



**NATIONAL MARRIAGE WEEK RUNS FROM 11-17 MAY 2020**

## **Commit or Quit**

*The Two-Year Rule and Other Rules for Romance*

Harry Benson

The social and sexual revolution of the last 50 years - with the advent of the contraceptive pill – may have liberated women from unplanned pregnancy... but has it also liberated men (in particular) from the need to commit?

- Couples need to have a serious conversation about their future 2-3 years into their relationship – and decide whether to ‘commit or quit’, rather than letting their relationship drift.
- Living together without discussing the future can lead to assumption, ambiguity and asymmetry.
- Family breakdown in the UK is at a record high – with unmarried parents statistically much more likely to split up than married parents. Family stability / breakdown has a direct impact on teenage wellbeing and mental health.
- ‘Is he marriageable?’ and ‘Does he fight for you?’ Harry’s key rules for romance for his daughters (tried, tested and approved by all 4 of them!).
- 4 bad habits which destroy relationships – and how to overcome them.

These are just a few of the findings and issues explored in Harry Benson’s new book, **Commit or Quit: The Two-Year Rule and Other Rules for Romance**, which follows on from his best-selling book, **What Mums Want (And Dads Need to Know)**. Described as ‘a must read for anyone living together’ (Professor Galena Rhoades, University of Denver), **Commit or Quit** is the first book to be published on cohabiting and commitment in the UK.

**Commit or Quit** takes as its focus the 3 million people in the UK who are currently cohabiting but not married – and the many couples who are likely to follow this path in the future. Harry traces the social and sexual revolution which has taken place over the last 50 years or so, with the advent of the contraceptive pill, and how this has thrown the previously accepted ‘order’ of commitment -> marriage -> living together -> sex -> children up in the air, making marriage a more ‘optional’ part of the process. While women have been liberated to some extent from unplanned pregnancies as a result of this, Harry argues that men in particular have also been liberated from the need to commit to relationships long-term. Drawing on various data, he explores how family stability, the likeliness of splitting up, and children’s mental health are affected when parents are married or unmarried. He examines the dangers of assumption, ambiguity and/or asymmetry for couples who are cohabiting, and how dedication (internal bonds that bind them together as a couple) and constraints (external bonds that make it harder to leave) can make it easy for couples to ‘slide rather than decide’ in terms of cohabitation, having children, etc. Based on various research and opinion polls (*see page 2 for more details*), Harry urges couples to have a serious conversation about their future 2 years into their relationship – the ‘two year rule’ of the subtitle.

Harry also introduces us to the two ‘rules for romance’ which his four daughters have adopted - prompted by him - and which have influenced their choices in terms of dating and marriage. These two rules - ‘is he marriageable?’ and ‘does he fight for you?’ - are intended to help people to ‘choose well’ when it comes to decisions about relationships. In addition, Harry explores the ‘STOP signs’ – four bad habits that can destroy relationships (Scoring Points, Thinking the Worst, Opting Out, Putting Down) - and how to overcome them. These are relevant for couples of all ages, whether married or unmarried, to help them to find ways to handle the differences between them. The book draws throughout on many real-life stories of couples, as well as extensive data from UK and international research on marriage and relationships.

**About the author:** Harry Benson is one of Britain's leading champions for marriage. As research director for Marriage Foundation, his findings are routinely cited in the media and by politicians and have made front page news on several occasions. Harry has spent the last 20 years researching, writing and teaching about marriage and family. Harry's book **What Mums Want (And Dads Need to Know)** - co-authored with his wife Kate – reached number 11 on the Amazon charts, and shared the story of Harry and Kate’s back-from-the-brink experience of marriage. Harry and Kate have now been married for 33 years and have 6 children.

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Research cited in **Commit or Quit** includes the following:

- **NEW FOR THIS BOOK** A survey of 2000 adults which found that men are more likely to say they want to get married in their 30s than in their 20s. The men interviewed were slightly more likely than women to say they wanted to get married in their 30s, but 33% less likely than women to say they wanted to get married in their 20s.
- **NEW FOR THIS BOOK** British Household Survey, which looked at 25,000 UK unmarried cohabiting couples between 1980 and 2000. This found that, the longer couples live together without getting married, the less likely they are to ever get married. 5 out of 10 couples who have lived together for a year will get married at some point; however, of couples who have cohabited for 10 years without marrying, only 3 out of 10 will end up getting married.
- **NEW FOR THIS BOOK** Online survey of 317 people, in which 88% agreed that couples having a serious discussion about the future was very important, and 80% said that this should happen 2-3 years into their relationship.
- 1200 men and women aged 18-35 in the US who are unmarried and in a relationship who were interviewed about how the various aspects of commitment (particularly dedication and constraints – see page 1) affected the likelihood of young couples staying together over an 8 month period.
- UK Relate survey which found that 15% of those in unmarried relationships were worried that their partner was not as committed as them (compared to 6% of those in married relationships).
- Marriage Foundation ‘Understanding society’ study, which interviewed 1783 UK mums. This found that 7-8 out of 10 married parents stay together while bringing up their children, compared to 3 out of 10 unmarried parents who stay together during this time. It also found that less than 50% of mums who had married after having children were still with their partner.
- Millennium Cohort Study, which surveyed 18,000 parents with children born in 2000 or 2001. This found that 73% of the married couples and 47% of the unmarried cohabiting couples planned their child’s birth, and that these ‘planners’ seemed happier with their relationship after the birth of their baby than those who had not planned. By the time their child was 3 years old, 31% of the couples who had not planned to have a baby had split up, as opposed to 8% of the ‘planners’; by the time their child was 14 years old, 45% of the couples who had not planned to have a baby had split up, as opposed to 24% of the ‘planners’.
- Research for **What Mums Want** in which a survey of 300 mums found that kindness, being interested in their partner and being a friend were the top 3 traits that they wanted in a partner.

### **Praise for *Commit or Quit*:**

“Harry Benson succeeds in taking what many people see as restrictive about the commitment of marriage and replacing it with sound and liberating truths about its benefits.” **Nicky and Sila Lee, Founders of The Marriage Course**

“A life-changing read for anyone looking for reliable love! This compact book is full of wisdom based on robust research and real-life experiences. It has the potential to redirect the course of couple relationships away from ambiguity and into committed, successful marriages in a modern era.” **Michaela Hyde, Executive Director, Marriage Foundation**

“Harry synthesizes current research and theory to offer practical, contemporary advice for those in modern relationships. This book is a must read for anyone living together.” **Professor Galena Rhoades, University of Denver**

“All too many couples drift into cohabitation without a plan or a clear sense of their future. This is a mistake, as couples who drift into cohabitation and then marriage are much more likely to end up unhappy and divorced. *Commit or Quit* offers a better path for men and women whose ultimate aim is a stable and happy marriage. Cohabiting men and women who would like to marry should definitely read this book.” **Bradford Wilcox, Department of Sociology, University of Virginia**

“*Commit or Quit* comes with a simple message to all couples to have a ‘forever conversation’. This is delivered alongside an avalanche of evidence from Harry Benson who sets out why the intentionality around marriage makes a difference to the likely longevity of a relationship. This isn’t just a relationship self-help guide – although every young man should read it – this book has implications for governments too. The more we strengthen couple relationships the less family breakdown and human misery we will see around us.” **Frank Young, Head of Family Policy, Centre for Social Justice**