



## Hiring the perfect wedding planner.

Look around and weddings are everywhere – television, magazines, and in the movies. Wedding planners are getting a lot of attention. As the demand for professional wedding planners increases, so does the number of men and women changing careers to try wedding planning. With so many options to choose from, here are some guidelines in selecting an extraordinary planner to guide you through this vulnerable journey.

Are all wedding planners created equal? Obviously not and while your wedding day will reveal whether you've chosen the right planner, you should feel confident with your choice long before it's too late. An expert wedding planner can mean the difference between stress and joy, between panic and peace.

**A Good Planner Listens** A professional planner should listen and pay close attention to your verbal and non-verbal communication. They will promptly respond to your questions and ideas with diplomatic solutions, creative suggestions and enthusiastic recommendations. It's a good idea to ask a planner to repeat what you've described so far in their own words. That way, you can make sure you are both communicating clearly. As important as fulfilling your requests, is a planner's responsibility to let you know when an idea or request is unrealistic. Good planners are diplomatic. Saying "no" without an explanation or discounting your ideas in favor of their own is less than professional. After all, they are planning *your* wedding and a "problem" is just an opportunity to formulate a new solution.

A great coordinator will help you articulate your vision by looking at the photos you've selected from magazines or show you photos of past events to elicit your response and clarify your vision. This can be like reading braille for a coordinator. It is a skill to be developed and a seasoned planner will have what it takes. An extraordinary planner will even sketch out your vision to confirm they are sharing your same vision.

**A Good Planner is Comforting** A professional planner will get to know you and will build a relationship based on trust. Like a loving friend or family member, your wedding planner is someone on whom you should be able to depend. You should feel comfortable with and connected to your wedding planner. There are many occasions during a wedding when a bride or groom cannot be physically or emotionally available to address an issue that requires action, so you should know that your wedding planner will be on top of everything that comes up. If you feel comfortable with their judgement and reliability in the beginning, you will feel much more comfortable on your wedding day. Someone who will blend in with your guests and know your vision well enough to be your eyes and ears.

**A Good Planner is Kind** Efficiency isn't everything. A good planner should exude warmth as well. An extraordinary planner will treat everyone involved with the wedding kindly and respectfully. Each family member, guest, vendor and staff member should be treated as well as the bride and groom. They are each a part of the wedding. Your planner should behave toward every guest as a gracious host. If there is a dispute, the best planners will consistently disarm the confrontation and create a "win-win" solution for all parties involved. Whether it means counseling a nervous parent, entertaining small children, or even calming the family pet, the right planner should be ready. Trust your instincts. If you don't sense that the planner you're considering will treat you and your guests the way you would, you probably right and you should know this is not the right person for you.

**A Good Planner Stays Cool** An extraordinary planner knows how to defuse unexpected stress rather than amplify it. They can rarely be rattled or pushed over the edge. One good way to tell how your planner may react in difficult circumstances is to be observant of the planner's personal life.

Are they spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and physically balanced? Sometimes it's easier to tell than you may think. When you meet with them are they distracted by their personal life? Do they appear to be happy or are they complaining? This is not to say that a great wedding planner who is distracted while they are meeting with you won't produce an outstanding event; however, you should realize that this is typical of how your meetings will be conducted and you should be prepared not to feel like the most important person in the room. When someone is balanced, they are better able to give time, energy and resources to you. A wedding planner who is highly vulnerable to having their "buttons pushed" suggests they have unhealed areas from their past that will impact how they respond to crisis situations. A planner is often the recipient of a client's fear, anxiety and sometimes, irrational and erratic behavior. The planner may become the "scapegoat" for the residual anger that emanates within many families. It is best that a planner come to the table ready to offer with his or her own peace, joy and balance.

**A Good Planner is Creative** A good planner's creativity involves more than colors, design and flowers. Creativity is also required for effective problem solving techniques. A diversified background and knowledge of design, business and psychology are beneficial when planning a wedding. Their creativity and experience will help prevent you from making mistakes and, consequently, wasting money. They will also know how to cut budgets when necessary.

**A Good Planner is Respected** A wedding professional should be active within wedding industry associations and maintain strong relationships with other wedding professionals. When a planner is highly revered by other top professionals in the industry, you can safely assume that they work well with others and excel at their job.

**A Good Planner is Available and Ready** Take your time and interview the planners you've discovered and those who have been recommended to you. If they have your date available, ask if they have other commitments that would prevent them from focusing on you at the time of your wedding.

Decide how much assistance you expect and be certain your planner understands your needs. Ultimately, your satisfaction with their performance will depend on how well they met your expectations. You need to decide if you want someone to help guide you through the process of making decisions or to make the decisions for you. Some brides hire a planner due to their "style" and ability; in this case, be prepared to let planner do what they do best.

**A Good Planner Works for You** The cost of hiring a professional wedding planner varies based on the amount of time and assistance you require and the experience of the planner. After determining the appropriate cost, ask how they are compensated. In addition to your payment, do they receive commissions from the vendors they recommend? If they only refer people who pay them a commission, will they be impartial when assisting you in selecting the perfect florist, photographer or band? However, if the commission paid to the planner comes out of the vendor's profit (not your wallet) and you would hire the same professionals regardless of the referral, then you may actually come out ahead; due to the commissions paid by other professionals, your cost to hire that planner may be less than a planner where you are the sole source of compensation. Regardless, the best wedding planners will only refer people who they are confident will exceed your expectations and make your wedding perfect.

When you find the right fit, you'll know it. If after the wedding you were thrilled with your planner, please share your experience with others. There is no greater compliment for a wedding planner than an enthusiastic referral from a satisfied bride and groom.

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