of the opposite-sex, unmarried partner households that include children.



"Times have changed," says attorney Thomas F. Coleman, executive director of Unmarried America, a Glendale, California, organization that—among other activities—tries to gain equal treatment of single people, as employees and potential customers, by American institutions and companies.

Coleman further illustrates how much times have changed with this startling comparison:

10% — Percentage of American "Ozzie and Harriet" families: husband, wife, and one or more children living in the same household.

10% — Percentage of American adults who will never marry.

So what steps can a company take to be more singles friendly? Coleman mentions policy matters, of course—urging an end to pension formulas and "family leave" criteria, for example, that make married workers eligible for a benefit not available to others.

"Times have changed."

But he also asks employers to look in areas where more subtle married favoritism might be found. An example is company picnics, parties, and other social events: "If a married worker with three kids can bring four people to these events at no cost, then should not a single worker who lives with his parents and two siblings be able to bring four people also?"

Millions of single customers

Coleman would also like to end different treatment of unmarried and single people as customers. Example: auto insurance. "Many companies charge a marital status surcharge which increases the premiums for auto insurance significantly if the consumer is unmarried. One company that discontinued this is AAA of Southern California."

Other areas of concern for singles as customers, Coleman says, are discounts extended to spouses of customers, but not to other relatives or unmarried partners of customers, and travel packages that charge a "singles supplement." In September, Britain's largest tour operator, Thomson, launched a "no supplements" trial to "make independent travel more attractive and flexible," according to a Thomson spokesperson.

Coleman says businesses can more effectively "reach out to unmarried consumers" if they allow employees or customers to choose who can receive a "family" discount through them, and if they make a segment of the company's marketing plan of direct interest to unmarried customers or potential customers.

In short, Coleman concludes, "Don't assume everyone is married or will marry and fit the traditional family model." ■

Fast follow-up: You can read about Unmarried America's "Singles-Friendly Workplace Campaign" at www.unmarriedamerica.org.

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