

Commitment: The Answer to the Middle's Questions on Marriage for Gay Couples



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National polls now indicate that a majority of Americans support allowing gay couples to marry. We have seen an unprecedented shift on the issue, with support doubling in just 15 years. But these gains are not yet locked in — a sizable chunk of the support is still susceptible to the arguments of marriage opponents. Below are the three lessons to heed when speaking to the middle on marriage.

Lesson #1: For the middle, marriage = commitment.

When asked “What does marriage mean to you?” they volunteered words like “commitment,” “responsibility,” “fidelity,” and “a big step.” The most frequently cited description of marriage was “a lifetime commitment between two people through good times and bad.”

Lesson #2: The middle isn't yet clear on why gay couples want to marry.

When asked why “couples like you” might want to get married, they overwhelmingly said “to publicly acknowledge their love and commitment to each other.” But when asked why gay couples might want to get married, just as many people said “for rights and benefits, like tax advantages, hospital visitation, or sharing a spouse’s pension.” Over 3/5ths of those who thought gay couples wanted to marry for rights and benefits opposed allowing them to do so, but more than 3/5ths of those who thought gay couples wanted to marry for commitment supported it.

Lesson #3: The middle needs to hear about commitment, not rights.

The rights frame appeals to our base supporters, but to move the middle, we must convince them that gay couples want to

marry for similar reasons that other couples do —
to make a public promise of love and commitment.

The Message

Gay and lesbian couples who are truly committed to each other want similar things from marriage as the rest of us — to build a life together based on love and commitment, staying together through thick and thin. If a couple is willing to stand up in front of family and friends and make a lifetime promise of fidelity to each other, it's not for us to judge, or to deny them that opportunity.

For more information about Third Way or the Commitment Campaign, please visit our website at www.thirdway.org/commitment.

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