

HOW TO PLAN THE PERFECT WEDDING RECEPTION

Congratulations on getting engaged. Now you have the huge responsibility of planning a wedding reception that includes all the details that will make for your perfect day and at the same time, ensure that your guests have a wonderful time. Weddings can be very expensive, not everyone has an unlimited budget. There are many vendors involved, so it is best to shop around – but there are few things to look for to make sure your event is successful. Following are some factors to consider in making your arrangements. These are my suggestions after performing at over 700 weddings and a few hundred other parties and events.

Prioritizing your budget:

If you ask anyone what the two most important factors of a good reception are – most people would answer “the food and the music”. This is true, but a few months or more after your reception, most of your guests would not even be able to tell you what they ate, much less how good it tasted. However, they will remember if they had a good time, danced, and were genuinely entertained. Shockingly enough, some couples will spend more money on the cheese and cracker platter served before the meal than they do on the entertainment. It is very true that the DJ will make or break your event. If the entertainment is dry and boring, your guests will all leave after dinner is over. So it is crucial that you allow your budget to ensure that you have hired the best entertainment possible. You should have music playing from the time guests arrive at the reception until your party is over. You should budget anywhere from \$100 to \$150 per hour, not including a tip, for your entertainment. Additionally, sit down meals are usually more expensive per person and take more time to get through – leaving you less time to dance and have fun. Buffets are popular because people can choose what they want to eat and eat until they are full. It is not necessary to provide multiple options as long as the food is tasty. I would say that buffets are used at about 90% of all wedding receptions, so if your budget does not allow for a 5 course meal – don’t sweat it. Here’s another tip: instead of paying for an expensive desert assortment – purchase a variety of chocolates and candies, put them in large containers, and provide goody bags for your guests to fill up with their favorite “sweets”. This can save you money and it will be well received by your guests. Champagne for the toast is also one of those options that can be eliminated if you are on a tight budget. I have noticed that most guests don’t drink all of their champagne anyway, so let them toast with whatever their drink of choice is. This alone could save you several hundred dollars.

The Ideal Location:

It is funny how many couples will choose the date they wed based on the availability of the hall they want to rent. Location is important, but more important are other factors such as – is there

enough parking for the guests? If ladies have to walk a long distance in heels they will be in a poor mood from the moment they enter the room. Is the place difficult to find or far away from the ceremony? Guests may not attend your ceremony if it is a long drive to the reception. Will all the guests be seated in the same room as the entertainment – or will it be chopped up into separate adjoining rooms? If the guests cannot see the dance floor and the dj cannot see the guests – the party will not come together well. Is there room for a dance floor and can the dj's table be placed in front of the dance floor? This is very important – I cannot stress this enough! If you stick the dj in the back corner of the room and there are several tables between the dj and the dance floor, the dj will have a difficult time entertaining, the guests seated closest to the dj will complain that the music is too loud, and the lighting that the dj uses will not have half the effect when the dance floor is no where near the lighting. When planning the layout of the room – be sure to put the dj and the dance floor in the center of the room together. One last detail to consider – is there another bar or facility close by that would divert your guests away from your reception. For example – if there is a balcony outside that allows smoking then half of your guests will be hanging outside the entire evening and you will never have a packed dance floor. Be sure that everything they need, including the bar, is located inside the reception room so your guests do not disappear for long periods of time.

Seating your guests:

Most couples use a seating chart and so they decide where their guests will be sitting before they arrive. If you use a seating chart, be sure to place the younger guests near the dj table. The music needs to be loud enough for everyone in the room to hear and the older the guest, the more uncomfortable they will be being seated where the music is the loudest. Also, your older guests tend to stay in their seats all evening while the younger ones are up and on the dance floor. The younger crowd typically does not mind the music being loud. In addition, it may be better to put young children in the back of the room or on the edge near the exterior walls. When they are seated next to the dance floor they will spend most of the evening running and sliding on the dance floor. If your dance floor is full of young children, others will be discouraged from dancing. I have seen children dominating the dance floor put a damper on many receptions that could have been a great party for all.

Opening up the dance floor:

Traditionally, guests know that it is customary to wait to dance until after the bride and groom have had their first dance. For this reason, it is best to do the first dance before dinner – right after introductions. This way, if guests hear a slow song that they like and are still waiting to go to the buffet, they can come up and dance. The bride/father, groom/mother dances can either be done right after the bride and groom's first dance, or saved till dinner is nearly over. The dj will

know how to best get the crowd up and dancing once dinner is over. The napkin pass is a great ice breaker that puts your guests in the partying mood.

Keep them dancing:

As stated earlier, a sure way to kill the dancing at your reception is to give your guests a reason to leave the room. Make sure your bar is located inside the reception room. Also, the bride and groom are the main focal point. If they are not dancing or are not even in the room (out taking photos or smoking, or going to their hotel room) the dance floor will suffer. Sometimes the couple likes to have a slide show presentation of photos of the couple growing up and dating. This is a nice touch, but will also kill the party atmosphere if it is done during the dancing portion of the evening. If you are doing a slide show – it is always best to do it during the cocktail hour or dinner, but it should be torn down and put away by the time dinner has finished. Also, lighting has a lot to do with how comfortable your guests will be on the dance floor. If the lights in the room are too bright or it is a daytime wedding with no blinds on the windows then do not expect many people to dance and certainly not longer than one or two songs. The room needs the ability to dim the lights and let the dj provide adequate lighting for the dance floor. Most people are intimidated to dance if the room is brightly lit. Try to choose a room that has the ability to lower the lights easily. Finally, the best weddings are the ones where the bride and groom trust the dj's judgment to pick the music to be played. When the couple provides a 2-3 page list of songs – not only is there not enough time to play them all, but far too often the guests are not huge fans of the songs on the list. The dance floor will be a ghost town. It is advised to give your dj your top ten fast and slow songs so they have an idea of the type of music you like. Remember, your dj has been to more weddings than anyone else in the room and will know just what to play to keep your guests dancing.