



## Getting a handle on the wedding-planning process

*Congratulations...* you're getting married! This is truly an exciting time in your life. You immediately run out and purchase five or six glossy wedding magazines and spend endless hours searching online wedding sites and Pinterest pages, and reading wedding blogs for inspiration. Suddenly, at every turn you notice everything that even whispers "wedding."

After a few weeks of this, you're beginning to wonder if you're becoming obsessed with thoughts of creating the perfect wedding. As the initial glow of your engagement turns into an overwhelming sense of panic, you begin to wonder how you'll pull it all together.

Don't worry. You can rekindle your sense of joy in planning your wedding, while maintaining your sanity.

First, take a deep breath, close your eyes, and remember weddings that you have attended which were truly outstanding. What was it about those events that made them unforgettable? Jot down the key elements that stood out, such as the venue and setting, the décor, the cuisine, and the "feel" — was it relaxed, intimate, exquisite, colorful, playful and fun, campy, rustic or chic? Was it the band, the music, and the dancing that you recall? Or the role the photographer played in capturing intimate family moments? Use adjectives that describe what was memorable for you.

This simple exercise should bring you to the starting place where you begin the planning process:

### **PRIORITIZE**

Identify the three most important elements that will make your event unforgettable for the two of you, and your guests. Ask your partner to participate to create a unified direction moving forward. You'll avoid stress down the road if you understand from the beginning whether or not you have a similar vision.

### **VISUALIZE**

Once the key elements are clear to both of you, focus on the "when, where, who, and how" questions. Your choices are vast — a destination wedding in a fabulous vacation area (like Vermont) in the spring, summer, fall, or winter? A backyard wedding in your hometown? Is your dream vision on a beach, in a barn, or in an elaborate ballroom in an ultra-chic, luxurious inn? How many guests would you ideally want to share this experience? Think of these decisions as if you are weighing them on a scale — if one decision drives the budget upwards, does an alternative direct it downwards?

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## DISCUSS THE BUDGET

This might be a good time to bring in your families to discuss one of the other key elements of any wedding: the budget. Discussing the budget early in the planning process will help bring you back down from the clouds if your visualizations took you into the land of unattainable fantasies. Memorable weddings are not necessarily built with unlimited budgets. Be realistic. Major costs are easy to account for, but the hidden costs can sneak up on you and totally throw the cost of your wedding over the deep end. Once your vision is in place, ask your families how they can support your special day, so that everyone can be involved and be proud of the results.

## GET STARTED

Your engagement will likely be split into two main bursts of activity — doing your initial research, picking a date, and booking your most important vendors, followed by the ongoing coordination that leads right up to the big day. The coordination phase is usually full of DIY projects (if you're so inclined) and decision-making around details like your dress, the reception décor, cakes, and flowers. If you're having a short engagement then the steps will probably all be smushed together, but that's perfectly fine. It is really important to book your vendors as early in your engagement as possible, especially if you have specific people you want to work with. Many of the most popular vendors will get booked up months, or sometimes even years, in advance. So if you have your heart set on something, don't delay in sending that inquiry.

## ANTICIPATE

This point cannot be emphasized enough. The best of plans can go astray if you don't prepare for the unexpected. If you dream of an outdoor event, then prepare for inclement weather. This can affect everything from the enjoyment of your event to whether or not your guests can even get there.

## FOCUSED

## STAY

Weddings today have become bigger-than-life events, as evidenced with the bevy of televised wedding productions and an ever-growing number of wedding websites to entice you. It is easy to be distracted with all of this available information to digest. Keep referring back to your plan, your vision, and your budget. A good wedding planner can be very helpful to you at this point if you're struggling.

## PLAN A DATE NIGHT

Remember that you are planning for a marriage and not just a "party." Take time each week to go out and have fun with your partner, and make it a rule not to talk about the wedding. This simple exercise has saved many a wedding disaster from occurring. The decisions that you are making as a couple can be the solid ground for building a good marriage, based on the ability to listen and compromise, or it can create a breeding ground for discourse. Love one another, and walk down that aisle with a sparkle in your eyes and a smile on your faces!

Your wedding is just that — it's yours to own and to manage. Make it unique, put your personal stamp on it. This will most likely be the biggest party that you will ever host together. When you look back on it years from now, you will remember that the special efforts that helped shape a truly memorable event for the two of you were also cherished memories for everyone there.

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