

CHAPTER 1

Defining the Role of the Wedding Planner

Over the past 25 years the role of the wedding planner has evolved from being a luxury for only the wealthy to a near necessity for any bride. In the past, those who could not afford help usually depended upon family and friends to contribute to the final stages of actually getting the wedding “off the ground.” Whether these friends and family contributed monetarily or through moral support, they were the ones who were counted on to make the wedding a complete success for the bride and groom. Fewer brides and mothers were in the workforce and most had plenty of time to plan their own weddings. How times have changed!

The Complexity of Weddings

In today’s society time has become a precious commodity. People are willing to pay a premium to save time in contrast to many years ago when people were willing to spend time to save money. Additionally, weddings and the planning that goes into them today are more complex for many reasons:

- Parents may live in another part of the country or in another country
- Individualization and customization is an integral part of society, and couples are desperate to find ways to make their wedding unique
- Religious boundaries have become a bit more relaxed
- Both men and women are more highly educated
- Society is obsessed with celebrities and often couples want to emulate weddings they have seen in the media or on the growing number of reality television programs highlighting weddings
- Couples are marrying later in life
- A higher income level is prevalent

- Couples travel as part of their career
- Society is more tolerant of interfaith marriages

Many misconceptions have developed regarding wedding planners due to recent television broadcasts and reality programming. There have even been movies produced that do not necessarily show the wedding planner in a positive light. AACWP's main mission is to change those misconceptions and educate the market that a wedding planner hired with an AACWP background is an "insurance policy" that the couple will have the day that they have envisioned beyond their expectations.

So What Exactly is a Wedding Planner?

A wedding planner is a trained professional wedding expert able to tend to the needs of the client from the beginning of and throughout the planning process until the couples farewell. The planner is an advocate for the couple. He/she will offer choices to the client based on their vision, personal taste and budget, and will do whatever it takes to ensure the event runs smoothly.

Wedding planners are also often called wedding consultants, which is apropos, as a consultant is a professional or expert advisor. A wedding coordinator typically offers a slightly different function, generally just helping the client wrap up final details and coordinating the actual wedding day. Sometimes, people billing themselves as wedding coordinators will accept an event at which they will just show up on the wedding day with the intention of running the event rather than laying the basic groundwork necessary for a successful execution, such as pre-wedding communication with vendors, ceremony and reception site visits, etc. It is not ever considered wise to agree to just attend and coordinate the event itself without having ever met with the couple in person to review plans, visited the event location(s) or spoken with all the vendors involved, though some clients will insist that is all the service they require. This key point is not to be dismissed

if a professional is to do the best possible job for their client, as well as maintain his/her good reputation.

Required Roles of the Wedding Planner

The full-service wedding planner will fill many roles during the course of events leading up to the wedding. Therefore, it is imperative that the Trained Wedding Planner possesses certain skills to be able to fulfill each responsibility.

Creative Consultant/Producer

Modern couples have been to so many weddings by the time they plan their own that they are desperate to make theirs stand above the rest. The client will look to the wedding planner to help find unique ideas, décor and entertainment to create personalized, one-of-a-kind dream wedding. The consummate planner will continually research to keep ahead of the latest trends and will continually educate him/herself to be able to offer his/her clients something exclusive and memorable.

Mediator

The couple and their families will have many decisions to make during all phases of planning. At some point the planner may be asked to step in as an intermediary to solve differences between the couple, the couple and their families, or the bridal party. The situation might also arise with a difference of opinion between wedding industry professionals and the client regarding contract details and proposals. Professionalism at all times is paramount in building a respectable reputation while in the role of mediator.

Facilitator

Follow-through is extremely important, and with all of the details couples must manage leading up to their special day, they will experience less stress if they

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know they can depend upon their wedding planner to manage many of these tasks. The wedding planner can at times be responsible for confirming appointments, scheduling deliveries, making pick-ups and sending payments. While the couple will depend on their planner for skillful and accurate notes, the wedding industry professionals will also appreciate the planner's attention to detail and understanding of the client's vision. The wedding party will also rely on the planner to provide accurate information relating to details of the wedding. As a facilitator, it is imperative that the couple's wishes are understood and the planner makes arrangements accordingly.

Resource Center

The resources of a Trained Wedding Planner cannot be surpassed. With networking available through the American Association of Certified Wedding Planners and through monthly attendance at educational meetings, it is possible to be one of the most valued team members to the couple. Peer sharing is encouraged by AACWP and expected among members; your fellow planners can become invaluable resources.

Without the resources of the TWP, couples are left to shuffle blindly through the endless pages of internet searches and telephone directories. A client should be able to count on the TWP to provide recommendations of wedding industry professionals within the couple's budget and taste. It is also the duty of the planner to be honest with clients regarding past experiences with somewhat questionable professionals – once again, with decorum.

Organizer

It is the position of the TWP to make sure that every aspect is covered in the planning process of the wedding in an orderly fashion. Tools will be presented throughout this course to assist the planner in becoming a systematic professional who can be totally depended upon by the bride.

Negotiator

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Reviewing contracts and proposals from wedding industry professionals is one of the most important tasks of the TWP. It will be essential to be able to identify deficiencies or to negotiate additional perks that would not otherwise be available had the planner not been employed by the client.

Director/Crisis Manager

The Trained Wedding Planner is responsible for implementing wedding activities according to the couple's wishes, which may also include weekend activities leading up to the actual event. The rehearsal and ceremony direction, as well as coordination at the wedding reception are of primary importance. Wedding industry professionals will look to the TWP for the final directive before proceeding with activities concerning the event. As a director, it is the planner who is responsible for coordinating the schedules and timetables during the planning process as well as the wedding weekend. The planner reviews all event details and then attends the event to implement the wishes of the couple.

Further, on the occasion that a crisis occurs on the wedding day, the prepared planner will quickly act to remedy any unforeseen situations that may arise with on-the-spot problem solving.

Budget Manager

All clients have a budget, whether it is generous or limited. One of the responsibilities of the TWP is to keep the client informed regarding expenditures. Advice to the matters of spending will be discussed at length in a future chapter but suffice it to say that being able to manage the budget is an assignment that should not be taken lightly. If the clients seem to be overspending extensively it is advised that the planner alert them.

Etiquette Expert

The etiquette expertise of the wedding planner will help couples with the sensitive decisions necessary for planning a socially correct wedding. There are many published books available to use as reference guides for the Trained

Wedding Planner, and the highlights of etiquette will be addressed in Chapter 4.

Local libraries, bookstores and the Internet can be used as references for decisions for delicate situations. It is the role of the planner to help the couple avoid embarrassing mistakes, oversights or hurt feelings. As society changes, it is imperative to adapt to the needs and comforts of guests and families by offering alternatives or choices for unique situations.

Wedding Planner – Primary Occupation or Part-Time Job?

The decision to be a full- or part-time wedding planner is yours to make. There are advantages and disadvantages to both. Knowing these pros and cons will help you to make the most informed decision for your situation.

Primary Occupation

As a full-time wedding planner, all of your business hours are dedicated to wedding planning. This means you are available during normal business hours to attend appointments, answer telephone calls and handle e-mail correspondence. Your hours of business allow you to tend to business with other wedding professionals and with your clients. You are able to attend continuing education courses held during business hours, as well as daytime networking activities.

The disadvantages of a full-time wedding planner are primarily the disadvantages of being self-employed:

- A steady income is not guaranteed
- No insurance benefits

Part-Time Occupation

The advantage of being a part-time wedding planner is that you can maintain another job, possibly even a full-time position with benefits. This will allow you to have a more reliable income and the structured hours you may need.

The main disadvantage of wedding planning as a secondary occupation, is that there are limited hours available to devote to clients and to the planning process

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during normal business hours. You will also most likely need to limit the number of events you accept so you do not overextend yourself.