

Why Get Married?

LET'S GIVE 'EM SOMETHING TO TALK ABOUT

The last time you tried to explain why you support marriage equality, did you mention civil rights? Justice? Equal access to benefits? Did you call it "gay marriage?"

Wrong, wrong, wrong and *waay* wrong! Who knew?

I always thought the "liberty and justice for all" argument was a pretty good one. I mean our Constitution does guarantee equal justice under the law. But we can talk about equal rights and justice till we're lavender-blue in the face — it just turns people off. At least the still-undecided voters. Dang.

Luckily, the do's and don'ts of persuading people to support our freedom to marry are all laid out in a little pamphlet that I picked up recently. Based on research from the National Freedom to Marry campaign, it explains what's needed to overturn "one man-one woman" constitutional amendments and win the freedom to marry for all.

We need to start conversations about why marriage matters to us, to share our love stories with friends, families, neighbors — pretty much anyone who will listen.

But we have to avoid bad buzzwords. In focus groups, "gay marriage" for example, conjures up some weird faux-marriage idea nothing like the "regular" marriage everyone understands. We must talk about why loving, committed couples want to marry. Love, commitment, marriage. People get that.

Forget demanding equal entitlement to Social Security, survivor rights and spousal insurance. Of course we want equal rights, but saying gay and lesbian couples deserve the same benefits as hetero married couples causes otherwise reasonable

folks to slip into a bizarre "special rights" fantasy and shut down. They see gay people's desire for equal marriage benefits as some kind of scam, as if we only want to get married for the bennies. Like we're all Kardashians or something.

People need to hear how our desires are similar to theirs. According to the pamphlet, "When Americans understand that same-sex couples want to make a lifelong commitment to the person they love, and marry them in order to care for and protect one another, their level of support increases greatly."

It's pretty simple. Instead of our outrage (which, granted, is totally righteous) at unjust and unequal laws, our love and commitment persuades undecided voters. Research shows that 20 to 30 percent of Americans continue to waver in their position on gay people and marriage. These folks are not the opposition. They're not the hateful homophobes who use lies and scare tactics (and millions of Catholic and Mormon church dollars) to perpetuate anti-gay stereotypes and spook people with all manners of imaginary horrors. Not *them*.

These 20 to 30 percent of good people, the pamphlet says, have sincere concerns and need help to push past their discomfort and resolve their conflicts. Our conversations with these folks is what will win majority support for the freedom to marry.

Field testing proves that effective conversations emphasize, very simply, love and commitment. Surprise, surprise. When two men or two women want to marry each other, it's for, big shocker, pretty much the same reasons anyone wants to get married. Love. Commitment. Sharing the ups and downs of life. Taking care of each other. Growing old together. All that basic stuff. That's all there is to it. Easy peasy.

Now start talking!

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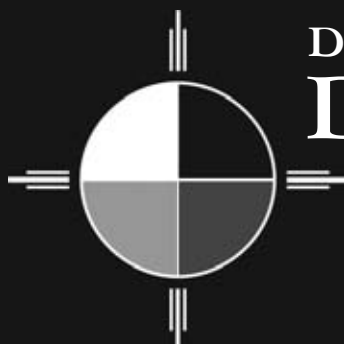
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