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Tips & Tricks for a Stress-Free Wedding

Originally from England with an Australian twist, I have had the pleasure of working as a full-time wedding photographer in upstate New York, Massachusetts, and Vermont for many years. I enjoy working hard for couples and documenting their day. Never a dull moment that's for sure. You will have lots of suggestions from family and friends but remember it's okay to be unique and different. Make it your day. Massive cliché here, but planning a wedding is like putting a jigsaw puzzle together. Slowly but surely all the bits will fit and fall into place; hopefully, without your stress level escalating out of control. When you worry it gets you nowhere in a hurry so why not avoid chaos and keep everything simple. This way you'll enjoy things more. You likely know what you want (and what you don't) so go for it, do whatever makes you happy. Make it your day.

In pretty much random order, I have listed a few mostly practical tips and tricks. Hopefully, one or two of these will help you enjoy your wedding a little more and keep you breathing and not feeling overwhelmed or stressed. Good vibes only please.

Friends are great but not always for your photography and music etc. Can be a gamble that goes pear-shaped in a hurry. For peace of mind, hire wedding professionals with the skill and experience to make you delighted. Your wedding will likely be expensive, so you deserve a great return on your investment. Anyone you hire should be excited to work for you. Plus, working with a specialist is usually a safer bet than hiring a company that offers to do everything. Chances are pretty good a dj company isn't experienced with photography and/or video as they sub-hire 'ringers' who aren't invested in the business. I am off my soap box now.

- The best plan is often to contact a variety of professionals and find the service and style that best meets your needs and budget. Then, let go, relax, and leave everything in their capable hands so you get to enjoy your day. Proper planning is very important, but do not micro-manage especially on your actual wedding day. If you watch tv shows on Bravo, you know the ones who scream and shout for no reason are not really enjoying things.
- Trying to control every little detail on your wedding day may seem like a good idea to begin with but can easily end up having the opposite effect. If you want to have an unforgettable day, be flexible, let family and friends help. Delegate without cracking the whip too much. Make planning an enjoyable experience for everyone. Truth be told, no-one really likes bridezillas (or groomzillas for that matter).
- Makeup and hair often will take longer than expected and are reasons brides are late getting ready with everything. A good idea is start styling appointments at least 30/45+ minutes earlier than you think you need to. Make sure you get a time from your stylist when he/she will have you wrapped up by. Same with makeup. Never go last behind all the bridesmaids and moms as that will guarantee you end up seriously stressed and late. It is your wedding day, and everything really should be about you. Your partner will understand.
- If possible, fix your lips after you get dressed as it is easy to accidentally get lipstick on your dress layers and fabric when stepping into your dress. Keep a towel handy. A bottle of champagne/wine too for that matter. Maybe more than one. That can help keep things calm and worry-free.
- Have your iPod or Spotify playing some of your favorite tunes while getting ready. It may help calm nerves a little too. Sets a nice vibe and relaxed feel. Everyone, not just the bride, can get stressed.
- Think about comfort over style with shoes. Do not spend the most important day of your life in agony because you want to impress with stilettos. If you are not a heels person, do not do it. Your shoes are mostly hidden from view anyway and it is hard to smile (and dance) when your feet are killing you. And rental shoes for the men can be miserably uncomfortable so not a bad idea to have the guys bring a backup pair of dress shoes, work boots, converse, and such so they can change later at the reception. Just in case.
- Your dress is going to get dirty especially at your reception party. This happens to all brides and virtually no one will notice so do not panic. Accept this as part and parcel of a fun and happy wedding and go with the flow. Just have a good dry cleaner lined up and let it go.

- Too many brides worry about the weather. If there are a few rain drops on your day so what. Not the end of the world. You will make it work. One way or the other, you will likely be under cover most of the day anyway. Surprisingly, pictures of a couple under a 'brolley' can be almost fun. Okay, that is stretching things, so knock on wood and hope for the best it does not rain on your day. Kind of sucks when it does truth be told.
- You may wish to let your dressmaker know your wedding day is two weeks (or more) earlier than it is, especially around prom season. This will avoid last-minute panic and unexpected delays with dress adjustments not being ready on time. Does happen.
- The lucky sixpence (or penny) in the shoe (or any other heirloom pinned on under your dress or on your bouquet) for good luck and fortune dates back to ancient times. Some brides still like this really old tradition. However, for comfort, rather than taping or placing it in your shoe or dress, keep things in your bridal bag. It is also more secure this way.
- Mentioning your bridal bag, consider including headache tablets, perfume, tissues, lipstick, lip gloss, mints, safety pins, bobby pins, a nail file, sanitary items, deodorant, etc. In the words of someone else, 'be prepared'.
- If you are hiring a limo or party bus, make sure they do not rush you as some companies are notorious for doing exactly that. Plan your booking time carefully so you do not have the vehicle(s) arriving 45 minutes earlier than needed when you could use that time later.
- A few guests always arrive late for ceremonies, and brides do not like walking down the aisle with stragglers still arriving. My suggestion is consider listing your ceremony time 30 minutes earlier on the invitation. This way, you will get to walk down the aisle almost on time. Which in turn means you get to your cocktail hour sooner which is the way it should be. This is your day.
- If you are late, you are late, but some officiants (usually ones who don't smile much and are not that friendly) aren't flexible and can be very fussy. Mostly the case in churches especially if there is another ceremony (or confessionals) following your wedding.
- Don't expect too much from young children in your bridal party even if they are usually well-behaved. Kids will be kids and yell and scream and cry. A lot. They get excited (or have a meltdown) and can suffer from pre-wedding nerves too especially if they are ready for a nap or hungry. Accept this may happen and often does when it comes to a ceremony and pictures. Keep in mind, whatever they do will likely be entertaining. At some point, you just must go with the flow. However, if on the fence about inviting kids, see next suggestion.
- Let friends and relatives know before your wedding it is okay for them to step away during your ceremony if their baby is screaming like a wild banshee. Guests much prefer to hear your vows not wailing children. Amen to that. Plus, it is okay to make your wedding a 21+ adult-only day. Nieces and nephews and core family aside.
- Make sure you designate a person to help pin boutonnieres on the guys as push comes to shove, men being men are usually clueless about this and in no idea what to do (with the flowers).
- Mentioning the guys, recommend they do not bring phones to your ceremony. Always shows through pockets in pictures. Plus, is it crucial to have a phone during a ceremony? I half expect the groom to pull out his iPhone 13 pro max and change his FB status after the ring is on his finger. I have never seen a bridesmaid with a phone (pockets in dresses a brilliant help mind you for phones and/or lip gloss), but often the men have theirs stuffed in their pants pocket. I am a professional. I can say that.
- At your rehearsal, ask the person marrying you if he/she would move to one side before your first kiss at the end. This will prevent their face/neck etc. showing right behind you which really looks weird in pictures.
- Consider not having boutonnieres for the men and avoid the prom look. A pocket square/hanky works great in suits. Looks very elegant and classy even if it is not folded right. Double-sided tape is great for keeping it in place too, so it does not slip down inside the jacket pocket.
- Many bridesmaids (and brides) race down the aisle and end up almost on top of each other. Leave plenty of space in-between and work the aisle like the models on Project Runway. Confidence photographs very well. Try not to constantly look down at your feet walking along. You know where they are. Chin up and if you hate pictures with your arms up high, keep them low by your side. Stand tall and

try not to go with the hunched back look. Good deportment as they say. You know what you like and do not like in your pictures so bring that into play on your day and feel amazing.

- Mentioning 'many' bridesmaids, consider keeping things simple and avoid the big over-the-top bridal party with too many attendants. Some couples like to have just one witness either side and/or just their siblings stand up with them for the ceremony. Less stressful (and expensive) all around for everyone.
- If your dress is not too tight and your heels are not killing you, take a deep breath, enjoy the moment and smile. It is a wedding not a funeral. Be happy.
- Attention brides. You are queen for a day so smile, keep your flowers low (they've got to compliment your dress, not cover it up), time your aisle walk to the music and bring it. Take it all in. Soak it up. Enjoy the moment. These are your memories. Treasure them. Do not rush down the aisle looking at your feet.
- Remind whoever is walking you down the aisle not to pull your veil off (if you are wearing one) when they hug you. Plus, give them a nudge (or elbow if needs be) when they start walking over your dress train in a mad rush to sit down.
- Don't be strangers during your ceremony. Many couples look as if they have just met sometimes. Look at one another. Yes, you are going to be anxious, nervous, excited, barely breathing, major league butterflies going on, but hold hands, talk, be together. This is the person you are marrying.
- Most of all, make sure you look at each other during your rings and vows. You are not marrying the officiant. In other words, try not to say "I do" to the person marrying you. Talk to each other. Just looks seriously weird otherwise.
- Despite what moms often say, most couples skip a formal receiving line after their ceremony. Your guests will really thank you for that as they want to get to the food and drink. The advantages are they you get to cocktail hour much sooner too and your guests are not waiting in line getting bored. When it is hot and humid this can be plain miserable for everyone and, believe it or not, only having parents in the meet-and-greet does not move guests through any quicker. They (the parents that is) still tell life stories and go on and on far too long.
- Let your officiant know you do not want your wedding certificate folded. You may wish to frame it.
- Bubbles or petals after your ceremony are great fun. If you are having a church ceremony, you may have to check it is okay as churches usually have too many rules. Whatever you do, do not do rice. You will regret it. Think not just of birds it harms, but your hair, your veil, your dress, your eyes, your nose/ears will never be the same as you will have rice hitting you everywhere.
- Instead of that boring formal receiving line right after the ceremony, many couples (and parents) prefer to mingle and mix with guests during cocktail hour and/or dinner. It is far more enjoyable this way for everyone, and you get to visit with friends and family you want to chat more with.
- On the biggest day of your life the last thing you want is ordinary. You do not want ordinary flowers. You do not want ordinary cake, cupcakes, or donuts. And you do not want to gamble with an ordinary photographer. Here is an idea, hire Paul Saunders Photography. That was subtle.
- There are many amateur wedding dj's and photographers (you know where I am going here) who lack the talent and experience to get results. If you are okay with ordinary pictures that mostly look like snapshots a guest may have taken, you will save money, but likely regret it later on.
- Many couples like to see each other and have first look pictures and core family groups prior to their ceremony. There are pros and cons on having a first look. Tends to diminish that beautiful authentic classic real moment when a couple first see each other at the start of their ceremony.
- When hiring videographers, most couples do not like bright video lights that blind guests and ruin the soft, low-light ambiance you will likely have at your reception. Like with pictures, low-key and unobtrusive is often the best filming style. These days, most digital video cameras are amazing and do not require lots of additional bright lighting.
- Make sure, too, your videographer is creative and captures your wedding story documentary-style. Let me know if you need suggestions for amazing videographers who will be extremely easy and friendly to work with. Happy to help with recommendations. Soap box moment coming up... there are some

videographers who are a nightmare to work with as always in the way and make we think I picked the wrong weekend to quit sniffing glue.

- Your wedding day goes by too fast so you should be together with friends and family as much as possible. You want to be part of your cocktail hour and reception not missing-in-action. It is your chance to really relax as up to that point everything will be a little non-stop.
- Find a photographer you will be comfortable around and one who works hard for you so you can enjoy your day. Hint, you are on a photographer's web site right now who checks these boxes. This way you will get to relax and enjoy everything much more.
- Have an at-a-glance emergency phone and email contact listing for all wedding services you hire. Keep this info on your phone. And if you still have a Verizon LG Revere 2 Basic Flip Phone. Good luck. Maybe time to upgrade.
- Many wedding couples prefer adult-only ceremonies and receptions. Unless they are teenagers, little kids can be a serious distraction with their running around, rolling on the dance floor, screaming/yelling, and will likely enjoy a movie and pizza more. Your parents will then get to enjoy a lovely night out together for a change. Truth be told, badly behaved children are only cute to a point. Perhaps for 60 seconds. (My wife edited this and insist I mention how much I love children and hope one day we will have many grandkids).
- With reception seating avoid having older guests too close to the dj or band. Younger guests will likely be okay with loud party music so put them by the big speakers.
- This is almost a repeat, but worth repeating. Cutting corners with your entertainment budget is usually a gamble. To put in perspective, it is amazing the amount some couples spend on flowers that will be long gone in days and have little lasting impact compared to the investment they make in their dj or band. Like you, your guests attend weddings and know when they have had a great time or not. The quality of your entertainment will play a big part in determining how much everyone enjoys your party.
- With rare exceptions, a friend or relative as your dj (and/or photographer) can spell disaster. Don't do it. You want your reception to be unforgettable not boring and dull. Hiring a professional with experience and expertise will make a noticeable difference. I think I have repeated myself now one too many times. I am officially done with my soap box.
- A dj with a spectacular light and laser show and a bright neon sign with their name plastered everywhere is not critical for a great party. It is their personality, style and professionalism that counts. Most of all, a dj that plays music you want them to play.
- Flowers are lovely but can be seriously expensive. Sometimes less really is more. Most venues (ballrooms and barns) already look genuinely nice and need little extra decoration. Keep it simple.
- Many moms (and grannies) prefer wrist corsages or small handheld bouquets instead of pin-on flowers that can be rather top-heavy and awkward (to pin-on) with thin dresses.
- Candles often work better than flowers as table centerpieces. They provide great ambient lighting, warm up faces, and allow people to see each other easier during dinner.
- Instead of traditional table numbers, use themes. Honeymoon destinations (London, Dublin, Reykjavik, Paris, Rome, Myrtle Beach, et cetera), places you've visited, favorite teams, types of flowers, cheeses, wines. Anything goes. Be different.
- Save dollars and get candles from stores like Michael's, Target, etc. Two or three large candles (perhaps on a mirror plate) look nice. You can even sprinkle petals to add a splash of color.
- You'll be amazed how many brides use Central Market florists at various Market 32 / Price Choppers in New England. Also, Wegman's in the central New York. Value, service, and selection are impressive. Other grocery chains have floral departments that specialize in weddings too.
- It is your wedding cake so if you do not like the typical chocolate or vanilla frosting be creative. Ice cream, carrot cake, marzipan, even banana pudding can make delicious alternatives. Have a rhubarb pie or blackberry crumble. Perhaps a Bundt cake. A donut wall. Get something you like so you will have cake to take home you want to eat.

- If your caterer is flexible, avoid 'forking' out for a massive cake. Have a flat cake behind the scenes as will save you budget dollars. Approximately 75% serving slices relative to your guest count usually more than adequate especially if left on a dessert table for everyone to help themselves. Having to-go containers also a great plan as often guests like the option to take cake (and sweet treats) home. Keep your cake-cutting simple and low-key. You do not have to feed one another if you would prefer not to.
- Most couples avoid the somewhat dated garter / bouquet routine. Options include just throwing the bouquet, an anniversary dance presentation to the oldest married couple, or just nothing. Remember it is your wedding celebration so be unique. Sometimes the fewer interruptions post-dinner the more fun your party will be. Get all the formalities like parent dances out of the way early if you are having these. With parent dances, keep these on the shorter side of things as a three-minute song can feel like an eternity stuck in the middle of the dance floor.
- If you do wear a garter, test it before your wedding day as they tend to fall down. Make sure it is a snug fit and does not create a line through your dress. You can always keep it in your bridal bag and put it on later at your reception.
- Your reception will be over before you know it so dance and party the night away. After all, it is the biggest celebration of your life. Most of all, the absolute best way to make sure everyone enjoys your wedding is for you to enjoy it yourself. After all the planning and preparation, that is all that matters. Have lots of great food, great fun and, remember, when you worry it gets you nowhere in a hurry. No stressing. Keep calm and marry on. Sorry but I couldn't help myself.

Let me know if you need any help with questions and/or suggestions for wedding professionals or services. Email is the best way to reach me at paul@psphotography.com. I will get back to you quickly.