

What They Don't Tell You in Your Wedding Planner

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Most of the tactical information I could share with you regarding planning a wedding can already be found in the numerous planners that are on the market. Find one that fits your needs and put it to work! It'll be a close companion by the date of the wedding and will help to keep you organized with the myriad of details that you have ahead of you. Lighten it by tearing out sections that don't pertain to your type of wedding.

What I'd like to share with you are some details that you probably won't find in any of the planners - little tidbits of information that I've amassed over the years as I've had the delightful privilege of working with brides and grooms and their families. Since the information herein is as varied as the event, allow me to just give you random thoughts. . .

Many of the rules that were considered strict etiquette even 20 years ago are now pretty flexible for today's weddings. As couples personalize their wedding, rules like not wearing a formal gown for a second marriage or guests not wearing black are no longer absolutes.

Two rules regarding invitations still hold, however, and should not be broken. First, even with the convenience of today's computers, invitations should *always* be hand addressed. If you don't have time to do the invitations yourself, ask for help, shrink the list, or hire them out. The second is an even worse misstep: *never* allude to gifts anywhere in your invitation. To state where you are registered or to request cash instead of a gift assumes an expectation, and it's a firm rule that you just don't do it. Be sure to let your family, close friends and a co-worker know where you are registered so they are prepared to answer when asked, but do not include it in the wedding invitation. It *is* acceptable to include them for showers, but not for the wedding. Now, let's talk about the wedding itself. . .

Just like everything else in life, communication is a critical key in planning a wedding. Be sure to talk *specifics* with everyone. Don't assume that just because you're working with a talented musician that s/he will already know the specific version of a song that you want. Remember, there's no such thing as a stupid question. Ask clarifying questions and communicate your wishes clearly to all parties involved. You'll be glad you did!

Another key to making a wedding work is synchronizing things well; punctuality is a *definite* key to wedding success. Ask someone who's responsible to go by and pick up the bridesmaid or groomsman who is chronically late!

When trying to decide what time of day to schedule your wedding, a major factor to consider is what food you will serve. If people attend an 11:30 a.m. or a 4:30 p.m. wedding, they're going to expect to be fed a full meal afterward. For a 1:30 or 2:30 wedding, folks will usually be satisfied with just cake and punch, nuts and mints. If your budget is tight, food is not the place I encourage you to spend money. If you don't have the money to feed guests (usually the biggest chunk of the wedding budget), don't feel compelled to have to. . . just use common sense in deciding what time of day to hold the ceremony. I've seen some couples go thousands of dollars into debt and later wished they'd kept it more affordable.

Weddings don't have to cost a lot of money to have a lot of meaning. In fact, the less money a couple has for a wedding, the more creative they tend to be. One of the most beautiful receptions I've ever seen was a winter wedding where free-standing fresh white tree branches were used as centerpieces, and a creative bride hung tiny glass heart ornaments with a Scripture verse on the branches; artificial snow and reflective confetti were spread beneath. Votive candles scattered about on the table just outside the branches completed the picture. Everyone agreed - it was breathtaking! . . .and *very* affordable.

After hearing about how to save money, allow me to swing that pendulum the other way and say that if you are going to splurge on one part of your wedding, get the very best photographer that you can afford. The day after the wedding the beautiful cake will have been devoured, the food will be gone, and those once-gorgeous flowers will be brown and droopy. Your pictures, however, can be there when you celebrate your 50th anniversary! Probably the greatest pain I've heard regarding weddings is from couples who've been disheartened by the photographer they chose. "We sure wish we'd spent a little bit more and gotten the good one - but now it's too late!" *Don't let this happen to you.*

Speaking of photographers, how do you choose a good one? It's important to see a few albums by the one you're considering. Almost anyone can have a shop with a few gorgeous portraits on the wall - but is that what you want from your wedding day, just one or two great shots? A good photographer should have several fairly current albums for you to look at. As you peruse them, put yourself in the place of the people in the album because a photographer generally goes by the same formula. Some will take traditional poses, while others will lean to more eclectic shots. The poses you see in their albums are close to what you'll get - that's their particular formula. Can you see yourselves in those shots?

Your photographer should provide you with a list of proposed shots. The standard list of shots (back of gown, bride with mom fixing veil, groom shaking hands with dad, etc.) should be listed, as well as a place for you to give information such as whether you have one set of grandparents or eight; s/he will decide how much time needed based on your answers. If you are expecting a special person that you want to be sure to be photographed with (former teacher, grade school best friend, etc.), make sure you put that on the list. Most photographers will agree to *a couple* of additional shots the day of the wedding, but remember - you are fitting into their formula and they know how much time it will take - so don't give them many surprises that day.

Many couples feel that having their wedding at a church is important even if they don't attend one on a regular basis. Check in your area until you find one that welcomes guests, and be sure to ask what their counseling requirements are. Once you have booked a church, keep in mind that *something* in you desired to have your ceremony in this particular setting and select your music with that in mind. A church wedding is first and foremost a worship ceremony, so allow the church staff to lead you in this process.

If you decide to include children in your wedding party, their parent(s) should be seated in one of the front few pews. Kids can add a delightful touch to the service - but ones who aren't behaving can be a major drawback! I attended a wedding once where the young flower girl needed a bathroom in the worst kind of way. The parents ignored her signals for the entire ceremony; it was a disturbance this bride could have easily avoided. One way to

prevent this is to allow the children to be a part of the processional and stand up front for a little while, then have them seated at the same time that the bride's escort (whoever gives her away) is seated. This is a great compromise and I've never seen it fail.

Be sure to appoint someone to take care of the items after the ceremony like your unity candle, guest book, etc. Ask someone that you trust, then direct them as to what to do with the items (take them to the reception to be used, keep them until after you're back from the honeymoon, etc.). Be sure this person checks the rooms where the wedding party dressed for any items that might have been left behind. If you'll have personal items at the reception (grandma's cake knife, etc.), make arrangements for those as well.

Have someone prelight the candles that will be used during the ceremony, as a prelit candle is much more dependable. Be sure to use *plain* tapers for the two side candles in the unity candle trio; the pretty ones with pearls and tulle are fire hazards. Decorations on the center candle are fine, however, as it will only burn down a little bit.

A quick note about brides who wear a veil: anyone who puts his/her arm around the bride should use care to tuck his/her arm under the veil. A bride who's had her head jerked back a few times is soon in a lot of pain! Pass the word so at least the wedding party knows.

Trying to select a place for ordering the tuxes? Be sure to choose a place that warehouses tuxes locally. If one of the men tries his tux on either Thursday or Friday and it doesn't fit, will they replace it prior to the wedding? If not, keep shopping and find a store that will take great care of your wedding party. Now back to the wedding itself. . .

Couples today are finding the great advantages of releasing the pews themselves instead of having the ushers do so. If you haven't seen the process, it works like this: the ceremony ends, the bride and groom and wedding party leave, then the bride and groom come back in. They approach their parents (bride's side first), hug them, then the parents and other folks in the first pew walk back the aisle; the bride and groom approach the second pew and release them, then continue back and forth until they have greeted all the guests.

There are a couple of strengths in using the pew release rather than having a receiving line. First, people don't tend to chat as long when everyone in the church is watching them, so the time investment is usually much shorter. You still are given a moment with everyone there and are able to thank each of them for coming to the wedding. Second, the main reason most folks are at the wedding is to watch the bride and groom - not the back of the heads of the people in front of them as they await their turn for the receiving line. The pew release allows this, and is one of the best things to happen to weddings in recent history.

One question that I am frequently asked is who to include for the rehearsal dinner. The answer is: anyone who is expected to attend the rehearsal, and the immediate family of the bride and the groom. The pastor, musicians, etc. should be invited as well - but don't be hurt if they don't accept. This is a time for you and your family, so allow them the freedom to not attend. Any out-of-town relatives are also optional, but inviting them should be the decision of the dinner host (generally the groom's parents). The cost of meals other than rehearsal attendees should be covered by the person asking, not the host (once the host has approved their attendance). And make sure that you tell everyone *ahead of time* who will be invited to this rehearsal and dinner; most folks don't assume to be.

You know, the goal of many brides is to have the “perfect” wedding. However, we imperfect people don’t make for perfect weddings! Be ready to look upon any dilemmas as *personalizations* to your day. You can’t do anything else about it, so you might as well decide to be a bride with a beautiful disposition regardless of what transpires. Remember: *No matter what may happen, you’re probably going to be married at the end of the day.* It’s true. The florist may not show up, the guys may knock over the sound table when scrambling for the garter, or the cake may end up on the floor (I’ve seen all three!). . .but *you’ll still be married!* Should something go awry, remind yourself to find a way to be gracious, smile and say, “Oh, well, I’ll still be married!”



Now a few words about the marriage as well. . .

Let’s talk for just a moment about the two of you. The Golden Rule is a terrific rule to live by (*Do unto others as you would have them do unto you*); its ability to work is tested more in the marriage relationship than in any other. Always make it your goal to treat your spouse with respect. Years ago I heard the saying “There’s no place for sarcasm in a healthy marriage,” and I encourage you to practice that. Save the sarcasm for your buddies at work, if you must use it at all. If each of you will make a commitment to always be nicer to your spouse than you are to anyone else, you’ll have a great foundation for a terrific marriage.

Recognize that each of you had a life before the other one appeared on the scene. Assuming nothing, I encourage you at some point before the wedding day to hold each other’s hands, look into each other’s eyes and say this to your future spouse: “I forgive your past, whatever it is, and I want us to go forward from this day. Let me help you if you have any issues, but otherwise your past is past and we’re going to let go of it today.” *This can bring great healing!* Once it’s forgiven, remember that the past is an issue that is off limits and cannot be brought up later during a fight.

Allow me to remind you of something that you probably already know - that God created marriage and wants us to find joy and peace in that relationship. He gave us the Bible, a terrific source of wisdom into how to make that relationship work - an Owner’s Manual, of sorts! Love is a *daily* choice and one way to keep your vows to each other daily is to put Christ at the center of your relationship. I know you find it hard to believe today, but there will probably come a time when you will question why you ever married your spouse at all. If you are the kind of couple who allows God to be at the center of your marriage and practice the kind of love that you find in the Bible, you’ll have the abundant life that is promised in the Scriptures; He will help you work thru those times. Your marriage won’t be trouble-free, but God will provide for you. What more could you want from life?

One final bit of advice for your wedding and your marriage that I would like to share from my experience and from my heart is this: *enjoy the process.* Whether you’re knee-deep in wedding details or about to walk down the aisle, make sure to *be present* and enjoy the moment! Don’t be so frazzled by the details of the wedding that you forget to take time to thank the ones who are helping you with it. Don’t be so focused on not tripping that you forget to enjoy walking down that aisle. And, in your marriage, don’t be so caught up in the details of work and life that you forget to enjoy the person that you chose so carefully!

