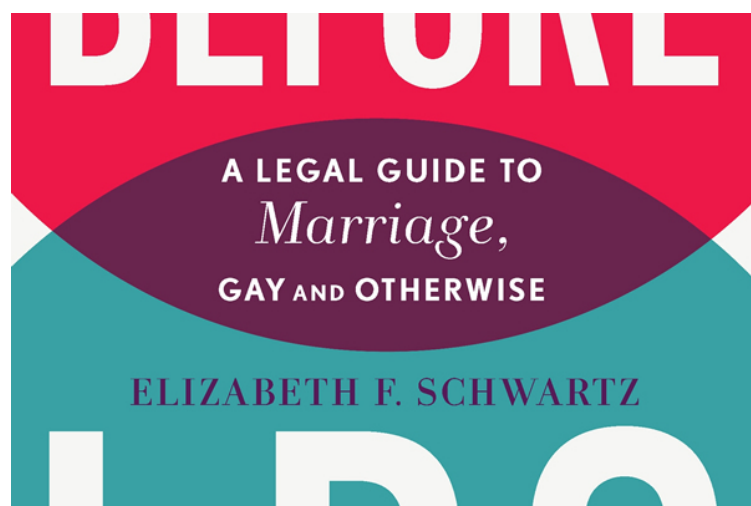


January 19, 2017 at 3:10 pm EST | by Terri Schlichenmeyer

## Guide to gay marriage



(Image courtesy The New Press)

**'Before I Do'**

By Elizabeth F. Schwartz, afterword by Jim Obergefell

The New Press

\$14.95

240 pages

The box was too small for a toaster.

There was no pony in there, no new car, not even a stuffed animal. The box was too small for all that, but it held so much more: dreams, ideas, happiness, congratulations. And if you're lucky, your wise new fiancé tucked "[Before I Do](#)" by Elizabeth F. Schwartz in the box with your beautiful engagement ring.

So you put a ring on it, made the proposal, and now you've got a wedding to plan. It's all quite exciting, but slow down a minute. If you've grown up thinking that this day would never come, then you might not've thought about what marriage entails.

"LGBT people," says Schwartz, "have not lived in a world with premarital guidance for LGBT couples. We have suffered systemic exclusion."

Just because you can be married now is no reason that you should, she points out. Yes, you're in love, and yes, you've been together forever, but now's the time to be sure you

know exactly what you're in for. That starts by asking yourselves a series of difficult but important questions.

Once you've gotten that (perhaps uncomfortable) part out of the way, be sure that any past relationships are completely and legally finished and "do not create confusion with multiple statuses with multiple people." Know what paperwork you need in order to proceed and what questions you'll be asked as you're filling it out.

This pre-wedding period is a good time to talk to a financial expert, a tax consultant and a lawyer. Don't trust word-of-mouth to protect your finances; the laws in your state may horrify you if wedded bliss goes bust. Talk about debt: how much each of you has and how you perceive it. Educate yourself on insurance coverage, asset protection, pre-nups and estate planning.

And if all this preparation makes you start to think that maybe marriage isn't such a good idea after all, Schwartz (who plans a Feb. 15 D.C. [appearance](#)) says it's OK. There are valid reasons for not taking the plunge and there are alternatives. One of them may be a much better fit for you.

Getting engaged is an exciting time. Putting the brakes on everything isn't the most romantic notion, but it's maybe the most prudent. "Before I Do" explains why.

Though she says her advice in this book is appropriate for anyone, author Elizabeth F. Schwartz focuses more on gay and lesbian couples, as well as trans individuals and their prospective spouses. She does so, in part, because she feels that they've only seen marriage "on the fringes."

That somewhat sets this book apart from the thousands of other wedding-planner books on bookshelves; what really makes it different, however, is that Schwartz admits her no-nonsense words may talk prospective brides and grooms out of having a wedding. Readers who might've somehow taken marriage lightly before will absolutely be convinced otherwise.

"Failure to plan has terrible consequences," says Schwartz, and this book erases that omission. Read "Before I Do," though, and rest assured that you can toast one another smarter.

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BEFORE I DO	ELIZABETH F. SCHWARTZ	JIM OBERGEFELL
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**Terri Schlichenmeyer**