

Reader's Guide: The powerful duo of habit and precedent can overshadow definitions. Changing Father's Day to a Saturday in October illustrates a potential Type II improvement by altering the application of a firmly entrenched definition. (1,300 words) Other definitions: Mother's Day, Presidents Day, Washington's Birthday, Memorial Day and Columbus Day.

First Definitions Prevail - Father's Day Observance in America

Father's Day came into prominence in the United States in reaction to the growing popularity of Mother's Day. Its origins go back to 1910. June was selected simply because the father of a determined American woman by the name of Sonora Dodd happened to be born in that month. Father's Day was recognized by a Joint Resolution of Congress in 1956. In 1972, President Richard Nixon established a permanent national observance date. The third Sunday in June was selected to celebrate fatherhood.

June was selected for Father's Day because that was the birth month of the father of a determined Spokane, Washington woman named Sonora Dodd.

A Sunday was chosen by the Federal Government it seems for three primary reasons. First, Mother's Day was already celebrated on a Sunday and that seemed to be working well. Second, the original celebrations were marked by sermons in church and third, that was just the way it had always been done. It is doubtful that any other day was even considered and besides, Ms. Dodd was a very Christian lady.

Father's Day is now celebrated around the world. Many countries including Canada, France, the United Kingdom, Argentina, India and Japan celebrate on the same Sunday as the United States. However, Spain and Portugal will observe Father's Day in 2009 on a Wednesday in March; the Scandinavia countries celebrate in November while Germany has no celebration at all though they do have a couple of holidays where men are recognized. Denmark and Korea chose different Thursdays in May and early June, 2009 respectively while in Taiwan the choice will be a Friday in August. It seems not everyone is still concerned about when Ms. Dodd's father just happened to be born.

Father's Day is celebrated worldwide. In 2009, for example, Spain and Portugal will observe it on a Wednesday in March while Taiwan chose a Friday in August.

Father's Day was begun in memory and gratitude by this Spokane, Washington daughter who thought that her father and all fathers should be honored with a special day just like we honor our mothers on Mother's Day. Contrary to urban myth, there is no evidence that Hallmark and the other greeting card companies played any role at all in the establishment of Father's Day. The

fact that June is a poor performing retail sales month at the end of the second fiscal quarter was also not a factor. Like many decisions, it simply happened with little, if any, forethought, and then once done, precedent prevailed.

**Father's Day happened with little forethought and then precedent prevailed.
Contrary to urban myth, there is no evidence that Hallmark was a factor at all.**

If we could take a *blank sheet* approach to Father's Day what would be done differently? Many believe that a special observance is unnecessary. It is my contention, however, that a simple change in date would be an exceptional first step toward remedying several of the structural weaknesses in the institution of American fatherhood. Without exploring those gaps in detail, let's instead focus on the advantages of shifting Father's Day to the first Saturday in October or some similar date.

The most significant advantage to shifting Father's Day in the United States to the fall would be that it would become a greater topic of interest, particularly in our elementary schools. It is not just that this would put Father's Day on a more equal stature with Mother's Day, which by happenstance is already celebrated during the normal school year. It would more importantly encourage fathers to become further involved in their children's early education at the beginning of a school year through classroom events, projects and father-related homework assignments.

The most significant advantage to shifting Father's Day to October would be that it would become a greater topic of interest, particularly in US elementary schools.

Saturdays are more ideal for fathers and particularly in October. What truly matters most is that children spend time with dad and the more memorable the better. Let's face it, June also just doesn't have as many opportunities for memorable days with dad nor do Sundays for that matter. Forgive my generalities and opinions, but for most mothers a Sunday without cooking, handmade gifts from school and a flower for those who attend church is quite a remarkable day. These are things that just don't float a dad's boat.

The best memories are when both parent and child have something unforgettable and positive to share. In contrast with late June, early October in North America has a multitude of additional and tantalizing choices. These range from outdoor activities like football to hunting to baseball playoffs; special cultural events at the beginning of the traditional performance seasons for music, dance and the arts; fall is also the peak season for festivals and public gatherings; and you simply can't beat the weather for day trips or a weekend get away with the family. Moms like a day off, however, dads respond best to a day on with the kids. It is that simple.

One further advantage to shifting to a Saturday observance is that church going families would still have father's recognized at Sunday services. They and their kids would get a double dip! It

would also give many adult children two chances – Saturday or Sunday - to bring the extended family together to celebrate fatherhood.

Shifting Father’s Day would favorably increase its economic impact. The influence on Fatherhood itself would also be immeasurably positive!

A shift of Father’s Day into October would also favorably increase its economic impact as well as governmental tax revenues. It is really rather straightforward. The more enticing the choices of activities to do, the more money we will spend both incrementally and overall on Father’s Day.

So why do I believe that this simple change would be a first step toward improving fatherhood. Beyond the adage, timing is everything; it would raise America’s awareness of and increase formal education on the important role of fathers beginning at an early age. It would also result in many more opportunities for fatherhood to be recognized and more importantly to be improved upon by a multitude of others.

Change can create additional and often unpredictable consequences. Historically, we tend to focus on the unintentional, potentially negative ones. However, a straightforward shift of the date for celebrating Father’s Day would result in numerous additional positive consequences. An early October Father’s Day would, at least during the first year of adoption, also open up more discussion on the entire definition of fatherhood itself. In short, good things would indelibly flow from the inevitable increase in national awareness around the role of fathers.

We have changed federal holiday dates in the past and with little opposition.

We have changed holidays in the past. Most recently, in 1968, the 90th Congress decided to create a uniform system of federal Monday holidays, so they voted to shift three existing holidays to Mondays. The law took effect in 1971. As a result, Washington's Birthday holiday was changed from February 22nd to the third Monday in February. Congress adamantly did not want to call this President’s Day, but that is what has occurred. Legally it is still on the Federal calendar as Washington’s Birthday. This change, however, shifted the focus from Washington and Lincoln, who also had a February birthday, to all past Presidents. Memorial Day and Columbus Day were also shifted to Mondays and seemingly without a blip.

If Ms. Dodd’s father had only been born in October we would already be celebrating Father’s Day then and maybe Halloween would not be such a big deal. Just think about what goes on in elementary schools across America at the very end of October; doesn’t fatherhood deserve at least equal footing?

**This is about overcoming the power of first decisions and initial definitions.
Ultimately both fathers and their families the world over could benefit.**

Ms. Sonora Dodd was the undisputed “mother” of Father’s Day and that will never change. It is, however, for me all about overcoming the power of the first decisions and the initial definitions that she laid down. Times change and this is one change in the application of a definition that would have very little downside. It is definitely worth a second look! Wouldn’t it be interesting to see what other countries and governments decide to do in response to a change of date for America’s Father’s Day celebrations to early October? This would be one logical and doable step toward improving the overall impact of fatherhood. Ultimately both fathers and their families the world over will benefit.

Copyright B. Helton 2008