

Singles Snubbed, from pg. 5

The researcher says that she's "not so big on us versus them. We're all in this together and we all have responsibilities and things we enjoy doing. It's good for employees to have a vibrant life outside of work that renews them--and good for the organization, too."

Some 40 percent of the workforce is unmarried, according to estimates by Thomas Coleman, an attorney and executive director of the 1,300-member American Association for Single People, a nonprofit organization based in Glendale, Calif. Coleman's definition of "single" is "anybody who's not legally married."

I asked the director, who is single and lives with a domestic partner, if single people are getting short shrift when it comes to flexible hours and work/life benefits.

"Big time," he replied. "Workers who don't have children or a legal spouse literally are being cheated by employers when it comes to benefits and other workplace policies. It can add up to thousands of dollars a year and is reflected in health-care policies, child-care deductions and even retirement. It's as if you fit the right lifestyle--married with children--you'll be rewarded."

Coleman advocates benefits plans that are on a cafeteria basis. "Let employees choose what they want to do."

As for flexible working hours, he encourages recognizing that even if you don't have children, you may be responsible for elderly parents or have interests you want to pursue. "But we're making progress," the attorney said. "Things are changing."

Employers, too, are aware of the resentment some singles feel. "Companies are inviting backlash if they don't look carefully at their employee demographics," said Richard Federico, vice president and work/life practice leader at The Segal Co., a benefits consulting firm based in New York. "But many benefits today are for everyone: fitness, recreation, tuition reimbursement, financial and estate planning, elder care and volunteer time off."

Federico has a solution to this problem. "The point I always make to employers is: Do some research," he said. "Just ask employees what their needs are. **AA**

University Study, from pg. 5

consultant, when unmarried employees were expected to travel away from home more often than the married ones.

The TU team is in phase one of the study that calls for 30 to 40 interviews of a diverse group of singles, including anyone who is not married -- with or without children and living alone or with another person.

"From these interviews, the team hopes to get a snapshot of the single lifestyle: who lives it, how they live it and how they work in it," Casper said. They will then use this information to study hundreds of singles regarding their work life, nonwork life, how one affects the other and how they feel about it all.

– Does the company view an employee's longtime live-in partner differently from a spouse?

– Are holidays worked equally by all employees regardless of their family makeup?

– If a parent can work his or her schedule around a child, can a single do the same for a pet or an outside activity?

"Three people doing the same job should get the same pay, but they're not because one employee is getting benefits for their spouse and another is not getting benefits for their domestic partner or adult child."

The American Association for Single People recently headed a less scientific study to learn how the Fortune 500 companies treated unmarried employees. The advocacy organization sent a questionnaire to the human resources department of each company but received just 12 responses.

Next year, AASP plans to survey the same companies again, this time using simpler methods. The group focuses on the rights of unmarried people in all areas of life, but work is a major one, said AASP Executive Director Thomas F. Coleman.

He said bosses are more likely to ask

the single, childless employees to work overtime and cover holiday shifts because they tend to think their outside lives are less demanding.

But employee-sponsored benefits like insurance and retirement really cheat singles, he said, because benefits cost 25 to 30 percent of an employee's pay.

"Companies have shifted from pay to benefits; the pay is taxable and the benefits aren't," Coleman said.

"Three people doing the same job should get the same pay, but they're not because one employee is getting benefits for their spouse and another is not getting benefits for their domestic partner or adult child. The rallying cry is equal pay for equal work."

Even if the change is slow, many companies are moving in the right direction. Some made employee perks for singles and marrieds by changing family-friendly programs to work-life programs and allowing employees to tailor their benefits to their personal needs.

Of the dozen Fortune 500 companies that responded to the AASP survey, half include the needs of single people in their diversity programs and more than half provide health and dental benefits for a domestic partner. It's a start, Coleman said.

"We're not anti-family. We're not anti-children. We're not anti-marriage," he said.

"We don't want to take benefits away from anyone. We just believe in equal pay for equal work based on the principles of merit and productivity. **AA**

Setting Priorities, from pg. 1

Every governor should look to New York's plan as a model of inclusion.

Our new Director of Development, Candace Kavanagh, is working hard to create a group health plan for AASP members. Wouldn't that be terrific?

By focusing our priorities in three key areas – taxes, health care, and employee benefits – we can do the most good for the greatest number of unmarried Americans.

We are also launching a new service this month – Advice and Resources – which our members should find helpful. **AA**