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Getting Organized: The First Steps of Wedding Planning

Congratulations! You just got engaged! Your wedding day will be one of the most joyous moments in your adult life. During the planning process, you will have many choices and decisions to make, which can become overwhelming. So where do you begin?

Before you begin setting appointments with photographers, florists and entertainers, you have to make a few basic decisions.

- **What is your budget?**
- **What style wedding do you wish to have?**

Your budget is the first, and most important thing to establish. It is logical to start here, since your budget will determine the type of wedding you have, and the number of guests you can invite. As we have said in the "Traditional Expenses Guide", the old book of etiquette has largely been abandoned by today's brides and grooms. Simply put, many parents of the bride are no longer paying for the majority of the wedding expenses. In fact, most of today's wedding couples pay a significant portion of the wedding expenses out of their pocket. For this reason, it is important to establish how much, if any, financial assistance you will receive. Once the bride and groom have determined exactly how much financial support they will receive from the parents, they must then determine how much money they themselves can contribute to the wedding expenses. Decisions must be made about whether to finance a portion of the reception, and so on.

Now that you have established your budget, you can start thinking about the type of wedding you want to have. Your budget will play a key role in determining what style wedding you can afford. This is the precise reason that the budget is set first. Your personal preference, your families' wishes and your budget all influence which style wedding you choose.

You have a variety of options to choose from. Do you want a garden style wedding at a historic inn? Have you always had your heart set on a reception at one of the upscale golf course banquet facilities? How about a theme for your wedding, such as a country western or Victorian?

When establishing the type of wedding you wish to have, take into consideration the number of guests you will be inviting to your celebration. One of the most expensive items in a wedding budget, is the cost to feed each guest. If your initial guest list is fairly long, you may have to scale down the number of people you invite, in order to have your reception at the location of your choice. In contrast, a more informal reception may be the answer, if you can't scale down your guest list.

Once you have established your budget, the type of wedding you wish to have, and the number of guests you plan to invite, its time to start checking the locations in which you want to have the ceremony and reception. You should try to decide an approximate date for your wedding. We recommend that you establish a primary date, as well as a few secondary dates that would be agreeable. Keep in mind that one, or both locations for the ceremony and reception may already be booked – this is why you should try to be flexible with your date, provided you are planning your wedding well in advance. Often times, a bride and groom will set a date, call the church and make the reservation, only to find out that the location for the reception that they had their hearts set on was already booked for the date.

Ok – lets summarize the process thus far:

- First, establish a budget for the wedding.
- Determine the style wedding you plan to have, and the approximate number of guests you plan to invite.
- Establish a primary date, and a few secondary dates for your wedding.
- Call the location(s) for the ceremony and reception, and determine if both of them are available for the primary date you have chosen. If not, choose one of your secondary dates that you pre-identified.

Now that you have set your date and locations for the ceremony and reception, its time to call the vendors that will handle all of the services you will need for the wedding. Are we having fun yet? I hope so! Hopefully, this has been helpful in getting you started with your wedding planning. See the timeline listed on page 6 for more information on planning the rest of the wedding! ♥