



IMHO: A Hallmark Holiday?

I've always had a certain ambivalence about what are generally termed "Hallmark holidays." You know the ones I'm talking about - the ones that seem crafted for the sole purpose of generating sales for greeting card sellers.

Of course, after a while you no longer question their existence - and if one still struggles to remember exactly when "Grandparent's Day" is, well, we've pretty much got Mother's Day, Father's Day, and Valentine's Day down to a science.

Regardless, I've never really been comfortable with ones like Secretary's Day (now Administrative Professionals Day) and Bosses' Day. I remember once, years ago, when I was part of a large department that had many "admins," all with overlapping coverage responsibilities. The fact was, none of them could remotely have been considered to be anything like a "secretary" to me, or any one manager in particular. To me, they were simply part of the team that, like the rest of us, had a job to do, and did it. That didn't mean we could ignore Administrative Professionals Day, of course. But since there were so many of them, and since we didn't want to upset the apple cart, the department decided to get everyone the same, relatively innocuous IMHO, "gift." All of which led me, in a moment of frustration with the process, to wonder aloud why we even had to bother.

At that point, a good friend and co-manager reminded me, "Because, even if we should be thinking about it every day of the year, it gives us another opportunity on that one day to pay attention to people we often take for granted." A point that was driven home to me again on Administrative Professionals Day that year when three separate admins sought me out to thank me for that gift that I had thought was "relatively innocuous."

For the past several years, the day after Labor Day has been designated 401(k) Day (aside from the traditional association of the day with labor/workers, the Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA) was signed into law by then-President Ford on the day after Labor Day, 1974). Unfortunately, for much of my professional career, 401(k) Day seemed like one of those "Hallmark holidays" - a day on the calendar that was entirely too close to a three-day weekend for any practical application.

Readers of this publication are all too aware of the challenges that confront our nation's retirement savings system. That familiarity perhaps makes it too easy to dismiss the opportunity that an occasion like 401(k) Day represents for a special focus. Sure, we're talking about these issues every day - but as that friend reminded me long ago, even a Hallmark holiday can provide an opportunity to pay attention to the people - and things - we often take for granted, even though we shouldn't.

Let's take advantage of the "occasion." And while we're at it, remember that the reasons behind 401(k) Day apply to 457, 403(b), 401(a), and all participant savings accounts in general...

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