



# The Wedding Planning Industry

## Learning Outcomes

- ✓ Identifying what marriage means in different religions
- ✓ Exploring wedding traditions in various countries
- ✓ Recognizing the role and the scope of wedding consultancy

## The Wedding Planning Industry

'Wed' actually comes from the Greek word meaning 'pledge.' This is very appropriate considering that's what a wedding ceremony actually is. When people wed they make a pledge to one another meant to last a lifetime.

The most accepted idea of marriage is a union between a woman and a man. An alternative concept describes it as a social affirmation of this union achieved through varying ceremonies and rituals. Another way to view marriage is as a system of roles which involve primary relationships. Indeed, marriage is often seen as a complex form of human relationships and one of great depth, the foundation of societies. It is usually sanctioned in a social setting as a religious or civil ceremony which authorises two people to form a sexual union. It is a bringing together of, not only two people, but also two families, or two tribes, sometimes two countries. Marriage is a powerful force and is not to be entered into lightly.

## The Concept of Marriage in Different Religions

### Marriage in Muslim Communities

Marriage is pretty much obligatory in Muslim communities and is viewed as one half of their faith, such is the importance it holds within the Muslim religion and another reason why it has to be declared publically. Muslim teachings discourage celibacy therefore marriage becomes even more important. Marriage in Islam is a formal and binding contract which is entered into between a woman and a man. It summarises the rights and responsibilities of both the bride and the groom. Divorce is permitted within Islam.

The features of Muslim marriages are: the acceptance of the marriage proposal by the potential bride, and the capabilities of the groom to enter into the marriage. A marriage in Islam is not valid if it comes with any legal complications. In some, but not all, Muslim communities, there is a preference for marriage between cousins.

### Marriage in Christian Communities

The Christian communities are numerous and found everywhere, but in the U.K. the two main denominations are Protestants and Catholics. The Protestants have many denominations and the hierarchy is limited within each denomination. The Catholic Church has only the one highest authority

On earth and that is the Pope. All their teachings must have the Pope's approval. In both these communities marriage is seen as a sacrament and divorce is not permitted (although there are

certain provisions today within the Protestant Church). A marriage can be declared null, however, if one of the spouses is already married and the first partner is still alive or if one of the partners is not of sound mind or impotent. This is a long and tedious road, however, and ultimately the Vatican must give approval for the nullification of the marriage. Mixed marriages (with other religions) are allowed in Catholicism but only if the Catholic spouse takes an oath to raise any children from the marriage as Catholics.

Divorce is allowed in the Protestant religion as is remarriage after a divorce. Consent must be gained from both parties before a divorce can occur. It must come freely from the other person, no coercion is allowed in any way.

## Marriage in Hindu Communities

In Hindu tradition marriage is considered a tradition (sanskara) as well as a religious sacrament. It is not seen as a contract. Marriage is seen as a holy union of souls, not just bodies. Only death can break the Hindu marriage bond.

## Marriage in Jewish Communities

In Jewish traditions both bride and groom come down the aisle with their parents. This is not done in any other religious ceremony. The bride and groom are married under a tent like formation called a chupah. It is intended as a symbol of the two people coming together and making a new home. It dates back to biblical times when Abraham married Sarah.

In Judaism, marriage is a contract also. The ceremony is conducted by a rabbi. After the ceremony many couples frame this contract called a ketubah and it is on display in their homes.

## Wedding Traditions

### Chinese Wedding Traditions

#### Red is the Colour of Weddings in China

For the Chinese, red is the central theme. Red signifies joy, love and prosperity and is used in many different ways in Chinese traditions. The bride is often dressed in red, the invitations are red, and envelopes for cash or boxes for presents are red. On the wedding day both the bride and groom's homes are decorated red.



### **Before the Chinese Wedding Day**

A bride-to-be in Chinese tradition will usually go into seclusion. She will do this with close friends. It is a symbolic gesture meant as a mourning period for losing her friends and family as she will go to her husband's family. Before the actual wedding, the family of the groom will bring wedding gifts to the bride's family home. They will all come in red boxes. In one box will be 'milk money' or 'uangsusu.' Other boxes will contain more personal gifts for the bride and this way all her personal belongings will already be in her groom's house on the wedding day. Three days prior to the wedding, the women from the bride's family will take gifts to the groom's house, including 'returns' all wrapped in red.

### **The Day of the Wedding Ceremony**

The Chinese are very careful about choosing wedding days. They go according to astrological signs. Custom dictates that the couple be married on the half-hour and not on the hour. It is considered starting a marriage on the 'upswing' as the clock hand will be moving up and not down.

The groom's parents will dress him on his wedding day and he will arrive at the bride's house on his way to the wedding place. The groom will be carrying cash gifts in red tissue paper for his bride's friends. This is like an exchange for letting her go. In some families the couple serve tea to their parents while kneeling. It is a gesture implying they are asking permission. The groom and his bride will go to the wedding site together.

### **Chinese Marriage Ceremony and Reception**

The bride and groom's immediate families will be at the ceremony. The bride will traditionally serve her in-laws tea after the ceremony but before the reception. Professional wedding photos are common after which they will attend the reception. It is a standing event and usually very elaborate.



An MC will usually make a speech and then the cake will be cut. It will be a huge cake of many layers. These layers are a symbol of a ladder that they will climb together. The couple feed each other cake, arms entwined. Then pieces are cut for their parents and grandparents. The couple feed them too. Music will accompany the event. People shake hands before leaving the reception area. In some cases, Chinese weddings will be extremely elaborate whereby guests will sit down to a 10 course meal, all with musical entertainment.

Chinese brides usually change outfits around three times at the reception.

## Indian Weddings

In India, money, sweets and eggs are part of the wedding theme. They are meant to symbolize prosperity, a sweet life, and fertility. The ceremony will include rituals to cast away evil spirits. Once the vows are over, the groom's father (or sometimes brother) will throw flower petals onto the couple. Indian grooms usually wear turbans which have veils in front covered in flowers.

Traditionally, the bride will wear a red and pink sari and have extravagant adornments of jewellery and henna. Her hands and feet will be painted with henna in lovely patterns. This will take place the day before the wedding itself. After the ceremony the bride will receive a special necklace which will signify she is now married.



## Indonesian Wedding Traditions

### Indonesian Engagement Etiquette

Engagements in Indonesia can last for years. In this time, the bride and groom's families will exchange gifts in order to strengthen the ties between them.

### Indonesian Wedding Ceremony

The wedding programme itself is an extremely important event. Not only close family and friends, but also people who are just slightly acquainted may be invited. Sometimes this comes to thousands of people. Most guests will not attend the ceremony but not showing up for the reception is seen as very rude.

### Wedding Reception Celebration

Often, an elaborate procession will take place all the way to the reception area. There will be long flower chains, professional dancers and of course, the family and guests will be waiting for the couple. Usually, the couple will greet every single guest individually before the reception can begin.



## Japanese Weddings

### Betrothal Ceremony

*Yuino* is the Japanese word for the betrothal ceremony. This is where gifts are exchanged symbolically between the two families. Popular gifts are a type of sea weed whose name can mean “child-bearing woman” and white hemp pieces which symbolize the couple growing old together, a folding fan which is opened to symbolize future growth and wealth. The main gift will be money, usually around \$5000 placed in a special envelope with silver and gold strings knotted tightly. Other gifts are delivered in decorative rice-paper envelopes.

### Sake-Sharing Ceremony

Traditionally, Japanese ceremonies are conducted in the Shinto tradition, but in the U.S. many Japanese weddings use the Buddhist ceremony. No matter which one the couple choose to use, most rituals will also have a sake-sharing tradition, called *san-san-kudo* which means ‘three’ ‘to deliver’ and ‘nine.’ Sake sharing dates back centuries and was a formal bond-creating ceremony. It uses 3 flat sake cups stacked on top of one another and the couple will take three sips from each cup. Then both sets of parents do the same. This symbolizes the bond that will now exist between the two families.



## Honouring Parents

In some weddings, the bride and groom will offer flower bouquets, toast, or letters of love and thanks. These are considered lovely ways of honouring one's parents at a wedding.

## Speeches

The wedding speech and the blessings are considered very important for Japanese weddings. Everyone will stand up (family, friends, teachers, colleagues) and wish the bride and groom well. Sometimes the speeches will contain a moral story about the importance of marriage.

## Korean Weddings

### Engagement Parties

Many Korean-American engagements are held in restaurants. This is where gifts will be exchanged. These gifts can be quite expensive, up to \$30,000 or \$40,000 worth. Family members will then be introduced formally. Brides-to-be sometimes wear a traditional engagement dress called *hanbok*. Entertainment is provided and this can be traditional Korean music as well as karaoke machines.

### A Wild Goose

A tradition occurs before the actual wedding whereby the groom will give his bride's mother a wild goose. In traditional Korean ceremonies in Korea, an actual live goose was gifted. Today, it is usually a wooden one. Wild geese are birds that mate for life. Hence, the wild goose symbolizes that the groom will look after the respective mother's daughter for her entire life.



## A Gourd of Wine

Traditionally, Korean weddings are held at the home of the bride's family. The vows will be taken. This ceremony is called *kunbere*. The groom and the bride bow to one another and then sip a particular wine which is poured by the mother of the bride into a small gourd. This is a symbol of the couple sealing their vows.

## Chestnuts & Dates

Some days after the wedding ceremony, the couple will pay a visit to the family of the groom. Here, there will be another wedding ceremony called *p'ye-baek*. Chestnuts and dates are offered by the bride to her in-laws. These are symbolic of children. The groom's parents will give sake as a return gesture and after that the chestnuts and dates will be thrown at the bride. She will try to catch them in the large wedding skirt she'll be wearing.

## Wedding Banquet

Wedding banquets may be quite simple in Korean tradition. The only required dish is noodle soup. The name for the banquet is *kook soo sang* which actually means 'long noodles.' It is not surprising since they symbolise a happy and long life in Korean tradition. The noodles are boiled in broth and vegetables are added. A sticky rice cake called *dok* is usually served at Korean events, weddings in particular.

## Pakistani Wedding Traditions

### Four Day Wedding Ritual

Four days is the length of traditional marriage celebrations.

### **First Day of the Celebration**

The first day is when the bride and groom's families dress all in yellow. They celebrate the upcoming nuptials separately. The couple won't see one another from this particular day until the wedding ceremony.



### **Second Day of the Celebration**

On the second day, a large celebration takes place called *Mendi*. There will be a lot of singing and dancing of ancient songs. The family of the groom will deliver the wedding dress to the bride's family. The bride's family will take the groom's attire to his family.

Hundreds of stringed lights will be placed around the home of the bride. This is intended as an announcement of the upcoming marriage. The bride will get her feet and hands decorated with henna. It is a traditional Muslim art form and involves intricate designs and symbolic patterns. As the henna needs time to dry, the bride will not do a thing but rather be waited on by members of her family.

### **Third Day - the Marriage Ceremony**

The third day is reserved for the actual wedding ceremony. Both bride and groom wear red and the bride will also adorn herself in jewellery. The groom will wear a traditional turban. Once the vows have been exchanged the Holy Koran will be held over the bride's head as a blessing as she becomes a member of the groom's family. All paperwork must be signed in front of the guests and an Islamic cleric.



#### **Fourth and Final Day of a Pakistani Wedding**

The last day is when the bride and groom host their first dinner as a married couple. Guests will be invited to the groom's family home and treated to a feast which is called '*valima*.'

### **Thai Wedding Traditions**

The monks come first at a Thai wedding. Food must be prepared for them and they in turn will give blessings to the couple.

A Thai wedding ceremony is usually only for family and very close friends. The bride and groom both sit on the floor, hands pressed together and their fingers pointing up underneath their chins. Their hands will be connected by a small flower chain. The oldest relative will lead the ceremony and give well wishes to the pair. This relative will place his/her hands in a shell with water and their parents and guests will also do this.



In some rural areas, elderly couples might arrange a bridal bed for the couple and place good luck tokens on it like rice, sesame seeds and also coins. This wedding custom is meant to symbolize fertility and good luck.

## Turkish Wedding Traditions

Even after the wedding has taken place, the celebrations continue for a few days. The bride may decide to go back home the morning after the wedding where her friends and family might adorn her in henna.

The Muslim weddings in Turkey will go for four to seven days. The celebrations will start separately for both families. The bride and groom will not see each other until the actual ceremony from this day.



The traditional wedding outfit for a bride is an elaborately embroidered silk wedding gown with a red, velvet cape.

## Russian Weddings

### Russian Civil Ceremony

In Russia, church weddings are not official so a couple have to exchange wedding vows at a Russian civil ceremony. The couple will receive salt and bread which is a symbol of prosperity, health, and a long life. The civil ceremony is not really considered that important to family and friends of the couple but the wedding reception is a lavish affair which lasts two days.

### Wedding Reception Traditions

During the celebrations, a close friend or relative makes a toast to the newly married couple and all the guests will throw the champagne glasses onto the floor. If they smash it is seen as good luck.

### Russian Orthodox Marriage Ceremony

When Orthodox couples are married they are crowned as a king and queen for the day. This is taken from the Greek Orthodox tradition whereby bride and groom are crowned. In Russia, the couple stand on a special carpet and recite their vows and they must also try to race each other to do this. The partner who gets to the carpet first will presumably be the head of the household.



## African Weddings

Africa is very large and there are so many different religions and cultures therein, including some of the very oldest civilisations on earth. Therefore, weddings in African society reflect the diversity of the continent. If we were to choose but one tradition that is found across Africa it would be the importance of family. Bringing two people, two families and often, two tribes together is what an African wedding is all about. The concept of *family* is one which unifies the ideas of Africa as a continent.

Over a thousand different cultures exist in Africa. Every tribe, every culture has its very own traditions for marriage and weddings. These traditions date back thousands of years in some cases.

In Africa many religions also exist. In the northern areas they have a mostly Islamic influence while in other parts there is a Christian, Hindu and Jewish influence. These religions are usually mixed with more traditional African culture.

Most African cultures train young girls to be good wives from their very early years. Sometimes, secret languages and codes are involved which allow them to speak to other women without husbands knowing what is being spoken about.

In many Parts of Africa wedding ceremonies are very large, elaborate affairs which can last for many days. In some places, very large ceremonies are held which will unite many couples at the same time.

Communities along the Nile have a tradition of grooms' families paying brides' families in cattle or sheep. This is supposed to compensate for their daughter's loss, which includes a loss of labour for the family. In some cases, men have to pay up to 30 or 40 head of cattle and this can make it difficult to have enough cattle to support a new wife and growing family.

In Somalia, for example, men can take up to four wives as long as they are able to support all of them. Sometimes, girls are engaged even before they are born.

African weddings involve lots of bright and festive colours, and lots of music and dancing. A common theme in African wedding ceremonies is the idea of moving from childhood into adulthood. Many African cultures marry children off between the ages of 13 to 15. This is the time they are considered to have reached physical adulthood.

Divorce is not common in African marriages and any problems that arise are discussed with both bride and groom's families. Solutions will attempt to be found by the families. In many cases, an entire village will try to find a solution for any problems arising within a marriage.



Africans, like most other cultures, consider marriage to be a sacred institution. Many cultures have special totems intended to remind couples that they must always make allowances for cultural and tribal differences. This is likely to lead to marriage success.

## English Traditions

### Getting Married in Great Britain

Flowers are scattered by little girls who walk before an English bride and the wedding party. This usually occurs whether the wedding takes place in a church or another wedding site. This flowered path is a symbol of hope for the bride to have a happy walk through life. Bridesmaids are part of the British system and also wear dresses which look very much like wedding dresses. The purpose of this is so that any jealous or evil wishers cannot single out the bride to curse her or her happiness.



In Britain, brides usually sew good luck charms onto their wedding dress hems. This usually comes in the form of a horseshoe of royal British brides. An old English wedding tradition also entails the bride carrying a horseshoe streaming with white ribbons for good luck.

### **English Wedding Ceremony**

English couples will traditionally exchange marriage vows in the chapel doorway. This allows anyone who may wish to witness their union, able to do so.

### **Traditional English Wedding Receptions**

In England, tradition dictates that the wedding cake be a fruitcake filled with ground almonds, raisins, marzipan and cherries. This will be served to guests at the reception as well as something called the groom's cake which originated in the Tudor period. Originally, the groom's cake was also a fruitcake but today it is usually chocolate.

A type of Victorian reception is a 'ribbon pull.' This involves the bridesmaids receiving a charm made of sterling silver with a ribbon tied to each charm. A baker will place them in between the layers of the wedding cake. When it is time for the newlywed couple to share the first piece of cake, all the bridesmaids gather and pull on one ribbon. This symbolises good fortune for each bridesmaid.

Tying shoes to the back of wedding cars is another tradition started in England. It was originally done during the Tudor period but of course the shoes were not attached to cars back then. Traditionally, guests at the reception would throw shoes at the couple as they left the church as a sign of good luck. Today, of course, the shoes are tied to the honeymoon car. Rain on a wedding day is considered good luck by the English.

# Austrian Wedding Customs

## The Proposal

In past times, a proposal of marriage was quite a formal affair and a specific procedure had to be followed. The prospective groom would send family members or a good friend to represent him to the family of the prospective bride and to the bride herself. If they came across a pregnant woman, a blind man, or a monk on their way, it was believed that the marriage would fail. These three were considered bad omens. Seeing pigeons, goats or wolves were considered good omens and therefore it was believed the marriage would be a good one.

## Surnames

Superstitions are commonplace and Austrians believe that marrying a man whose surname begins with the same letter as the woman's is unlucky. In fact, there was even a little rhyme that they had: *"To change the name and not the letter, is to change the worst and not the better."*

They also believe that the future bride should not write her new name before the actual wedding as they think it tempts fate and brings bad luck.

## Choosing the Day

In the past, Saturday was not chosen as a wedding day as it was thought to be unlucky, as were Fridays, in particular Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>. Another rhyme to guide couples was: *"Monday for wealth, Tuesday for health, Wednesday the best day of all, Thursday for losses, Friday for crosses, Saturday for no luck at all."*

## The Wedding Dress

Brides do not make their wedding dresses as this again is considered unlucky. The groom seeing the bride before the actual wedding in her dress is also thought unlucky. Brides are also advised to not wear the whole outfit before the wedding. To counter this problem, many brides leave a final stitch undone until the time comes to go to the ceremony. Only then can the outfit be completed.

## The Veil

Traditionally, it was thought that brides were especially vulnerable to evil spirits. Many traditions and customs associated with weddings are done to provide protection.



## Flowers

Red and white flower combinations are avoided by those who are superstitious because they think these are symbols of blood and bandages. The groom usually chooses a flower for his buttonhole which can be found in the bride's bouquet. This is a remnant of times when knights would wear their ladies' colours to display their love.

## On the Way to the Wedding

Once the bride is ready to leave for the wedding, one final look in the mirror is thought to bring good luck. Once the journey to the wedding venue has begun it is considered bad luck to go back to the mirror. Chimney sweeps seen on the way are good luck and sometimes people will hire one to attend a wedding. Spiders, rainbows and even black cats are considered good omens if one is seen on one's way to a wedding.

Bad weather when going to the wedding ceremony is seen as an omen of an unhappy marriage. However, certain cultures consider rain a good omen, such as England, as mentioned above. A windy or cloudy day is thought to cause a stormy marriage but snow is associated with wealth and fertility.

## Bridesmaids

Bridesmaids were originally dressed similarly to the bride and often still do. They were supposed to be decoys which would confuse evil spirits and protect the bride.



## A Couple's First Purchase

Austrians say that the partner who first buys something new after the wedding will be the one who is most dominant in the relationship. Brides ensure they are the one to buy something first by arranging to buy something small from one of the bridesmaids immediately after the wedding ceremony.

## French Wedding Traditions

### French Traditions including those Before the Marriage Ceremony

The hope chest, or trousseau, has its origins in French tradition. It means 'bundle.' Wearing white on one's wedding day also began in France a few hundred years ago as did having fresh flowers as decorations around the site as well as the bride's bouquet. Every flower has a special significance to the bride and groom. Flowers that were especially fragrant were originally chosen to help freshen up before perfume or deodorant was invented. Weddings usually took place during summer or spring. This is when it was warm enough for people to bathe.

In some smaller villages in France, the tradition of a groom calling on his soon-to-be wife on the morning of the wedding is still practiced. The groom will escort the bride to the chapel and the children of the village will extend white ribbons across the road the bride will pass. The groom will walk his mother down the aisle just before the main procession. After the ceremony when the couple are leaving the church, laurel leaves will be scattered along their path.

### French Wedding Reception

During the wedding reception a toast will be made, as is the tradition in many cultures. After the toast, the couple will drink as husband and wife for the first time, from a specially engraved goblet. Often, this will be a family heirloom which has been passed down from one generation to another. After the reception, friends may turn up outside the couple's window where they will bang on pots and pans and sing. The groom is expected to invite them all in for snacks and drinks.



## German Wedding Traditions Before the Wedding Day

When a baby girl comes into the world, Germans will plant several trees to honour the birth, as per German tradition. When the child grows up and a date is set for the wedding, the trees are sold and the money raised will be used as part of her dowry. Family and friends of the couple will create a newspaper full of articles, stories and photos of the engaged twosome. This newspaper is uniquely a German tradition and copies are then sold at the wedding to assist with the honeymoon expenses.

## German Marriage Celebrations

Traditionally, wedding celebrations can last for three days in Germany. The couples must first have a civil ceremony with only family and close friends. The next evening there is a big wedding reception attended by family, friends, neighbours and even acquaintances. Guests will bring old plates to break at the party as this is seen as good luck. The newlywed couple then sweep the pieces of the broken dishes together which symbolises that nothing else will ever be broken in their home again.

## Religious Marriage Ceremonies in Germany

On the third day, the religious wedding ceremony will take place. German brides do not have traditional bridesmaids but they do have flower girls. As the couple leave the chapel they throw coins to the waiting children.

Another reception will come after the religious ceremony. The best man traditionally 'steals' the bride from the reception and takes her to a local pub. Here they will drink champagne and wait for the groom to find them. He must then pay for all the drinks they've had. Later on in the evening, the couple's friends block the doors with garlands and ribbons to stop them from leaving. The groom has to pay some kind of toll in order to be able to leave with his bride and go on their honeymoon. The payment usually comes in the form of another party.

# Marriage in the Arab Culture

## Celebrations

Usually, there are many celebrations which lead up to the wedding ceremony in Arab culture. An engagement celebration is held at the home of the bride's family. Here the prospective groom will formally ask for her hand in marriage. There is another party when the contract of marriage has to be signed. Then there is a henna night for the bride where her family and friends elaborately decorate the bride with henna on her hands and feet. This is like a bachelorette or hen's night type of event. Only women are allowed and there can be dancing and refreshments. However, the main attraction is the henna designer or 'mehndi' who does the henna tattoos. These are of course, only temporary. Not only the bride but all the guests may have their hands and feet adorned with henna decorations.

## The Wedding Reception

The actual wedding reception is the coup de grace, so to speak, what the last few events have been leading to. There are quite a few different customs for the reception. In the cities the reception will be similar to what one would see in the west. There will be dancing and speeches and the couple will cut a cake together and throw the bouquet. In the rural areas the event may be more subdued and reserved. Ceremonies might be a little bit more traditional.



## Wedding Etiquettes

Wedding planning is a very big task. Some people say that it is as complex and difficult as a large theatre production to plan and execute. The main difference, of course, is that weddings must adhere to certain rules of etiquette. These are the usual practices prescribed by either social convention or an authority as pertaining to weddings. Etiquette refers to a set of rules which must be followed, kind of like the rules in a sporting game.

Today, however, weddings can be less formal as some couples prefer to not strictly follow etiquette and make some of their own rules for their weddings. Most people are familiar with

wedding etiquette to a large degree. Because of this, they decide for themselves how much they wish to change. There are some things which have to be followed at all weddings, even those that are very casual affairs. Mostly this is done so as not to hurt anyone's feelings or damage any valued relationships.

## The Role and Scope of Wedding Consultancy

It can be difficult planning a wedding and knowing how much to spend and on what, where to find specialised services etc. There is so much to do from choosing the invitations to planning the honeymoon. More and more these days, couples turn to professionals for assistance.

Some time ago, wedding coordinators were seen as a luxury and their services were only sought by the wealthier people. Today, a wedding coordinator is almost essential if people want a well-planned affair.

The wedding co-ordinator or planner has experience dealing with florists, photographers, caterers, and other suppliers. This will save a couple valuable money as well as time. The co-ordinator usually has his/her well known suppliers who will provide the services needed. They are given discounts others are not privy to and this can help couples avoid mistakes that can be costly. Wedding planners are also good because they can often make dreams reality.

The wedding co-ordinator makes sure the entire event goes according to plan right from the get go. He/she helps the clients to make right decisions and selections for the right venue and vendors and also makes sure that when it is all happening, it is happening right. Very importantly, he/she makes sure the wedding stays within the budget originally discussed with the couple.

A survey was done in 2006 regarding the cost of weddings. It found that the average cost of weddings was around £26,000 as opposed to £15,000 in 1990. This means a 73% growth in cost. It is not surprising that weddings incur large costs and many purchases are first-time purchases. A wedding co-ordinator has the much needed experience to bring to the process.

Trends show that wedding co-ordinators will most likely become more in demand as time goes on. There are many names for a wedding co-ordinator such as: wedding planner, bridal consultant, wedding director, wedding designer, and wedding consultant. Below we examine what they mean:

**Wedding Planner** - someone who assists in organizing and planning all or *any* aspect of a wedding ceremony, including the reception.

**A Bridal Consultant** - almost all bridal consultants are actually *wedding planners*. They help with all aspects of a wedding. This title also describes those who work in retail bridal stores, and work with brides in particular.

**A Wedding Director** - This term is often used in some parts in reference to a wedding co-ordinator who concerns him/herself with the wedding ceremony alone.

**Wedding Consultant** - refers to a person who owns a wedding planning business. A wedding consultant can be hired to plan an entire wedding, part of a wedding, or simply give advice to people wanting to plan their own weddings.

**Wedding Co-ordinator** the term "wedding co-ordinator" is sometimes used in the place of "*wedding planner*." Some wedding co-ordinators are only involved in co-ordinating the actual wedding ceremony.

Brides today are spending a lot more money to make sure their wedding day, which is considered the most important day of their lives, is perfectly planned. Couples today are usually busy with careers. Despite this, they want to ensure their wedding day is uniquely personal. Wedding planners are the perfect help for this. They save couples money, time and very importantly, stress when preparing for a big wedding day.

## Required Skills for a Wedding Planner

### Sense of Humour

Wedding planners must come with an honest 'sense of humour.' In the wedding planning business one must rely on many others' professionalism to get many jobs done right in order to ensure someone's dream wedding can be achieved. Of course, things can go awry and keeping a good sense of humour as well as the ability to think on one's feet are necessary to keeping everything on track. Wedding planners must deal with so many things from emotional or indecisive brides to difficult parents to unreliable vendors. Their work is really cut out for them and having a sense of humour will help them (and others) get through any issues a little more easily.

### Personal Qualities to Cultivate

Traits that are marks of successful and effective wedding planners are:

Organizational skills -

Professional and effective wedding planners are hired to "*organize*" weddings. They must cope with numerous errands as well as dealing with many people, *and often all at the same time*. It's vital to ensure that all these tasks and intricate details are handled in a very timely manner. Only in this way will the wedding run effortlessly.

Interpersonal proficiency -

In order to attract new clients and get more recommendations, interpersonal skills are very necessary. A wedding planner must work effectively with so many different types of personalities, including the bride and groom in order to discover exactly what they desire in a wedding and provide this day for them as they envision.

Imagination -

A person's wedding is considered the most important event in many people's lives and one they want to remember fondly for the rest of their lives. The wedding planner is the one whose ingenuity will be necessary to design exclusive ideas for the ceremony and the reception, despite most weddings being traditional affairs. Every couple that the wedding planner must deal with will be unique so their wants and needs will also be unique. The wedding planner must account for all of this.

Persistence -

As a planner, patience is absolutely vital for success. A planner has to be patient with all clients, with other business people such as any vendors, and the business itself. Each wedding will require different elements from a wedding planner. This variety and difference is what will challenge a planner and their desire to provide excellence will make a wedding consulting business energetic and exciting.

### Planning Skills Required of Wedding Planners

- a) Can the planner handle a variety of tasks all at different stages, and all at the same time?
- b) Is he/she *detail* oriented?
- c) Is he/she *motivated* and able to work without needing another's direction?
- d) Is he/she disciplined and works when weather is perfect outside or other demands on him/her?
- e) Is he/she capable of working alone without the benefit of conversational co-workers?
- f) Can he/she handle emotionally fragile brides, demanding parents, and irritable suppliers, without acceding to the impulse to flatten them?
- g) And finally, can he/she handle things graciously when they go wrong, then think fast to fix them?

For those wanting or thinking about whether or not they can become wedding planners, consider the answers to the questions above truthfully. If you answered yes to most of them you have what it takes to be an effective wedding planner.

### Calm

The wedding planner or consultant must be the bride and groom's rock. He/she must keep his/her cool no matter what might go wrong. Miscommunication with a vendor? Handle it graciously and get things fixed. A meltdown at the ceremony? Handle it graciously and with compassion. Keeping their cool in the face of a calamity is necessary for wedding consultants. Plan Bs are a must and any good wedding planner knows they must always have them.

### Charming

A wedding planner is indeed the face of his/her business, their own representative to the world. Excellent social skills and impeccable communication skills are needed. The planner's reputation all

relies on his/her ability to communicate effectively and create great working relationships with every personality type. Not all people they come across in their line of work will be pleasant or easy to deal with. Planners must have the knowledge and skills to defuse any potential calamitous situation and achieve the outcomes that client's desire.

### **A Great Negotiator**

Couples depend on the planner or consultant to do everything necessary to put on a great wedding. They must hire the band, organise for the photographer, and order the flowers in keeping with what the couple want, recommend and/or deal with the caterer, assist in the venue options and help plan the ceremony and reception. They must do all these things while in keeping with the budget that was set out for them by the bride and groom. As wedding planners begin to make a good reputation for themselves, this will all become a lot easier as they will become better known within all the relevant circles. Their connections will enable them to get better deals for their clients.

### **Good with Money**

Starting a business in wedding planning will require one to be able to handle their own expenses and stay within any given budget. Wedding planners are also responsible for other people's money so keeping within budget is an important skill. Having some experience with managing money will become essential, even if this experience is managing household budgets.

### **Organized**

The wedding planner might be asked to plan one part or every part of the big day: the venues, theme, flowers, photography, refreshments, food, attire, honeymoon, and other details. Keeping track of every nuance, every contract date, every deadline, requires an enormous amount of organizational skill and attention to detail. The calendar becomes a new best friend.

### **A Plethora of Knowledge**

A wedding planner who excels will also have fashion sense, a good eye for colour, good taste in music, and knowledge of flower themes. He/she has to keep up to date with the latest bridal trends and honeymoon destinations as well as the all-important list of wedding etiquettes. Wedding planners must also have a good knowledge of different religious ceremonies and traditions. In this way their business is not limited to only one group of people but they can accommodate people of many faiths.

### **Consultant Packages**

Wedding consultants may provide individualised services or ad hoc services. Every planner has different services they offer. The comprehensive package or full package involves the planner being involved in the wedding from the get go. This package is more expensive because it will include everything necessary for a great wedding including ongoing assistance with usually a few or all of these services: 1) preparing a budget, 2) determining the vision and theme, 3) creating timelines and checklists, 4) choosing, negotiating and booking vendors, 5) designing stationary for the event such

as invitations, 6) compilation of a guest list, 7) preparing the ceremony and/or reception, 8) directing clients with any paperwork necessary, i.e. marriage licence, 9) directing any on-site rehearsals, ceremonies, or receptions, 10) organising final payment, and wrapping up anything with vendors.

Some planners will only allow clients who want comprehensive packages because they prefer to be involved from the beginning with all stages of planning. If you are thinking about starting out in the wedding planning business, however, it might be best to diversify your services.

Partial packages for weddings are usually vendor-based. These are useful for couple who need assistance with finding and selecting service providers who are suitable for their particular vision and budget. Wedding planners can give couples who don't really have time to shop around or compare vendors, invaluable advice. Partial packages allow planners to help with contract negotiation, vendor selection, scheduling appointments, co-ordinating, making final payments, and any follow-ups that may be needed.

Packages referred to as Day-of packages are becoming more popular. These are specifically designed for couples who have already finished the planning process and now need help with co-ordinating the rehearsals and the special day itself. The wedding consultant will be involved in a limited capacity before this time, mostly to make sure the necessary information is provided to ensure the day flows well. The consultant will need a list of vendors and will then proceed to assist with preparing the wedding day timetable. This will mean that the consultant will likely be the primary contact point during rehearsals and the actual wedding, so the couple will be free to enjoy themselves. The only thing to look out for with these types of packages is if the couple have chosen vendors who are less than ideal. The planner will then spend more time trying to put out fires rather than spending time planning the wedding. Wedding planners, especially those who have been in the business for a while, will be able to recommend well established and trusted vendors, making the job a lot easier for everyone.

So, in a situation whereby the planner has not been involved with the vendor selection, it will be necessary to get the list of vendors chosen immediately and touch base with them. This will give the planner an idea of what they provide and can/cannot do and also confirm all the arrangements in advance, thereby potentially avoiding any problems down the track.

Some ad-hoc services that wedding planners may provide are: co-ordinating engagement parties, bridal showers, gift selections, seating list preparation, honeymoons, post wedding events such as luncheons, and thank you cards. All these will be fee based.

## What Wedding Planners Do

Wedding planners mainly perform the following duties during the course of conducting a wedding party:

- Assistance with budget preparation
- Finding a suitable venue for the reception and/or ceremony or a vow-exchanging site
- Assistance with choice of colours, wedding themes, and/or styles
- Assistance when choosing a dress or other attire
- Setting up the ceremony and reception areas including guest logistics (seating, arrangement, selection, refreshments)
- Co-ordinating the themes and decor
- Planning and preparing the itinerary
- Running rehearsals
- Helping to prepare the vows and speeches
- Co-ordinating the reception timeline
- Co-ordinating with vendors and deliveries, and managing any no-shows
- Planning the honeymoon
- Ensuring the wedding party is on time and in the right places
- Making hotel arrangements for after the wedding
- Handling wedding crashers or unruly guests
- Managing any last-minute emergencies
- Finding suitable accommodations for out-of-town guests
- Ensuring venues are left clean so clients can get back their deposits
- Collecting personal items, wedding gifts and getting them back safely to the client
- Returning rentals and any other borrowed items.

## Wedding Planner Roles

Wedding planners fulfil a number of roles throughout the planning and implementation of a wedding day. Depending on what type of package the couple has chosen, the wedding planner's role will differ. The comprehensive package gets the planner involved fully with the couple as well as their families. Usually, a planner will fulfil seven more common roles. These are: service provider, organizer, decision maker, psychologist, artistic designer, friend, and mediator.

Wedding planners must keep in mind that their primary role is based on a business relationship with a couple. As service providers, they have very specific obligations to meet and must at all times maintain a high standard of professionalism. Even though the business relationship is of utmost importance, other roles often emerge. Some of these will be related to business and others to plain old human nature. A wedding planner often becomes decision maker by default. Often, those who choose the comprehensive package do so due to lack of time or even desire to make the myriad of decisions necessary for planning a wedding. The planner must still ensure the couple feel that they are involved in decisions. Even a small amount of participation from the couple brings a sense of ownership as well as accountability. Wedding planners must never sign their names to any contract on behalf of any couple, nor should they sign their own name to vendor contracts.

A wedding planner is also an organiser and as the consultant, they are the ones the couple, or anyone else involved in the wedding, can turn to for assistance. Keeping checklists, timelines and

itineraries are vital to maintaining clarity and order, especially since things may get overwhelming or confusing. Wedding planners must know how to prioritise tasks and make sure each one is completed on time. As a wedding planner, you must keep a comprehensive calendar and written agendas for every meeting. This will ensure everything is kept on track.

The fourth role is that of artistic designer. Many people who go into the wedding planning business have natural good taste, a sense of flair which has been noticed by family and friends, and some knowledge of colour schemes. This will help planners help couples to make their visions a reality. Wedding planners must take care not to impose their views on their clients. Generally, however, wedding planners are hired partly because people want artistic design advice for a range of aspects of a wedding: cake selection, floral décor, stationery essentials, and other decorative elements.

Weddings are generally stressful, therefore the fifth role of a consultant or planner is that of psychologist. Brides are usually the main point of contact and spend an average of seventeen months planning their weddings (Fairchild Bridal Group, 2005). Brides will often turn to the consultant in moments of pressure, anxiety, or strain. The line between business communication and interpersonal communication blurs as trust develops (Knapp and Vangelisti, 1996; Littlejohn, 1989), and the bride may seek reassurance from the consultant during emotionally stressful moments. In cases where the stress of wedding planning has moved beyond individual levels, the wedding planner usually takes on the role of mediator, making it their sixth role. Mediators will respond to conflict situations using encouraging empowerment, active listening, recognition, and negotiation (Bush and Foger, 1994). As a mediator, a wedding consultant might help disputing parties through the creation of a forum where each has a chance to listen and speak, then allow the parties to work with each other to clearly define any problems and come up with alternative solutions. Ultimately, they should agree on a strategy which suits everyone (McKinney, Kimsey, and Fuller, 1995). Wedding planners sometimes make vendor relationships with counsellors. They can then recommend these marriage counsellors to clients who might be facing a relationship crisis.

Finally, it is not unheard of for wedding planners and their clients to form a friendship. Often, wedding planners start working with family and friends when they first open their businesses. Referrals are one of the main ways wedding planners get more clients; friends suggest their services to other friends and the business begins to grow. Of course, it's not necessary to become friends with clients for a business to be successful. On the other hand, everyone gets clients they don't like at all. This doesn't make it impossible to have a good working relationship, however. Friendship is sometimes a natural outcome of client-provider dealings and not a forced necessity.

## Further Reading:

- ❓ *Easy Wedding Planner: Workbook & Organizer, (2008), By Elizabeth Lluch, Alex Lluch*
- ❓ *Wedding Planning Made Easy: The Ultimate Wedding Planning Guide, (2012), By Kayla Andrew*
- ❓ *Wedding Planning For Dummies, (2013), By Marcy Blum*