

CHAPTER 2

Service Categories and Levels

Determining What Services to Offer

A professional wedding planner will be expected to offer many types of services that can be classified under several major categories:

- Advice and Guidance
- Planning Services
- Event Execution and Direction
- Vendor Recommendations
- Product Resource
- Social Events Production

With so many aspects of wedding planning that need attention, the wedding planner must make a decision as to what services to offer and to what extent prior to meeting with clients. Below is an overview of these categories and numerous services that can fall under them, but the list is by no means complete.

Advice and Guidance

The client will look to the planner for advice and guidance during any phase of the planning process. This may be in the form of telephone calls, e-mails or text messages. Past experiences and training will allow the TWP to be able to intelligently discuss almost any type of problem. It is always a good idea to be honest with clients in that the answer may not be available immediately. Assuring clients that the resources are available to answer questions and give advice are always near at hand either through reference books or via discussions with other planners will add value and goodwill to your services.

As a planner's business evolves, he/she will develop and refine his/her own unique set of planning tools that will help give the client direction. The tools of

this trade include budgets, timelines, task lists or countdowns, recommended vendor lists and more. Occasionally, some clients seek a service to help them kick-start their own planning. Some planners offer a “getting started” service as a two to three hour meeting during which they supply the couple with a generic representation of these vitals, giving them an idea of where to begin.

Planning Services

Planning services encompass the majority of what every planner does. Of course there is the execution on the weekend of the wedding, but all of the months of planning are what lead there. These roles and services, as explained in this chapter, comprise the essence of wedding planning.

Assembling the Dream Team

Vendor Recommendations

One of the most significant benefits a professional wedding planner offers clients is solid connections to qualified wedding vendors. It is the TWP’s duty to locate competent wedding industry professionals who are compatible with the client’s budget, style and wedding date. The following are major categories of vendors typically necessary.

Apparel

The selection of her wedding gown is often one of the first big decisions a bride will make. But sometimes when a bride secures her wedding planner, she has not found her gown yet. Locally, there are several fantastic salons and boutiques that not only offer bridal gowns, but also the gamut of the entire wedding party’s attire. The knowledgeable wedding planner knows what shops sell which lines/designers of gowns, attendant dresses, mother dresses, flower girl dresses and if they also rent tuxedos. The wedding party apparel goes a long way to setting the style of the event so the prepared planner will be clued in to what the bride is looking for and where she can find it.

Catering

Chapter 2 Service Categories

When a venue is being considered it is important that the wedding planner be aware of the catering policy – whether or not an outside caterer can be engaged to prepare and serve food. It is especially important for cultural weddings where a specific type of food is necessary. Additionally, it is imperative that the planner be aware of whatever will be provided by the caterer other than food – tables, chairs, linens, staff/bartenders, china, flatware, glassware, cake cutting utensils etc.

Ceremony Décor

In considering the décor for the ceremony it is best to visit the site with the client to understand their vision for the day. Take into consideration that the ceremony comprises only one-fifth of the wedding celebration while the remainder of the time will be spent at the reception. If the church is old-world ornate there may be no need for additional décor. On the other hand, if the couple are being married outside there may be a need for elaborate backdrops. The final decision should be based on the couple's wishes and budget allowance, as well as the church or venue's guidelines.

Ceremony Music

Music for the ceremony may be religious or secular depending upon the venue. Some facilities prohibit the use of non-religious music. It is the responsibility of the TWP to have a copy of policies and procedures before proceeding with music choices for the ceremony.

The most common instruments used for ceremony music are the piano and/or organ, but the services of a string quartet or trio, harpist, classical guitarist, keyboardist or trumpeter may also be engaged for the ceremony. The couple may wish to have a soloist perform as well. If this is the case, the TWP should check with the onsite staff to be certain that engaging additional musicians does not violate any of the facility's rules. Approval for any music to be played at the ceremony must be obtained from the music director or the officiant.

Ceremony Site

3

Chapter 2 Service Categories

In many cases the ceremony site dictates the wedding date. The availability of a particular religious venue may be a consideration if the couple are members and wish to be married at that venue, but in all cases the ceremony location should be the choice of the client. Some other factors that may impact where the ceremony will be held are the guest count and membership. If a church wedding is desired, there are often restrictions on how far in advance a non-member can book a wedding. In some cases a period of six months' membership is required for the couple. Pre-nuptial classes are commonly required by many churches for couples intending to marry. It is the responsibility of the TWP to obtain a copy of policies and procedures before proceeding with venue choices for the ceremony.

Some couples wish to hold their ceremony in a venue other than a religious facility. In this situation, it is up to the planner to identify available options for the ceremony. Choices include such venues as hotel ballrooms, country clubs, outdoor venues and many others.

Often, couples today choose their ceremony site to commemorate the location of their first date or point of engagement, or they might hold their ceremony at the home of a family member or friend. It is also not uncommon for the couple to have married out of state or country and then renew vows or simply skip the formal ceremony and just have a reception.

Church Facility Rentals

In most cases, the church will have all necessary items to perform the ceremony, such as kneelers and podiums. It is the planner's charge to make sure necessary items are available. In many cases the florist can supply things such as candelabra, unity candle stands or small tables for guest registry. The TWP should anticipate whether or not there are items that need to be rented and inform the client.

Hotel Accommodations

Out-of-town wedding guests will need hotel accommodations, and a planner may

be asked to provide information on area hotels or help reserve a block of rooms.

4

Chapter 2 Service Categories

Often a discounted rate may be secured if many rooms are reserved for the same event. The TWP should contact a group sales manager to negotiate a rate for traveling guests. The bride and groom will usually sign a non-binding contract that states the number of rooms, the dates of arrival and check-out and a cut-off date when the room rate will no longer be honored. If a credit card is required before the client sign the agreement be sure to ask about an attrition rate – the number of rooms that will have to be guaranteed by the client in order to secure the reservation. It is the responsibility of the TWP to review the accommodation contract.

Officiant

The officiant of the ceremony can be a justice of the peace, a judge, a priest, a rabbi, a pastor or an ordained minister. In all cases, it is the responsibility of the planner to defer to the officiant in determining the order of service. Regardless of the ceremony locale, the officiant will have the final word regarding the ceremony structure, readings and music.

Photography

Photographs capturing the event are one of the few tangible items the couple will have after all the excitement of their day has passed. There are different formats used by photographers – medium format (film) and digital (non-film) – though most use digital now. Photographs may be in black and white as well as color and may be altered either by a photo laboratory or by the photographer. The photographer should have wedding experience; Uncle Bob can take good pictures, but is he aware of all the shots that are not to be missed at a wedding? There are also different types of photographers with the two most common advertising themselves as either traditional or as photojournalistic. Just as film has given way to digital, traditional photography is being overtaken by photojournalism. The traditional photographer will have posed shots for most of the pictures while a photojournalistic photographer will take not only the formal

posed shots at the church, but also capture the ceremony and reception in a

5

Chapter 2 Service Categories

candid fashion. It is the couple's choice and the responsibility of the TWP to be able to offer both types.

Photographs of the wedding are usually available in proof form either on the Internet or in a book within several weeks of the wedding. The final wedding album (once photos have been chosen by the couple) can take from six to twelve weeks before it is presented. Sometimes clients select their final prints well after the wedding. It is well advised to make sure the couple knows that this may increase their costs. Sometimes, when photography is important to a client but budget is an issue, it might be wise to suggest the client invest in the best talent they can afford and focus on the product later. Most photographers will allow a reasonable window of time for the couple to purchase an album or prints.

Further, some photographers are open to negotiating a package in which the client obtains a CD of their wedding images and the rights to do whatever they wish with them. There are many software programs and websites that allow the average person to create a lovely album if they have quality images to use.

Reception Site

One of the first questions asked by possible reception site staff will be the number of expected guests. This number will determine availability of particular ballrooms or catering space. For a buffet or food station type of reception, 100% seating availability is suggested but not required. The budget will also be a great determining factor in this selection. The planner should have a list of questions that are standard when reviewing various reception sites – how many guests can be seated comfortably, are there additional events occurring during the requested date, what is the facility's minimum food, beverage, security and parking requirements. Note that whenever the reception site is quoting a minimum food and beverage requirement, the required taxes and service charges (usually amounting to approximately 30% of the total) are not included in the minimum.

Reception Décor

Chapter 2 Service Categories

Reception Décor can be simple or elaborate. Décor includes floral, “bling”, trees, furniture/props, linens, tableware, paper goods, favors, etc. Lighting has become a very popular element of reception décor. Although not necessary, lighting can change the entire mood of the room if an allowance is included in the client’s budget. Lighting specialists can survey a room and make suggestions as to how to best light the room to get the ambiance that the couple hope to convey. Lighting can take a pretty reception set-up to absolutely breathtaking with just a few key elements.

Pinspots are lights usually installed on the ceiling that shine directly on the centerpiece of each guest table; pinspotting can be used to highlight the buffet, cake, registry and gift tables as well. Another lighting element is color washing or uplighting, which are lights placed along the wall that bathe the wall with color. Some clients like to have the colors washing the walls change throughout the evening’s festivities to subtly transform the mood or energy. Another fun option is the gobo. A gobo is a thin circular plate with holes cut in it to create patterns of projected light. A monogram gobo can be digitally produced on the walls or dance floor to personalize the reception.

Be sure to check with the reception facility to learn if there are any limitations or special rules regarding any aspect of décor and to determine the timeline for vendor set-up. Décor installation can be very time consuming, and because venues often host back-to-back events, getting the timing right is vital.

Reception Music

Reception music is often provided by either a live band or a disc jockey and is determined by both the preference and budget of the client. Couples have oftentimes used the services of a live band and engaged a disc jockey to fill in when the band takes breaks (usually two or three times during the event) to maintain the party’s momentum by keeping the music playing. Some clients might like having a member of the band play during cocktail hour, or hire entirely

different musicians for this time, such as a strings group, harpist, pianist or

7

Chapter 2 Service Categories

guitarist. Regardless of the type of entertainment, planners must check with the contact or booking agent regarding power needs of the entertainer(s) and then with the facility representative to ensure the venue can meet the power requirements and determine if there will be additional charges to the client for the power usage. This is crucial for bands and DJs, as their equipment can draw a lot of power.

Rentals for Reception

Once the reception site has been selected the TWP should be aware of any and all possible rentals that might need to be added into the budget to complete the vision of the couple. Rentals that might be necessary are tables, chairs, linens, flatware, china, glassware, beverage serving stations, dance floors, etc.

Stationery/Maps/Calligraphy

Stationery is one of the most tangible categories that touch the wedding couple's guests. Guests receive the invitation, use the map card to find the wedding site(s), review the wedding program during the ceremony and anticipate the meal explained on the menu card. The client will look to the planner to help determine what stationery pieces to order and when and where to place the order, as well as how they can tie the theme and style of the event into all of the stationery items. Maps and/or written directions highlighting key locations such as the ceremony and reception sites and guest hotels are very helpful to those unfamiliar with the city in which the event is being held. Nowadays this task has been simplified by use of the Internet. It is also a good idea to provide a map from a general area, for instance, an airport. Maps are usually included with the invitation, but can also be placed in hotel welcome bags or even made available at the ceremony site. Calligraphy, the art of beautifully addressing envelopes, continues to be popular. Envelopes can be hand addressed by a calligrapher or computer-addressed in a fancy font. A professional calligrapher can be an additional resource for paper products and for proper etiquette.

Transportation

With so many varieties of transportation available, again it is the client's preference and budget that will determine how elaborate to go and who might have transportation provided for them on the wedding day. If most of the guests are coming in from out of town, the couple may choose to hire buses to transport guests to and from the rehearsal dinner, the ceremony and the reception.

Transportation might consist of a limousine or bus for the bridesmaids, groomsmen and family members or can be scaled down to only include the couple. Other forms of transportation may be considered including a horse and carriage, a vintage car, a trolley car, an old pick-up truck, a golf cart and more.

Videography

A video of the wedding is something that has become more and more popular. The video is a movie presentation for the couple who oftentimes cannot remember all the details that were planned or how their event actually unfolded because they are so caught up in the moment. If the bride is in the bride's room waiting for the ceremony to start, it will be the videographer who captures the harpist or string quartet playing the prelude (music played before the ceremony begins). It is the video that captures a tear rolling down a face, grandparents who have traveled from out of state and sometimes even thoughts from parents and friends. Many videographers capture the couple's thoughts just before they walk down the aisle, and this is recorded permanently for the couple to view. The video is the perfect complement to the photographs and neither is more important than the other. The videographer spends many hours editing and condensing the video and this process can take up to six months to complete depending on the videographer's schedule.

Many videographers require the client to select five or six musical selections to be used as background music. Make sure the client informs the videographer of these selections before the wedding to avoid post-wedding delays.

Wedding Cakes

Unless the venue for the reception includes a wedding cake in the proposal, it will be necessary to hire an additional vendor – a professional baker – to create the wedding cake. Wedding cakes have evolved from the traditional breaking of bread over the bride’s head and guests eating the crumbs that fell to the floor to elaborately tiered and lavishly decorated masterpieces. A great southern tradition is the groom’s cake. This cake is usually chocolate and may be created in the shape of something as simple as a layer cake or something as elaborate as a golf bag, a sports stadium or some other representation of a special hobby or interest of the groom. It is the responsibility of the TWP to check with the venue to determine details such as if there is a cake cutting fee or whether the venue staff will be serving the cake to each guest table or if the cake will be cut and served from the cake table. The cake cutting fee can sometimes be negotiated to a lesser fee or even totally eliminated.

Event Execution and Direction

Rehearsal and Ceremony Only

The planner attends the rehearsal to meet the family and attendants. The planner may or may not direct the rehearsal, depending on the procedures of the ceremony venue and the preference of the officiant.

Rehearsal, Ceremony and Reception

Taking on the direction roles of the rehearsal, ceremony and reception may require the aid of an assistant depending on the number of guests, attendants and proximity of the ceremony and reception sites. While it is not impossible for the planner to take on total responsibility, the task is much easier when assistance is utilized.

Reception Only

Chapter 2 Service Categories

In some cases the planner may be asked to coordinate the reception without the rehearsal and ceremony. The couple that has married earlier in the day, at another time, or has renewed vows in a small setting would usually do this. The reception agenda is just as important for the planner as the entire day's schedule of events.

Product Resource

Bouquet Preservation

Freeze-drying the bridal bouquet is being done on a more frequent basis than in years past. The process is usually begun immediately after the wedding reception and the bouquet is freeze-dried by professionals. It does not come without cost and this varies by the choice of the bride and how she chooses to display this remembrance of her wedding day. As the planner, you can opt to facilitate this, but you must plan ahead. Most companies offering this service require obtaining the bouquet on the wedding night or the following day to ensure the best quality product.

Bridal Party Gifts

Most couples need suggestions for gifts for their wedding party. Offering creative choices once again enhances the value of the planner to the clients.

Favors

Keepsakes to share with guests as they leave the wedding reception can be as small as a personalized mint to as elaborate as a "bar" serving varieties of candies that guests choose as they leave. In addition to consumable favors, you can get creative with other options ranging from simple candles to arranging donations in the guests' honor to the bride and groom's favorite charity. Assisting the client with choices that fit into their budget and style can be an additional service offered by the Trained Wedding Planner.

Gown Preservation

Chapter 2 Service Categories

This service can be offered either through a wholesaler or the salon where the bride purchased her wedding gown. The wedding gown is cleaned and preserved in a weather-sealed box for use at a later time and can be left unopened for years.

Specialty Linens

As guests enter the reception, the ambiance should be one of warmth. In many instances the bride's budget allows for specialty linen rental. Many clients want a particular look as the guests arrive at the reception and this is usually carried out in a color scheme or theme. The budget should always be taken into consideration prior to the decision to rent linens as this expenditure can prove quite costly. If the venue's chairs are not acceptable to the couple, the choice may be made to rent chair covers in a color to match the decor. Another choice would be to rent chairs from one of the reputable rental agencies in the area. Specialty cake table linens can also add a special touch to the reception.

Wedding Stationery, Invitations and Accessories

Personal stationery, invitations and accessories can be offered as an option by the planner and can be a lucrative addition to the planner's income by dealing as a wholesaler for various companies. Today there is stationery for engagement announcements, save-the-date cards, bridesmaids' luncheon invitations, rehearsal dinner invitations, wedding programs, wedding invitations and thank-you notes. Accessories such as unity candles, cake knives and servers, toasting flutes, guest books and pens and personalized napkins can also be ordered through the planner.

Social Event Services

In addition to the actual ceremony and reception, some clients want to secure assistance with the other events surrounding their wedding. Many planners have separate contracts for these social events, and the parties are a great way to earn additional fees while working on something a little different than the usual.

Following is a list of possible events for which you may choose to offer planning

services to your clients.

12

Chapter 2 Service Categories

Bridal Luncheon

This get-together is usually held a few days before or the day before the wedding. With many family members and attendants living in a city other than the bride, it has become a tradition to hold a fun ladies' gathering usually during the noontime hour offering a great opportunity to have the far-flung wedding party get acquainted. It is hosted by either the bride's family or by the bride herself.

Day-After Brunch

If there are a considerable number of guests who will be attending the wedding from out of the area, it is a charming gesture to have the out-of-town guests gather for a day-after brunch before heading back to their home state or city. This gathering can be as simple as a continental breakfast served at the hotel where guests are staying to an elaborate brunch buffet, once again depending on the budget.

Engagement Party

The couples parents, family or friends may wish to celebrate the news of the engagement by honoring the new couple with an engagement party. It is not necessary to include the fact that it is an "engagement party" in the invitation – simply a celebration honoring the couple. If presented in this manner, guests would not feel obligated or question whether it would be necessary to present a gift, as engagement gifts are not required. The guest list is generally limited to the couple's relatives and close friends and should never include anyone who will not be invited to the actual wedding.

Rehearsal Dinner

The parents of the groom traditionally host the rehearsal dinner, but it is also acceptable for the couple to host their own dinner. This is the time for the families and the attendants to get together in a relaxed atmosphere to meet. The rehearsal dinner is typically held on the evening before the wedding but in other cultures it may be held a few days earlier than the wedding. The dinner menu,

décor and invitation should not attempt to “upstage” any of the wedding plans.
Likewise, the degree of formality should also be discussed with the bride’s family

before finalizing any details. Traditionally, the entire wedding party and their spouses or dates are included on the rehearsal dinner guest list. Both sets of parents, grandparents, immediate family and out-of-town guests are also invited if the budget permits. Invitations should be sent out about a week after the wedding invitations and the dinner should be scheduled to immediately follow the rehearsal with driving time taken into consideration.

Structuring Service Levels

After mapping out the services to offer, the TWP must next determine how he or she will structure and sell them. Most planners develop a variety of packages proposing different levels of service. While every planner's offerings are unique, generally the most common packages are "full service", "weekend or month of" and often, a service that falls somewhere in between. Another option that many planners provide is allowing clients to build their own service from an a la carte menu.

Full Service

Because everyone's idea of full service is subjective, the prudent wedding planner will spell out every service and detail included in the full service package. What might seem like an obvious inclusion to one planner – or client – may be considered above and beyond by another. For most professionals however, full service does mean some form of holding the client's hand during every step of the process. Each planner should be sure to spend time deciding what that entails for him/herself.

Weekend or Month of Service

This is the "home stretch" package; the one that pulls all of the bride's plans and her loose ends together to make the event happen – successfully. Again, it varies by each professional, but with this type of service, typically the planner and client will start meeting and finalizing details six to eight weeks prior to the wedding.

Chapter 2 Service Categories

Middle-of-the-Road Service

Some planners shy away from a package that offers more planning assistance than a final stage option but not the full, hands-on level of service because this is the package most likely to bring scope creep. Even if it is made abundantly clear when the contract is signed what services are included and how many meetings the client is limited to, somewhere along the way the client is likely to forget and develop higher expectations. It is more possible to be taken advantage of with this type of package, but that can be avoided by standing firm with the client, with professionalism and kindness, of course! Establishing clear boundaries upfront and managing expectations during the planning can help avoid an unpleasant conversation that might be necessary once it has gone too far.

A la Carte

A la carte doesn't need much explanation. This option allows the client to choose specific services from the planner's menu of offerings, building their own custom package. The planner could have a predetermined price set for each activity/service and give the client the bottom line at the meeting or she/he could go back to the client with a proposal and price after the meeting. While some planners may not want to leave things as wide open as this allows, it is always a good idea to be flexible even within set packages because not every client is the same.