

Food for Thought



Photo: Paul Barnett

When a group of professional wedding planners and caterers recently gathered to compile a list of great advice for brides, I was reminded of the song, "Everyone's Free to Wear Sunscreen."

Based on a column by *Chicago Tribune* columnist, Mary Schmich and put to music by Baz Luhrman of *Moulin Rouge* fame, the song runs through a series of amusing, if not completely on-target rules to live by. It begins with Schmich's advice, "Wear Sunscreen. If I could offer you only one tip for the future, sunscreen would be it. The long-term benefits of sunscreen have been proved by scientists, whereas the rest of my advice has no basis more reliable than my own meandering experience."

The list of advice our team deemed invaluable for brides was also founded on experience – of those who have worked on hundreds of weddings. In talking about our experiences, the focus invariably turned to wedding horror stories: cakes falling, linens failing to appear and groomsmen appearing, albeit a little tipsy. Why not gloss over these sad tales and move on? Because the fact is that a wedding is happily comprised of many people and personalities, not to mention dreams and emotions, all of which increase the chances that something perfectly human will happen. And because our advice is best served by putting it into perspective:

1. It is not what goes wrong that ruins a wedding, but how one reacts to it. For one bride, nothing could go her way. She was greeted on her wedding day by a rainstorm so torrential that the tent did nothing more than dump water. After moving the party inside, the power went out when the main transformer blew and the only solution was to move the event to another venue. Everything – the guests, food, cake and chefs – were shuttled to the new site, and although nothing was as they planned it, the bride and groom's positive attitude was their saving grace. Everyone left happy.

2. Make sure you hire vendors that are true professionals. This bears repeating. If you have hired the right professionals for your wedding, chances are slim that you will have to ruin your beautiful French manicure biting your nails as you wait for flowers or linens. There are far too many stories of caterers having to design centerpieces at the last minute, or having to use centerpieces for bridal bouquets, or going to a nearby restaurant to beg and borrow linen that someone forgot to order.

3. Once you've hired the professionals, please listen to them. There once

was an unfortunate bride who, despite her caterer's advice, went ahead with her desire to have a cake with an unstable combination of whipped cream frosting and custard filling. As the top of the cake began to melt halfway through the wedding, she learned the hard way that her caterer was right. After discretely cleaning up what was on the floor, the caterer suggested that they quickly cut the disappearing cake!

4. Don't cut corners; outsource as many services as possible. Brides have shown up at their wedding with bolts of tulle in hand thinking that they will "create" their veil that day. Trust us: you will be too busy on your wedding day to start your career as a seamstress.

5. Communicate, even over-communicate, with your vendors. If you require an audio-visual system during your reception, make it known ahead of time. Showing up on your wedding day with a DVD in hand will not cause one to magically appear. Professionals can usually pull one out of the bag by quickly calling around, but why risk it?

6. If guests haven't responded to the invitation, (and unfortunately this is a trend that is getting worse) call them. A caterer will always plan for a certain percentage of extra food, but when twenty people show up unexpectedly, there won't be enough chairs or place settings to accommodate them. Save you and your caterer the heartache and spend the time calling your non-responsive guests.

7. Once you have hired the right people, relax (as much as humanly possible), and enjoy the process leading up to the day, and, of course, the day itself. It only comes once and if you do it right, once will be enough. It's heart-breaking to see a bride worry so much about her timeline or the number of roses in each centerpiece that she misses the big picture.

8. And finally, wear sunscreen. With many weddings taking place at outdoor beach venues, we've had more brides and grooms (not to mention guests) leave with bad sunburns. We always advise brides to wear it, and we even leave it on the bars and at the tables. Every once in awhile, however, we still find that some newlyweds leave their wedding not inflamed with passion, but with sunstroke.

Take all this advice as our wedding present to you. Keep what you need, return what you don't, but, as Schmich says, "Trust me on the sunscreen."

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