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## FROM ANNE, THE WEDDING PLANNER

### ANSWERS TO YOUR BASIC QUESTIONS ABOUT GETTING A WEDDING PLANNER FOR YOUR DAY

BY ANNE MARIE BERMAN AS TOLD TO LAUREN GLENN

**A**s a wedding planner, I often hear from soon-to-be-wed couples that don't know whether they can afford a planner, what a planner does, or if they need a planner at all. Choosing a planner is a difficult – and sometimes expensive – decision. It should be given just as much thought, as you would give to choosing a location, caterer or flowers. But first, you need to figure out whether hiring a planner is the best option for you. Here are some things to think about.

#### What type of budget do you need for a planner?

I like to think of it as less about the budget and more about what there is to be done, and why there's more to do with a pricier wedding.

A \$50,000 wedding will obviously require much more work than a \$15,000 wedding. The more expensive the wedding, the more details there will be to address, the more tasks there will be to complete, and probably, the more nervous the bride will be about things being done properly.

The average Maryland wedding costs about \$20,000 to \$25,000. Generally speaking, no more than 10 percent of that should be spent on a planner.

But the fact is, a good planner is expensive.

If your budget is small – maybe about \$15,000 or less – then you probably don't want to spend too much of it, if any, on a wedding planner. And chances are, paying for an experienced planner will take money away from other important details – like a good location, flowers or catering. So it's all about priorities: Is it more important for you to have the perfect menu or photographer, or the perfect planner?

#### Why should I spend 10 percent of my budget on a planner? What do they do that makes it so worthwhile?

I've met tons of brides who want to hire an experienced planner, but they just can't seem to reconcile themselves to the idea of spending 10 percent

of their budget on it.

Well, there are planners out there who might do your wedding for \$500 or \$1,000. But that planner will probably have less experience or less time to devote to each individual client. And why spend the money at all if you're not going to get everything you want?

The fact is an experienced planner costs more for the same reason that an experienced lawyer, architect or chef costs more. They know what they're doing and they have a portfolio and years of experience to back it up.

The best planner will always be the most experienced planner. Their experience comes with connections to all the local florists, caterers, locations, and other vendors, as well as the ability to guide you through the planning process.

#### What am I getting for my money? Will having a planner save me money?

A lot of my clients want to know why hiring a planner will save them money in the long run. Most planners have different levels of service depending on how involved a bride wants to be, and how much help she thinks she'll need from her wedding planner.

A good planner will know when to spend a little extra and when to be more reserved with your money.

In the end, what you're really saving is your time and your sanity.

A bride-to-be might meet with 10 different florists, and never find one that fits her budget.

But a good planner will be able to look at your budget, listen to what you want, and tell you exactly where to go. And the best planner might even go along with you.

As far as saving money, a planner's main goal should be to keep you within your budget by helping you prioritize what is important.

#### Can the bride decide how involved a planner might be? Will her planner take over if she decides that she can't do it all on her own?

Your wedding is a special day and you should want to be a part of planning it.

These days, most brides-to-be also have full-time jobs. Other brides might be planning their wedding from an entirely different city and can't be there to meet with caterers and deejays at the drop of a hat. We live in a busy world, and most brides don't have time to do everything themselves.

You should meet with a potential planner in person at least once before you actually sign a contract. Planning a wedding is a months-long process, and you have to be positive that you can work with that person. And your planner needs to be sure that she can work with you.

It's a good idea to know as early on as possible how involved you want to be. But if you think you might reach a point where you just can't handle as much of the planning as you initially thought you could, tell your planner in advance so that she can plan her schedule around you. Remember, yours is



probably not the only wedding she's planning.

Often, brides get frustrated and overwhelmed mid-way through the planning process. That's when a planner is more likely to step in. She should be able to help you prioritize or even pick up some of the slack.

### How do wedding planners deal with high-strung, Type A, overly controlling brides?

This is a creature to be tangled with lightly, often referred to as "the monster bride," or "bride-zilla." What I try to remember is that at some point or another, a man found this woman lovely and endearing enough to ask her to spend the rest of her life with him. So, when this creature appears, I try to remind myself that the bride-zilla isn't really a monster at all. She's just stressed and wants her special day to be perfect.

But in reality, nothing is perfect. And as hard as she might try to control every aspect of her wedding, something – whether it's the weather, or traffic jams or misbehaving guests – will happen that no one, even the most controlling bride, can prevent. Trying to control all of these things can completely drain a bride's happiness and excitement, and it can make her forget what's important.

The most any planner can do is listen to her concerns, no matter what they might be, and remind her that this is something to be happy about. Planning a wedding should be a beautiful experience. And a good wedding planner will help the bride keep things in perspective: Yes, planning a wedding is a stressful experi-

ence. But it's the end result – saying, "I do," to a person you love – that makes it all worthwhile.

At the end of the day, it's a planner's job to do what the bride asks her to, even if she doesn't agree with it. But if a bride is so demanding that no planner could handle her, or if she reaches a point where she's insulting or degrading, most self-respecting planners will release the bride from her contract. This is rare, but the bride has to know that her planner is a professional, not a servant.

### What is too much to ask of my wedding planner?

First and foremost, it's important that you never, ever ask your planner to do anything illegal. Remember – his or her credibility is on the line. But there are other demands that people make that are entirely within the law, but still entirely out of line.

When you hire your planner, you'll probably sign a detailed contract, listing what his or her specific obligations to you are.

And, unless you plan on paying extra, anything outside of that contract is too much to ask.

If there's a chance that you're going to need more help than you realize, it's best to go ahead and select your planner's highest level of service. A planner's hourly fees – which is probably what you'll pay if you ask her to exceed the demands of her contract – are likely to amount to much more than paying the extra money for the extra level of service.

Your planner is not there to take care of unruly children, or to pour drinks for your friends. •

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