



Ensemble Events

Wedding 101

Scheduling For Success



In an earlier article, I talk about timelines that are not properly paced. The reason why a wedding reception is not properly paced is most likely due to a poorly planned agenda. Like I have said many times, if the agenda is not planned around the entertainment, what may look like fun on paper may not be so fun in real life. In this article, we will discuss the science of creating a timeline that will keep your guests informed, involved, and entertained throughout your reception. We'll also talk about how to create a lineup of events that flow, have your personal touch, and continues to keep your guests involved. Don't be afraid to leave your comfort zone- your goal is for everyone to have an enjoyable time.

By now, you should know what kind of pace you want for your reception. Now, it's time to put the pieces together into a well structured, and well flowing format. One very common mistake is packing your wedding with too many events in the agenda. This is usually done to prevent boredom, but can result in a top heavy agenda and leave people feeling overwhelmed. Too much of a good thing is still too much, and more is not always better (especially in this business). Hold on to the best ideas rather than all of the good ideas. Your entertainment and coordinator should be able and willing to help.

A great resource to go to for advice is your venue. They have a good idea about what works and what does not. Some venues will go so far as to require you to stick with their timeline, even if it's not optimal for you (it's rare, but it does happen). If the venue does a lot of weddings, then they know what works. Also, make sure that the

venue is not going to start cleaning up before the end of your reception. I've seen the manager at a venue turn the lights on before the reception ends- that's an invitation for guests to leave thinking the celebration is over. Make sure to go over the timeline with your venue, and head off any problems ahead of time.

Wedding receptions typically begin with the cocktail hour as guests arrive and the newlyweds take photos. Then typically the grand entrance, first dance, toasts, blessing (if applicable) dinner, cake, traditional dances, and open dancing. Some people like to get the parent dances and cake cutting done right after the first dance. This is a fine option as long as you plan for it.

The toasts can be done before or after the meal, or even after the cake cutting. The blessing usually follows the toast immediately. The order of your reception events depends pretty heavily on regional and cultural influences. So much so that it is taken for granted. A wedding in California will be structured completely differently than a wedding in New York City, and then bring in cultural and religious influences. That's just something to keep in mind.

Like we said earlier, the first dance typically happens right after the grand entrance. The parent and special dances however, may take place at a number of times. I like to recommend that the parent dances happen after cake cutting and before the open dancing, when everyone is still seated and their attention is drawn because you just cut the cake.

So that leads to the cake cutting, when do you have it? It really depends on your personal preference. Some like to do it early, some later in the night. Some guests may leave after the cake cutting because they assume that there is nothing left to miss, but only if they are not being entertained or are bored. I always recommend to let about a half hour pass between when people finish eating and the cake cutting. Let people dance a bit and burn off some calories from dinner. When the cake is served right at the end of the meal, it tends to go uneaten (and they are not cheap), as most are still full. When you wait a bit, you have given your guests a chance to develop a sweet tooth, especially seeing that they know cake is coming.

The bouquet and garter toss can take place at various times during your reception as well. Some say do it right at the end of the meal, some say after the cake and before parent dances, others say wait until later. This to me, is kind of a variable in the timeline because if people leave, then you may have no one to toss the bouquet to (once again it comes down to experience, preparation, and planning). When done well, the bouquet toss can definitely create energy, so it may be good to place it at the beginning of open dancing or after a lower energy event such as the cake cutting or money dance. Also, lately, the idea of calling only single people has become less and less popular. People don't want their singlehood advertised at a wedding.

If you are planning on having a money dance, there are some things to think about. If the money dance is to a slow song, it will be a low energy moment and should be planned as such. Scheduling a slower money dance can cause a dip in energy, and lead your reception in a downward spiral.

When you have open dancing depends on many things, including regional norms. Some people want to dance from the beginning to the end, some wait until after dinner. Make sure discuss these things with your entertainment director during the planning process. He/she is an expert, and will be able to help.

Finally, let's talk about the ending. You need to decide when to call it and do your last dance. The ending can be one of the most memorable experiences for your guests. Unless your venue has a rigid time for ending (many do), the timing of your ending is totally up to you. Don't become trapped into thinking that your reception has to last as long as you have access to your venue. You can end early if it means a more memorable sendoff.

Oh yeah, one more thing. If you smoke, I recommend a nicotine patch or figuring out something that does not have you going outside every half hour. That has an effect, guests want to see you.

Thanks!

CW

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