

# A PERFECT DAY

EFFECTIVE PLANNING IS THE KEY TO A STRESS-FREE WEDDING

Story: Michele Turner

Planning a wedding can be one of the most exciting and gratifying times of your life. It can also easily become a horrific experience plagued by panic, stress, and an overwhelming desire to hop a “red-eye” to Vegas. So, how can couples take measures to ensure that their ceremony witnesses do not include an Elvis impersonator?

The most important advice I stress to all brides is to allow plenty of time to plan. Rome was not built in a day. This is also true for one of the most important events of your life. Regardless of how small, large, simple, or elaborate your vision is for this day, rest assured that the height of your “to-do” list will undoubtedly dwarf the summit of Mt. Everest if you are not careful. Adequate planning and an experienced event coordinator can make all the difference in the world and ensure that the “b” words used by your friends and family to describe you on the big day include “beautiful and brilliant” rather than “bride-zilla.”

It is imperative that you set deadlines for yourself and meet them. Ideally, all brides would have at least twelve to eighteen months to plan their event. Realistically, this is not typically the case. It is important to remember that the earlier you start, the more likely you will be able to secure the wedding professionals you desire.

Remember, there is a very good reason why particular wed-

ding professionals are booked one year in advance—it is because they are great at what they do. So don’t assume that you will have the pick of the litter if you start calling around four months before your wedding date. The only thing this assures you is a sense of panic that will quickly escalate to mass hysteria by day two of phone calls.

The timeline below will help you organize yourself, set deadlines, and remain as composed as is humanly possible. This timeline encompasses the major highlights of a wedding “to-do” list that will ensure that you are well on your way to being the calm, collected bride you always envisioned. If you are planning in a short time frame, DO NOT panic. Start immediately, and do not be afraid to ask for help from friends, family, and professionals. Most importantly, do not allow details to overshadow what this day should mean to you, your fiancé, and your families.

## 6-8 MONTHS PRIOR TO YOUR WEDDING

### Determine your “vision” of the day:

What season or time of year do you want to have the wedding? Will it be intimate or elaborate? Formal or informal? Sit down with your fiancé and make these basic decisions. The answers will guide you through the rest of the planning process.

### Hire an event coordinator, if desired:

Being in the event coordinating business, I obviously have strong opinions about the benefits of a coordinator. Oftentimes, when interviewing with brides, I follow up the conversation with one phrase: “If you don’t hire us, hire someone.” In addition to having a professional that can guide you through the maze of wedding etiquette (which has come a long way since the days of Emily Post), a coordinator will allow you, your families, and your friends to enjoy the day together as he or she shuffles hurriedly around to pin corsages, line up ceremony attendants, cue reception announcements, and hand out favors.

### Set a budget:

Everyone’s financial circumstances are different. A budget is crucial because it is easy to lose track of expenses. A coordinator can also be a huge asset when setting your budget. They understand where the large expenses surface and can help you prioritize your needs, as well as brainstorm on creative ways to make the most of your available funds.

### Compile a guest list:

Many people wait until they have secured a site to worry about the guest list and addresses. This is a mistake that occurs all too often. How can you make an educated decision regarding the capacity needs of your chosen

facilities with no clear idea of your minimum and maximum number of potential guests? Handling this detail early will prevent you from trying to squeeze 350 of your parents' "closest" friends into an intimate wedding chapel built to accommodate 100 guests.

**Set a date and reserve your ceremony and reception sites:**

These are the first things to secure. Find what you want and put down a deposit.

**Select and reserve the following wedding professionals:**

Secure your caterer, photographer, florist, ceremony and reception musicians, officiator, videographer, and cake baker. This is time-consuming. Conduct research, ask questions, and remember that time is always of the essence.

**Select attendants and order bridal gown/bridesmaids' dresses:**

Some bridal gowns and bridesmaids' dresses can take months to receive after the initial order. Place your order as soon as possible to ensure adequate time for alterations.

**4-6 MONTHS PRIOR TO YOUR WEDDING**

**Plan and book your honeymoon:**

Great deals can be found on the Internet—just be careful that it is a great deal. For plans this important, I recommend using a travel agent that can assist you with your trip details—but the need for professional assistance is ultimately dictated by the complexity of your travel plans.

**Select and order invitations and all stationary:**

Don't forget to secure someone, whether a professional or a friend, to assemble and address your invitations.

**Arrange wedding day transportation and wedding night accommodations:**

You have booked the honeymoon, but make sure you have a place to stay on the night of your wedding if you aren't leaving immediately—and don't forget to make arrangements for transportation. Otherwise you might end up bunking with your parents in their room at Howard Johnson's.

**Register for gifts, purchase wedding rings, select favors and wedding party gifts:**

Don't forget these details. Selecting and ordering these items can often take longer than you anticipate. Leave yourself plenty of time to avoid hasty decisions.

**Purchase or reserve groom's party formal attire:**

Men shrink away at the site of a tailor or the utterance of the word "tuxedo." Handle this early to allow time for them to adjust to the idea of a "bow tie" or "tails." This is also a good time to ensure that you have secured all necessary accessories for your bridal gown (i.e. shoes, jewelry, veil, lingerie, stockings, girdle, crinoline, and, of course, the kitchen sink).

**2-4 MONTHS PRIOR TO YOUR WEDDING**

**Discuss final event details with the following wedding professionals:**

Talk about menus with the caterer; discuss event setup with the coordinator, rental company, and event facilities; plan the service, readings, wedding vows, and ceremony musical selections with the officiator; give the photographer you desired photo list; settle

on floral and bouquet details with the florist; inform your reception entertainment professional of music expectations and requests; and take care of your hair and makeup with a salon professional.

**Mail invitations:**

Mailings should be coordinated with enough time to receive responses and provide a final guarantee to your caterer. Typically, invitations to out-of-town guests should be mailed six to eight weeks prior to the event, with the in-town guests receiving invitations four to six weeks prior to the event. Remember to make sure that the postage for your response card is adequate.

**Schedule the rehearsal and the rehearsal dinner:**

Make sure that the wedding professionals planning to attend the rehearsal (your coordinator, officiator, ceremony musician, etc.) are all aware of the time and date, as well as your immediate family, wedding party, readers and other ceremony participants.

**1-2 MONTHS PRIOR TO YOUR WEDDING**

**Ensure you have compiled all necessary items provided by you or your family:**

The best thing to do is purchase two large storage tubs with lids. Label one "ceremony" and the other "reception" and add items to them as you acquire them. "Ceremony" tubs often include programs, unity candles, guest book, signing pen, pictures to display at ceremony site, etc., and "reception" tubs often include favors, favorite CDs for the band or deejay to play, toasting glasses, cake service, etc.

**Marriage license:**

Nothing brings a ceremony to a dead halt like the lack of a license. Find out what the individual requirements are for the county in which you will be married and make plans to do this immediately. This is also a good time to begin assembling the necessary documents for a bride wishing to legally change her name—but do not start this process until after you return from your honeymoon.

**2-4 WEEKS PRIOR TO YOUR WEDDING**

Last minute details include tasks such as final dress fittings and pick-up of dresses, finalization and printing of ceremony programs, writing toasts for the rehearsal dinner or vows for the ceremony, finalization of seating plans and place cards, and finalization of event timelines with your coordinator.

**1-2 WEEKS PRIOR TO YOUR WEDDING**

More last-minute details include tasks such as getting a final guaranteed guest count to the caterer; writing thank you notes to your parents, family, close friends, and wedding party for their involvement in your big day; wrapping thank-you gifts; confirming and packing for the honeymoon; taking care of beauty requirements such as hair color or eyebrow and body waxing; and confirming, or having your coordinator confirm, arrival times and all contract logistics with your wedding professionals and service providers.

**1 DAY PRIOR TO YOUR WEDDING**

Final details include tasks such as getting a manicure and pedicure, hosting a bridesmaids' luncheon, attending the rehearsal, and preparing tip or payment

envelopes for wedding professionals requiring final payment on the day of the event.

**YOUR WEDDING DAY**

Relax and enjoy every moment of your special day.

Keep your eye on the aisle and don't let details such as bows, bubbles, baked brie, or bands cloud your judgment regarding who and what this day is truly about. Planning carefully, setting and maintaining realistic goals for yourself, and never losing sight of the important aspects surrounding this day will ensure that you are the cool, calm, and brilliant bride that everyone knew you would be. Follow these tips and save that first-class ticket to Vegas for your renewal vows later on down the road. This way, you will have the best of both worlds and you will still make Elvis proud.

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