



UNIT-1

The Wedding Planning Industry

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Identifying what marriage means in different religions
- ✓ Exploring wedding traditions in various countries
- ✓ Recognising the role and the scope of wedding consultancy

Unit 1

The Wedding Planning Industry

The word 'wed' actually comes from a Greek word meaning 'pledge.' This is very appropriate considering that's what a wedding ceremony actually is. When people wed they make a pledge to one another, a pledge that is meant to last a lifetime.

The most widely accepted idea of marriage is a union between a woman and a man. An alternative concept describes it as a social affirmation of this union achieved through various ceremonies and rituals. Another way of viewing marriage is to consider it as a system of roles which involve primary relationships. Indeed, marriage is often seen as a complex form of human relationship and one of great depth, facilitating the foundation of societies. It is usually sanctioned in a social setting as a religious or civil ceremony which authorises two people to form a sexual union. It is a bringing together, not only of two people but also of two families, or two tribes, and sometimes two countries. Marriage is a powerful force and is not to be entered into lightly.

The Concept of Marriage in Different Religions

Marriage in Muslim Communities

Marriage is largely obligatory in Muslim communities and is viewed as one half of their faith, such is the importance it holds within the Muslim religion, thus explaining why it has to be declared publicly. Muslim teachings discourage celibacy; therefore, marriage becomes even more important. Marriage in Islam is a formal and binding contract which is entered into between a woman and a man. It summarises the rights and responsibilities of both the bride and the groom. Divorce is permitted within Islam.

The features of Muslim marriages are the acceptance of the marriage proposal by the potential bride, and the capabilities of the groom to enter into the marriage. A marriage in Islam is not valid if it comes with any legal complications. In some, but not all, Muslim communities, there is a preference for marriage between cousins.

Marriage in Christian Communities

Christian communities are numerous and are found everywhere, but in the U.K. the two main denominations are Protestants and Catholics. The Protestants have many denominations and the hierarchy is limited within each denomination. The Catholic Church has only one highest authority on earth: the Pope. All its teachings must have the Pope's approval. In both these communities, marriage is seen as a sacrament and divorce is not permitted in the Catholic Church. A marriage can be declared null, however, if one of the spouses is already married and the first partner is still alive or if one of the partners is not of sound mind or is impotent. This is a long and tedious road, however, and ultimately the Vatican must give approval for the nullification of the marriage. Mixed marriages (with other

religions) are allowed in Catholicism but only if the Catholic spouse takes an oath to raise any children from the marriage as Catholics.

Divorce is allowed in the Protestant religion, as is remarriage after a divorce. Consent must be gained from both parties before a divorce can occur. It must come freely from the other person, and no coercion of any kind is allowed.

Marriage in Hindu Communities

In Hinduism, marriage is considered a tradition (sanskara) as well as a religious sacrament. It is not seen as a contract. Marriage is seen as a holy union of souls, not just bodies. Only death can break the Hindu marriage bond.

Marriage in Jewish Communities

In Jewish traditions, both bride and groom proceed down the aisle with their parents. This does not occur in any other religious ceremony. The bride and groom are married under a tent-like formation called a chupah. It is intended as a symbol of the two people coming together and making a new home. It dates back to biblical times when Abraham married Sarah.

In Judaism, marriage is also a contract. The ceremony is conducted by a rabbi. After the ceremony many couples frame this contract, called a ketubah, and it is on display in their homes.

Wedding Traditions

Chinese Wedding Traditions

Red is the Colour of Weddings in China

For the Chinese, red is the central theme. Red signifies joy, love and prosperity and is used in many different ways in Chinese traditions. The bride is often dressed in red, the invitations are red, and envelopes for cash or boxes for presents are red. On the wedding day both the bride's and groom's homes are decorated in red.



Before the Chinese Wedding Day

A bride-to-be in Chinese tradition will usually go into seclusion. She will do this with close friends. It is a symbolic gesture meant as a mourning period for the loss of her friends and family, as she will go to her husband's family. Before the actual wedding, the family of the groom will bring wedding gifts to the bride's family home. They will all come in red boxes. In one box will be 'milk money' or 'uangsusu.' Other boxes will contain more personal gifts for the bride; in this way, all her personal belongings will already be in her groom's house on the wedding day. Three days prior to the wedding, the women from the bride's family will take gifts to the groom's house, including 'returns' all wrapped in red.

The Day of the Wedding Ceremony

The Chinese are very careful about choosing wedding days. They make their decisions according to astrological signs. Custom dictates that the couple be married on the half-hour and not on the hour. This is considered starting a marriage on the 'upswing' as the clock hand will be moving up rather than down.

The groom's parents will dress him on his wedding day and he will arrive at the bride's house on his way to the wedding place. The groom will be carrying cash gifts in red tissue paper for his bride's friends. This represents an exchange for letting her go. In some families the couple serve tea to their parents while kneeling. It is a gesture implying they are asking permission. The groom and his bride will go to the wedding site together.

Chinese Marriage Ceremony and Reception

The bride and groom's immediate families will attend the ceremony. The bride will traditionally serve her in-laws tea after the ceremony but before the reception. Professional wedding photos will normally be taken, after which the couple and their immediate families will attend the reception. This is a standing event and is usually very elaborate.



An MC will usually make a speech and then the cake will be cut. It will be a huge cake of many layers. These layers symbolise a ladder that they will climb together. The couple feed each other cake, arms entwined. Then pieces are cut for their parents and grandparents. The couple feed them too. Music will accompany the event. People shake hands before leaving the reception area. In some cases, Chinese weddings will be extremely elaborate, with guests sitting down to a ten-course meal, all with musical entertainment.

Chinese brides usually change outfits around three times at the reception.

Indian Weddings

In India, money, sweets and eggs are part of the wedding theme. They are meant to symbolise prosperity, a sweet life, and fertility. The ceremony will include rituals to cast away evil spirits. Once the vows are over, the groom's father (or sometimes his brother) will throw flower petals onto the couple. Indian grooms usually wear turbans which have veils at the front covered in flowers.

Traditionally, the bride will wear a red and pink sari and will have extravagant adornments of jewellery and henna. Her hands and feet will be painted with henna in lovely patterns. This will take place the day before the wedding itself. After the ceremony the bride will receive a special necklace signifying that she is now married.



Indonesian Wedding Traditions

Indonesian Engagement Etiquette

Engagements in Indonesia can last for years. In this time, the bride's and groom's families will exchange gifts in order to strengthen the ties between them.

Indonesian Wedding Ceremony

The wedding programme itself is an extremely important event. Not only close family and friends but also people who are just slightly acquainted with the couple may be invited. This occasionally amounts to thousands of people. Most guests will not attend the ceremony but failure to attend the reception is considered very rude.

Wedding Reception Celebration

Often, an elaborate procession will take place all the way to the reception area. There will be long flower chains and professional dancers and, of course, the family and guests will be waiting for the couple. Usually, the couple will greet every single guest individually before the reception can begin.



Japanese Weddings

Betrothal Ceremony

Yuino is the Japanese word for the betrothal ceremony. This is where gifts are exchanged symbolically between the two families. Popular gifts include a type of seaweed whose name can mean “child-bearing woman”, white hemp pieces which symbolise the couple growing old together, and a folding fan which is opened to symbolise future growth and wealth. The main gift will be money, usually around \$5000 placed in a special envelope with silver and gold strings knotted tightly. Other gifts are delivered in decorative rice-paper envelopes.

Sake-Sharing Ceremony

Traditionally, Japanese ceremonies are conducted in the Shinto tradition, but in the U.S. many Japanese weddings use the Buddhist ceremony. No matter which one the couple choose to use, most rituals will also have a sake-sharing tradition called *san-san-kudo*, which means ‘three’ ‘to deliver’ and ‘nine.’ Sake-sharing dates back centuries and was a formal bond-creating ceremony. Three flat sake cups are stacked on top of one another and the couple will take three sips from each cup. Then both sets of parents do the same. This symbolises the bond that now exists between the two families.



Honouring Parents

In some weddings, the bride and groom will offer flower bouquets, a toast, or letters of love and thanks. These are considered lovely ways of honouring one's parents at a wedding.

Speeches

The wedding speech and the blessings are considered very important in Japanese weddings. Everyone will stand up (family, friends, teachers, colleagues) and wish the bride and groom well. Sometimes the speeches will contain a moral story about the importance of marriage.

Korean Weddings

Engagement Parties

Many Korean-American engagements are held in restaurants. This is where gifts will be exchanged. These gifts can be quite expensive, up to a value of \$30,000 or \$40,000. Family members will then be introduced formally. Brides-to-be sometimes wear a traditional engagement dress called *hanbok*. Entertainment is provided, including traditional Korean music as well as karaoke machines.

A Wild Goose

A tradition occurs before the actual wedding whereby the groom will give his bride's mother a wild goose. In traditional Korean ceremonies in Korea, an actual live goose was presented. Today, it is usually a wooden one. Wild geese are birds that mate for life. Hence, the wild goose symbolises the groom's intention to look after the respective mother's daughter for her entire life.



A Gourd of Wine

Traditionally, Korean weddings are held at the home of the bride's family where vows will be taken. This ceremony is called *kunbere*. The groom and the bride bow to one another and then sip a particular wine which is poured by the mother of the bride into a small gourd. This symbolises the couple's sealing of their vows.

Chestnuts & Dates

Some days after the wedding ceremony, the couple will pay a visit to the family of the groom. Here, there will be another wedding ceremony called *p'ye-baek*. Chestnuts and dates are offered by the bride to her in-laws. These symbolise children. The groom's parents will give sake as a return gesture and the chestnuts and dates will then be thrown at the bride. She will try to catch them in the large wedding skirt she'll be wearing.

Wedding Banquet

Wedding banquets may be quite simple in Korean tradition. The only required dish is noodle soup. The name of the banquet is *kook soo sang* which actually means 'long noodles.' This is not surprising since they symbolise a happy and long life in Korean tradition. The noodles are boiled in broth and vegetables are added. A sticky rice cake called *dok* is usually served at Korean events, particularly at weddings.

Pakistani Wedding Traditions

Four Day Wedding Ritual

Four days is the length of traditional marriage celebrations.

First Day of the Celebration

On the first day, the bride's and groom's families dress all in yellow. They celebrate the forthcoming nuptials separately. The couple won't see one another from this particular day until the wedding ceremony.



Second Day of the Celebration

On the second day, a large celebration takes place called *Mendi*. There will be much dancing and singing of ancient songs. The family of the groom will deliver the wedding dress to the bride's family. The bride's family will take the groom's attire to his family.

Hundreds of stringed lights will be placed around the home of the bride. This is intended as an announcement of the approaching marriage. The bride will have her feet and hands decorated with henna. It is a traditional Muslim art form and involves intricate designs and symbolic patterns. As the henna needs time to dry, the bride will be waited on all day by members of her family.

Third Day - the Marriage Ceremony

The third day is reserved for the actual wedding ceremony. Both bride and groom wear red and the bride will also adorn herself in jewellery. The groom will wear a traditional turban. Once the vows have been exchanged the Holy Koran will be held over the bride's head as a blessing as she becomes a member of the groom's family. All paperwork must be signed in front of the guests and an Islamic cleric.



Fourth and Final Day of a Pakistani Wedding

On the final day the bride and groom host their first dinner as a married couple. Guests will be invited to the groom's family home and treated to a feast called 'valima.'

Thai Wedding Traditions

Monks take priority at a Thai wedding. Food must be prepared for them and they in turn will give blessings to the couple.

A Thai wedding ceremony is usually reserved for family and very close friends. The bride and groom both sit on the floor, hands pressed together and their fingers pointing up underneath their chins. Their hands will be connected by a small flower chain. The oldest relative will lead the ceremony and offer

their best wishes to the pair. This relative will place his/her hands in a shell with water and their parents and guests will then do the same.



In some rural areas, elderly couples might arrange a bridal bed for the couple and place good luck tokens on it, such as rice, sesame seeds and coins. This wedding custom symbolises fertility and good luck.

Turkish Wedding Traditions

Even after the wedding has taken place, the celebrations continue for a few days. The bride may decide to go back home the morning after the wedding, where her friends and family may adorn her in henna.

Muslim weddings in Turkey last from four to seven days. The celebrations will start separately for both families. From the first day, the bride and groom will not see each other until the actual ceremony.



The traditional wedding outfit for a bride is an elaborately embroidered silk wedding gown with a red, velvet cape.

Russian Weddings

Russian Civil Ceremony

In Russia, church weddings are not official; thus, couples have to exchange wedding vows at a Russian civil ceremony. The couple will receive salt and bread, which are symbols of prosperity, health and a long life. The civil ceremony is not really considered particularly important to family and friends of the couple but the wedding reception is a lavish affair which lasts two days.

Wedding Reception Traditions

During the celebrations, a close friend or relative makes a toast to the newly married couple and all the guests will throw the champagne glasses onto the floor. If they smash, this is seen as good luck.

Russian Orthodox Marriage Ceremony

When Orthodox couples are married they are crowned as a king and queen for the day. This is taken from the Greek Orthodox tradition whereby bride and groom are crowned. In Russia, the couple stand on a special carpet and recite their vows, and they must also try to race each other to complete the vows first. The partner who reaches the carpet first will presumably be the head of the household.



African Weddings

Africa is very large and contains many different religions and cultures, including some of the very oldest civilisations on earth. Therefore, weddings in African society reflect the diversity of the continent. If we were to choose but one tradition that is found across Africa, it would be the importance of family. Bringing two people, two families and, often, two tribes together is what an African wedding is all about. The concept of *family* is one which unifies the ideas of Africa as a continent.

Over a thousand different cultures exist in Africa. Each tribe and culture has its very own traditions for marriage and weddings. These traditions date back thousands of years in some cases.

In Africa there are also many religions. In northern areas there is a strong Islamic influence while in other parts there are Christian, Hindu and Jewish influences. These religions are usually mixed with more traditional African culture.

Most African cultures train young girls to be good wives from their very early years. Sometimes, secret languages and codes are involved which allow them to speak to other women without their husbands knowing what is being spoken about.

In many parts of Africa wedding ceremonies are very large, elaborate affairs which can last for many days. In some places, very large ceremonies are held, uniting many couples at the same time.

Communities along the Nile have a tradition of grooms' families paying brides' families in cattle or sheep. This is supposed to compensate for their daughter's loss, which includes a loss of labour for the family. In some cases, men have to pay up to 30 or 40 head of cattle, sometimes leaving them with barely sufficient cattle to support a new wife and growing family.

In Somalia, for example, men can take up to four wives as long as they are able to support all of them. Sometimes, girls are engaged even before they are born.

African weddings involve lots of bright and festive colours, and lots of music and dancing. A common theme in African wedding ceremonies is the idea of moving from childhood into adulthood. Many African cultures marry children off between the ages of 13 and 15. At this age they are considered to have reached physical adulthood.

Divorce is not common in African marriages and any problems that arise are discussed with both the bride's and the groom's families, who will attempt to find solutions. In many cases, entire villages will try to find solutions to any problems arising within marriages.



Africans, like most other cultures, consider marriage a sacred institution. Many cultures have special totems intended to remind couples that they must always make allowances for cultural and tribal differences. This is likely to lead to successful marriages.

English Traditions

Getting Married in Great Britain

Flowers are scattered by little girls who walk before an English bride and the wedding party. This usually occurs regardless of whether the wedding takes place in a church or an alternative wedding site. This flowered path is a symbol of hope that the bride will have a happy walk through life. Bridesmaids are part of the British system and also wear dresses closely resembling wedding dresses. This practice is intended to prevent any jealous or evil persons from singling out the bride to curse her or her happiness.



In Britain, brides usually sew good-luck charms onto their wedding dress hems. This usually takes the form of a horseshoe of royal British brides. An old English wedding tradition also entails the bride carrying a horseshoe streaming with white ribbons for good luck.

English Wedding Ceremony

English couples will traditionally exchange marriage vows in the chapel doorway. This allows anyone who may wish to witness their union to do so.

Traditional English Wedding Receptions

In England, tradition dictates that the wedding cake will be a fruitcake filled with ground almonds, raisins and cherries, topped with marzipan. This will be served to guests at the reception as well as something called the groom's cake which originated in the Tudor period. Originally, the groom's cake was also a fruitcake but today it is usually chocolate.

A type of Victorian reception is a 'ribbon pull.' This involves the bridesmaids receiving a charm made of sterling silver with a ribbon tied to each charm. A baker will place them in between the layers of the wedding cake. When it is time for the newlywed couple to share the first piece of cake, all the bridesmaids gather and pull on one ribbon. This symbolises good fortune for each bridesmaid.

Tying shoes to the back of wedding cars is another tradition that started in England. It was originally done during the Tudor period but of course the shoes were not attached to cars back then. Traditionally, guests at the reception would throw shoes at the couple as they left the church as a symbol of good luck. Today, of course, the shoes are tied to the honeymoon car. Rain on a wedding day is considered good luck by the English.

Austrian Wedding Customs

The Proposal

In past times, a proposal of marriage was quite a formal affair and a specific procedure had to be followed. The prospective groom would send family members or a good friend to represent him to the family of the prospective bride and to the bride herself. If they came across a pregnant woman, a blind

man or a monk on their way, it was believed that the marriage would fail as these were considered bad omens. Pigeons, goats or wolves were considered good omens and therefore it was believed the marriage would be a good one if these were encountered on the way.

Surnames

Superstitions are commonplace and Austrians believe that marrying a man whose surname begins with the same letter as the woman's is unlucky. In fact, there was even a little rhyme to describe the scenario: *"To change the name and not the letter, is to change the worst and not the better."*

They also believe that the future bride should not write her new name before the actual wedding as they think that this will tempt fate and bring bad luck.

Choosing the Day

In the past, Saturday was not chosen as a wedding day as it was thought to be unlucky, as were Fridays, in particular Friday the 13th. Another rhyme to guide couples was: *"Monday for wealth, Tuesday for health, Wednesday the best day of all, Thursday for losses, Friday for crosses, Saturday for no luck at all."*

The Wedding Dress

Brides do not make their wedding dresses as this is also considered unlucky. The groom should not see the bride in her dress before the actual wedding as this is also considered unlucky. Brides are also advised not to wear the whole outfit before the wedding. To counter this problem, many brides leave a final stitch undone until the time comes to go to the ceremony. Only then can the outfit be completed.

The Veil

Traditionally, it was thought that brides were especially vulnerable to evil spirits. Many traditions and customs associated with weddings are conducted to provide protection.



Flowers

Red and white flower combinations are avoided by those who are superstitious because they believe these are symbols of blood and bandages. For his buttonhole, the groom usually chooses a flower that can be found in the bride's bouquet. This is a remnant of times when knights would wear their ladies' colours to display their love.

On the Way to the Wedding

Once the bride is ready to leave for the wedding, one final look in the mirror is thought to bring good luck. Once the journey to the wedding venue has begun it is considered bad luck to go back to the mirror. Chimney sweeps seen on the way are good luck and sometimes people will hire one to attend a wedding. Spiders, rainbows and even black cats are considered good omens if seen on one's way to a wedding.

Bad weather encountered on the journey to the wedding ceremony is seen as an omen of an unhappy marriage. However, certain cultures, such as England, consider rain a good omen, as mentioned above. A windy or cloudy day is considered likely to cause a stormy marriage but snow is associated with wealth and fertility.

Bridesmaids

Bridesmaids were originally dressed similarly to the bride and often still are. They were intended to be decoys who would confuse evil spirits and protect the bride.



A Couple's First Purchase

Austrians say that the partner who is the first to buy something new after the wedding will be the one who is dominant in the relationship. A bride ensures that she is the first to buy something by arranging to buy a small item from one of the bridesmaids immediately after the wedding ceremony.

French Wedding Traditions

French Traditions Including Those before the Marriage Ceremony

The hope chest, or trousseau, has its origins in French tradition. It means 'bundle.' Wearing white on one's wedding day also began in France a few hundred years ago as did having fresh flowers as decorations around the site and in the bride's bouquet. Each flower has a special significance to the bride and groom. Flowers that were especially fragrant were originally chosen to help freshen up before perfume or deodorant was invented. Weddings usually took place during summer or spring when it was warm enough for people to bathe.

In some smaller villages in France, the tradition of a groom calling on his soon-to-be wife on the morning of the wedding is still practised. The groom will escort the bride to the chapel and the children of the village will extend white ribbons across the road on which the bride will pass. The groom will walk his mother down the aisle just before the main procession. After the ceremony, when the couple are leaving the church, laurel leaves will be scattered along their path.

French Wedding Reception

During the wedding reception a toast will be made, as is the tradition in many cultures. After the toast, the couple will drink as husband and wife for the first time, from a specially engraved goblet. Often, this will be a family heirloom which has been passed down from one generation to another. After the reception, friends may turn up outside the couple's window where they will bang on pots and pans and sing. The groom is expected to invite them all in for snacks and drinks.



German Wedding Traditions

Before the Wedding Day

When a baby girl comes into the world, Germans will plant several trees to honour the birth, as per German tradition. When the child grows up and a date is set for her wedding, the trees are sold and the money raised will be used as part of her dowry. Family and friends of the couple will create a newspaper full of articles, stories and photos of the engaged twosome. This newspaper is a uniquely German tradition and copies are then sold at the wedding to assist with the honeymoon expenses.

German Marriage Celebrations

Traditionally, wedding celebrations might last for three days in Germany. The couples must first have a civil ceremony attended only by family and close friends. The following evening a big wedding reception is held, attended by family, friends, neighbours and even acquaintances. Guests will bring old plates to break at the party as this is seen as bringing good luck. The newlywed couple then sweep the pieces of the broken dishes together, an act symbolising that nothing else will ever be broken in their home again.

Religious Marriage Ceremonies in Germany

On the third day, the religious wedding ceremony will take place. German brides do not have traditional bridesmaids but they do have flower girls. As the couple leave the chapel they throw coins to the waiting children.

Another reception will be held after the religious ceremony. The best man traditionally 'steals' the bride from the reception and takes her to a local pub. Here they will drink champagne and wait for the groom to find them. He must then pay for all the drinks they've had. Later on in the evening, the couple's friends block the doors with garlands and ribbons to stop them from leaving. The groom has to pay some kind of toll in order to be able to leave with his bride for their honeymoon. The payment usually comes in the form of another party.

Marriage in the Arab Culture

Celebrations

Usually, there are many celebrations leading up to the wedding ceremony in Arab culture. An engagement celebration is held at the home of the bride's family. Here the prospective groom will formally ask for her hand in marriage. There is then another party when the contract of marriage has to be signed. There is also a henna night for the bride where her family and friends elaborately decorate the bride's hands and feet with henna. This is a bachelorette or hen's night type of event. Only women are allowed and there may be dancing and refreshments. However, the main attraction is the henna designer or 'mehndi' who provides the henna tattoos. These are, of course, only temporary. As well as the bride all the guests may have their hands and feet adorned with henna decorations.

The Wedding Reception

The actual wedding reception is the 'coup de grace', so to speak, the occasion to which all the last few events have been leading. There are quite a few different customs for the reception. In cities the reception will be similar to what one would see in the West. There will be dancing and speeches and the couple will cut a cake together and throw the bouquet. In rural areas the event may be more subdued and reserved. Ceremonies may be a little more traditional.



Wedding Etiquettes

Wedding planning is a very big task. Some say that it is as complex and difficult as a large theatre production to plan and execute. The main difference, of course, is that weddings must adhere to certain rules of etiquette. These are the usual practices prescribed by either social convention or by an authority as pertaining to weddings. Etiquette refers to a set of rules which must be followed, rather like the rules of a sport or game.

Today, however, weddings can be less formal as some couples, rather than strictly following etiquette, prefer to make their own rules for their wedding. Most people are familiar with wedding etiquette to a large degree. Because of this, they decide for themselves how much they wish to change. However, there are some procedures that have to be followed at all weddings, even the most casual ones. These are adhered to mainly to avoid hurting anyone's feelings or damaging any valued relationships.

The Role and Scope of Wedding Consultancy

Planning a wedding and knowing how much to spend and on what, and where to find specialised services etc, can be difficult. There is so much to do, from choosing the invitations to planning the honeymoon. More and more, these days, couples are turning to professionals for assistance.

Some time ago, wedding coordinators were seen as a luxury and their services were sought only by wealthier people. Today, a wedding coordinator is almost essential for those who want a well-planned occasion.

The wedding co-ordinator or planner has experience of dealing with florists, photographers, caterers, and other suppliers. This will save a couple valuable money as well as time. The co-ordinator usually has reliable suppliers who will provide the services needed. They are given discounts not available to others, and this can help couples avoid costly mistakes. Wedding planners are also desirable because they can often turn dreams into reality.

The wedding co-ordinator ensures that the entire event goes according to plan right from the start. He/she helps the clients to make the right decisions in selecting the right venue and vendors and also ensures that when it is all happening, it is happening in the right way. Crucially, he/she ensures that the wedding stays within the budget originally discussed with the couple.

A survey conducted in 2006 found that the average cost of a wedding was around £26,000, as opposed to £15,000 in 1990. This amounts to a 73% growth in cost. It is not surprising that weddings incur large costs and many purchases are first-time purchases. A wedding co-ordinator has the much needed experience to bring to the process.

Trends show that demand for wedding co-ordinators is likely to increase as time goes by. There are many names for a wedding co-ordinator including wedding planner, bridal consultant, wedding director, wedding designer, and wedding consultant. Below, we examine what these terms mean:

Wedding Planner - This is someone who assists in organising and planning all or *any* aspects of a wedding ceremony, including the reception.

A Bridal Consultant - Almost all bridal consultants are actually *wedding planners*. They help with all aspects of a wedding. This title also describes those who work in retail bridal stores and work with brides in particular.

A Wedding Director - This term is often used in some places to describe a wedding co-ordinator who concerns him/herself with the wedding ceremony alone.

Wedding Consultant - This refers to a person who owns a wedding planning business. A wedding consultant can be hired to plan an entire wedding or part of a wedding, or to simply give advice to people wanting to plan their own weddings.

Wedding Co-ordinator - The term "wedding co-ordinator" is sometimes used instead of "*wedding planner*." Some wedding co-ordinators are only involved in co-ordinating the actual wedding ceremony.

Brides nowadays are spending a lot more money to ensure that their wedding day, which is considered the most important day of their lives, is perfectly planned. Couples today are usually busy with careers. Despite this, they want to ensure their wedding day is uniquely personal. Wedding planners provide the perfect assistance for this. They save couples money, time and, very importantly, stress when preparing for a big wedding day.

Required Skills for a Wedding Planner

Sense of Humour

Wedding planners must have an honest 'sense of humour.' In the wedding planning business one must rely on many others' professionalism to get many jobs done properly in order to ensure that the client's dream wedding is achieved. Of course, things can go awry and keeping a good sense of humour as well as the ability to think on one's feet are necessary for keeping everything on track. Wedding planners must deal with so many things, from emotional or indecisive brides to difficult parents to unreliable vendors. Their work is really cut out for them and having a sense of humour will help them (and others) overcome any issues a little more easily.

Personal Qualities to Cultivate

Traits that are marks of successful and effective wedding planners are as follows:

Organisational skills -

Professional and effective wedding planners are hired to "*organise*" weddings. They must cope with numerous errands as well as deal with many people, *and often all at the same time*. It's vital to ensure that all these tasks and intricate details are handled in a very timely manner. Only in this way will the wedding run effortlessly.

Interpersonal proficiency -

In order to attract new clients and gain more recommendations, interpersonal skills are very important. A wedding planner must work effectively with many different types of personalities, including the bride and groom, in order to discover exactly what they desire in a wedding and to provide for them exactly what they envision for this special day.

Imagination -

A wedding is considered the most important event in many people's lives and it is one they will want to remember fondly for the rest of their lives. The wedding planner's ingenuity will be necessary to design exclusive ideas for the ceremony and the reception, despite most weddings being traditional events. Each couple with whom the wedding planner must deal will be unique; hence, their wants and needs will also be unique. The wedding planner must take all of this into account.

Persistence -

For a planner, patience is absolutely vital for success. A planner has to be patient with all the clients, with other business people such as any vendors, and with the business itself. Each wedding will require different elements from a wedding planner. This variety and difference will challenge the planner, and his/her desire to provide excellence makes the wedding consulting business energetic and exciting.

Planning Skills Required of Wedding Planners

- a) Can the planner handle a variety of tasks, all at different stages and all at the same time?
- b) Is he/she *detail*-oriented?
- c) Is he/she *motivated* and able to work without needing another's direction?
- d) Is he/she disciplined and able to work when the weather is perfect outside or when other demands are made of him/her?
- e) Is he/she capable of working alone without the benefit of conversational co-workers?
- f) Can he/she handle emotionally fragile brides, demanding parents and irritable suppliers, without losing their temper?
- g) And, finally, can he/she handle things graciously when they go wrong and think fast to fix them?

Those contemplating the idea of becoming wedding planners should consider the answers to the above questions truthfully. If you answered 'yes' to most of them you have what it takes to be an effective wedding planner.

Calm

The wedding planner or consultant must be the bride's and groom's rock. He/she must keep calm no matter what goes wrong. Miscommunication with a vendor? Handle it graciously and get things fixed. A meltdown at the ceremony? Handle it graciously and with compassion. Keeping calm in the face of a calamity is vital for wedding consultants. Plan Bs are essential and any good wedding planner knows that he/she must always have one.

Charming

A wedding planner is indeed the face of his/her business, their own representative to the world. Excellent social skills and impeccable communication skills are needed. The planner's reputation relies entirely on his/her ability to communicate effectively and create excellent working relationships with every personality type. Not everyone they encounter in their line of work will be pleasant or easy to deal with. Planners must have the knowledge and skills to defuse any potentially calamitous situation and achieve the outcomes their clients desire.

A Great Negotiator

Couples depend on the planner or consultant to do everything necessary to stage a great wedding. They must hire the band, organise the photographer, order the flowers in keeping with the couple's wishes, recommend and/or deal with the caterer, assist with the venue options and help plan the ceremony and reception. They must do all these things while remaining within the budget set by the bride and groom. As wedding planners begin to establish a good reputation, all this will become a lot easier as they will become better known within all the relevant circles. Their connections will enable them to obtain better deals for their clients.

Good with Money

Starting a business in wedding planning will require one to handle one's own expenses and stay within any given budget. Wedding planners are also responsible for other people's money; hence, remaining within budget is an important skill. Having some experience of managing money will become essential, even if this experience is limited to household budgets.

Organised

The wedding planner might be asked to plan one part or every part of the big day: the venues, theme, flowers, photography, refreshments, food, attire, honeymoon, and other details. Keeping track of every nuance, every contract date and every deadline requires a huge amount of organisational skill and attention to detail. The calendar becomes a new 'best friend'.

A Plethora of Knowledge

A wedding planner who excels will also have fashion sense, a good eye for colour, good taste in music, and knowledge of flower themes. He/she has to keep up to date with the latest bridal trends and honeymoon destinations as well as the all-important list of wedding etiquettes. Wedding planners must also have a good knowledge of different religious ceremonies and traditions. Such knowledge will ensure that their business is not limited to one group of people, and they will be able to accommodate people of many faiths.

Consultant Packages

Wedding consultants may provide individualised services or ad hoc services. Each planner offers different services. The comprehensive or full package involves the planner being involved in the

wedding from the start. This package is more expensive because it will include everything necessary for an excellent wedding including on-going assistance with usually a few or all of these services: 1) preparing a budget; 2) determining the vision and theme; 3) creating timelines and checklists; 4) choosing, negotiating and booking vendors; 5) designing stationary for the event such as invitations; 6) compilation of a guest list; 7) preparing the ceremony and/or reception; 8) directing clients on any necessary paperwork, i.e. marriage licence; 9) directing any on-site rehearsals, ceremonies or receptions; 10) organising final payment and concluding all matters with vendors.

Some planners will only take on clients who want comprehensive packages because they prefer to be involved from the beginning with all stages of planning. If you are thinking about starting out in the wedding planning business, however, it may be advisable to diversify your services.

Partial packages for weddings are usually vendor-based. These are useful for couples who need assistance with finding and selecting service providers who are suitable for their particular vision and budget. Wedding planners can give invaluable advice to couples who don't really have time to shop around or compare vendors. Partial packages allow planners to help with contract negotiation, vendor selection, scheduling appointments, co-ordinating, making final payments, and any follow-ups that may be needed.

Packages referred to as 'Day-of' packages are becoming more popular. These are specifically designed for couples who have already finished the planning process and now need help with co-ordinating the rehearsals and the special day itself. The wedding consultant will be involved in a limited capacity before this time, mostly to ensure that the necessary information is provided to enable the day to flow well. The consultant will need a list of vendors and will then proceed to assist in preparing the wedding day timetable. This means that the consultant will probably be the primary contact point during rehearsals and the actual wedding, leaving the couple free to enjoy themselves. The only potential problem with these types of packages is the possibility that the couple have chosen vendors who are less than ideal. The planner will then spend more time trying to put out fires rather than spending time planning the wedding. Wedding planners, especially those who have been in the business for some length of time, will be able to recommend well established and trusted vendors, making the job a lot easier for everyone.

Hence, in a situation where the planner has not been involved with the vendor selection, it will be necessary to obtain the list of chosen vendors and contact them immediately. This will give the planner an idea of what they provide and can/cannot do and also confirm all the arrangements in advance, thereby potentially avoiding any problems later on.

Some ad hoc services that wedding planners may provide include co-ordinating engagement parties, bridal showers, gift selections, seating list preparation, honeymoons, post-wedding events such as luncheons, and 'thank you' cards. All these will be fee-based.

What Wedding Planners Do

Wedding planners mainly perform the following duties during the course of conducting a wedding party:

- Assistance with budget preparation
- Finding a suitable venue for the reception and/or ceremony or a vow-exchanging site
- Assistance with choice of colours, wedding themes, and/or styles
- Assistance with choosing a dress or other attire
- Setting up the ceremony and reception areas including guest logistics (seating, arrangement, selection, refreshments)
- Co-ordinating the themes and decor
- Planning and preparing the itinerary
- Running rehearsals
- Helping to prepare the vows and speeches
- Co-ordinating the reception timeline
- Co-ordinating with vendors and deliveries, and managing any non-arrivals
- Planning the honeymoon
- Ensuring the wedding party is on time and in the right places
- Making hotel arrangements for after the wedding
- Handling 'wedding crashers' or unruly guests
- Managing any last-minute emergencies
- Finding suitable accommodations for out-of-town guests
- Ensuring venues are left clean to enable clients to recover their deposits
- Collecting personal items and wedding gifts and restoring them safely to the client
- Returning rentals and any other borrowed items.

Wedding Planner Roles

Wedding planners fulfil a number of roles throughout the planning and implementation of a wedding day. The wedding planner's role will differ depending on what type of package the couple has chosen. In a comprehensive package, the planner will be involved fully with the couple as well as their families. Usually, a planner will fulfil seven more common roles. These are: service provider, organiser, decision-maker, psychologist, artistic designer, friend, and mediator.

Wedding planners must keep in mind that their primary role is based on a business relationship with a couple. As service providers, they have very specific obligations to meet and must at all times maintain a high standard of professionalism. Even though the business relationship is of the utmost importance, other roles often emerge. Some of these will be related to business and others to plain old human nature. A wedding planner often becomes a decision-maker by default. Often, those who choose the comprehensive package do so due to lack of time or even desire to make the myriad decisions necessary in planning a wedding. The planner must still ensure the couple feel that they are involved in decisions. Even a small amount of participation from the couple brings a sense of ownership as well as

accountability. Wedding planners must never sign their names to any contract on behalf of any couple, nor should they sign their own name to vendor contracts.

A wedding planner is also an organiser and, as the consultant, he/she is the one the couple, or anyone else involved in the wedding, can turn to for assistance. Keeping checklists, timelines and itineraries is vital for maintaining clarity and order, especially since things may become overwhelming or confusing. Wedding planners must know how to prioritise tasks and make sure each one is completed on time. As a wedding planner, you must keep a comprehensive calendar and written agendas for every meeting. This will ensure everything remains on track.

The fourth role is that of artistic designer. Many people who go into the wedding planning business have natural good taste, a sense of flair which has been noticed by family and friends, and some knowledge of colour schemes. This will help planners help couples to make their visions a reality. Wedding planners must take care not to impose their views on their clients. Generally, however, wedding planners are hired partly because people want artistic design advice for a range of aspects of a wedding: cake selection, floral décor, stationery essentials, and other decorative elements.

Weddings are generally stressful; therefore, the fifth role of a consultant or planner is that of psychologist. Brides are usually the main point of contact and spend an average of seventeen months planning their weddings (Fairchild Bridal Group, 2005). Brides will often turn to the consultant in moments of pressure, anxiety or strain. The line between business communication and interpersonal communication blurs as trust develops (Knapp and Vangelisti, 1996; Littlejohn, 1989), and the bride may seek reassurance from the consultant during emotionally stressful moments. In cases where the stress of wedding planning has moved beyond individual levels, the wedding planner usually takes on the role of mediator, making it their sixth role. Mediators will respond to conflict situations using encouraging empowerment, active listening, recognition, and negotiation (Bush and Foger, 1994). As a mediator, a wedding consultant might help disputing parties through the creation of a forum where each has a chance to listen and speak, thus allowing the parties to work with each other to clearly define any problems and come up with alternative solutions. Ultimately, they should agree on a strategy that suits everyone (McKinney, Kimsey and Fuller, 1995). Wedding planners sometimes make vendor relationships with counsellors. They can then recommend these marriage counsellors to clients who may be facing a relationship crisis.

Finally, it is not unheard of for wedding planners and their clients to form a friendship. Often, wedding planners start working with family and friends when they first open their businesses. Referrals are one of the main ways in which wedding planners obtain more clients; friends suggest their services to other friends and the business begins to grow. Of course, it's not necessary to become friends with clients for a business to be successful. On the other hand, everyone occasionally gets clients they don't like at all. This doesn't make it impossible to have a good working relationship, however. Friendship is sometimes a natural outcome of client-provider dealings and not a forced necessity.

Further Reading:

- ✓ *Easy Wedding Planner: Workbook & Organizer, (2008)*
Elizabeth Lluch, Alex Lluch
- ✓ *Wedding Planning Made Easy: The Ultimate Wedding Planning Guide, (2012)* Kayla Andrew