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A Look At The Typical Wedding Reception

By Paul Beardmore – The DJ Connection

Since 1981, my wife and I have planned out literally thousands of wedding receptions. One thing that we have learned, is that there are numerous ways in which to organize your reception. In some cases, the bride will plan the sequence of her formal reception events based on how a friend or family members reception was done. In other cases, the bride applies her own needs and tastes, and is very particular about how her reception is planned and organized. One thing is certain, everyone has their own idea about what formalities should be included, and what sequence they should follow.

Lets take a look at the "typical" reception. Keep in mind that the suggestions we offer here are only guidelines, and that each of our clients chooses the wedding traditions they want (and don't want), as well as choosing the exact sequence they prefer for their reception formalities to follow.

Once the bride and groom have exchanged vows and rings, and the ceremony is complete, the guests who attended the wedding ceremony usually drive to the reception. Normally, the bride, groom and wedding party will stay behind for the necessary photographs. As the guests arrive, the DJ will start background music, and guests will help themselves to light hors d'oeuvres.

Most of the receptions that we perform include the Bridal Party Introduction. When this happens, the entire wedding party and any parents are usually announced, although occasionally this is scaled back to introducing just the bride and groom. If you have an experienced Emcee/DJ, he or she will take charge of lining up the wedding party for the introductions. It's a good idea to inform the wedding party and parents that the introduction will take place upon their arrival at the reception, emphasizing that they should go straight to the reception. This helps prevent any delays of the Bridal Party Introduction.

After the bridal party has been introduced, the bride and groom may opt to have a receiving line. In recent years, receiving lines have become less popular than they used to be in the 70/80's. One popular option to a formal receiving line is to allow 20 to 30 minutes after the Wedding Party Introduction to mingle with your guests, and use this opportunity to thank them for coming. This option is attractive because it doesn't force your guests to stand in a long line.

Prior to the buffet/sit down dinner, it is customary for a blessing to be performed. If you plan on having a blessing, you will need to choose the person to perform this in advance, so they are not taken by surprised when they are called upon to perform this task!

The toast may be done just after the blessing, prior to the meal being served. Equally as often, the toast is done with the cake cutting after the meal. Your decision on this depends greatly on personal preferences. The more formal the wedding, the more often the toast is done prior to the meal, especially when a sit down dinner is served.

Whenever you decide to include the toast, the Best Man is usually the first person to offer the toast to the bride and groom. The Best Man's toast is sometimes followed by the father of the bride, who can propose a toast for the bride's family. Then, the groom's father might follow. This greatly depends on the bride and/or grooms fathers personal preferences.

The music during dinner is normally light background music. However, it is not uncommon for a bride to request that we play up-tempo oldies, for people to tap their toes to!

Your Emcee/DJ should be paying close attention to the flow of dinner, and make suggestions on when to move on to the next formal event of your reception. An experienced Emcee/DJ will know when the time is right to move on to the next event (usually the cake cutting). This is why I am not fond of setting a time schedule for the reception. Why? First of all, time schedules almost never work. While they can be used as a guideline, one little glitch throws the entire schedule off track. An experienced Emcee/DJ will be able to assist in making sure the flow of your reception runs smoothly – making sure that the reception doesn't become boring, as well as ensuring that it isn't rushed.

The cutting of the wedding cake is one of the big highlights of any wedding reception. We recommend that the bride and groom cut the cake after dinner, just prior to starting the dancing. In the event that you have older people attending the reception, cutting the cake right after dinner allows them to take part in this important tradition prior to them leaving. Some people also like the idea of serving the wedding cake as desert.

It is traditional for the bride and groom to cut the first piece of cake together. The feeding of a piece of cake to each other is usually customary. One important issue that the bride and groom need to work out in advance, is whether smashing the cake is "fair game". I have personally witnessed more than one reception where the bride or groom became extremely upset or angry after having the wedding cake smashed in their face. This usually occurs after being coaxed by some of the well-intended onlookers. This obviously puts a damper on the rest of the reception, and we strongly suggest that both the bride and groom come to an agreement on this prior to the wedding day – and stick to that agreement.

Ok, the dinner has been served, the cake has been cut, now its time for the fun to begin! Traditionally, the bride and groom share their first dance as husband and wife to lead off the dancing portion of the reception. Occasionally, a bride and groom share their first dance after the introductions, but that doesn't happen often in our area.

Once the bride and groom complete their first dance, a variety of parents and bridal party dances may take place. The bride and her father, the groom and his mother, the wedding party dance, etc, are all options that you can choose. The dance floor is usually opened up to all of your guests after the parents and bridal party dances have been completed, and this is where things start to liven up!

You should communicate with your entertainer exactly what you want and don't want in the way of interaction. Do you want your Emcee/DJ to be fun and interactive, or do you prefer that they use a more "low key" approach? Every bride has her preference, and we always customize our performances to suit the bride's tastes. Some brides tell us that they saw a DJ (from another company) at a recent wedding that just sat behind the equipment table and played music. They go on to say that there was little or no interaction to motivate the guests – indicating further that the reception was boring because the DJ didn't have the ability or initiative to motivate the crowd.

On the other side of the spectrum, a few brides express concern about the DJ going overboard with the interactive approach. When asked to do so, we are happy to offer the low key approach to any wedding. When requested to be fun and interactive, our goal is to strike a compromise between the two extremes we have identified. We will never be the "show-off" type of DJ who stands on chairs, screaming at your guests. Instead, we like to do interactive things that facilitate fun for your guests, and are careful not to take the spotlight away from the most important people that day: the bride and groom. Often times a little interactivity and personality by the Emcee/DJ is all that is necessary to give your guests a little "nudge" to get out of their chairs, and on the dance floor having fun!

The dollar dance is a tradition that is very common in the northern parts of the country. This tradition involves having the ladies line up to dance with the groom, and the gentlemen lining up to dance with the bride. Each person can make a donation of a dollar, five dollars, ten dollars, or whatever they choose to donate. One word of caution – dollar dances take time away from open dancing for all of your guests. If you anticipate a lot of dancing at your reception, you should carefully consider the effect of stopping open dancing. During the dollar dance only four people are dancing at any given time.

Often times, when open dancing is stopped to do the dollar dance, it is difficult to get people back on the dance floor at the conclusion of the dollar dance. While this is not always the case, it is a consideration for any bride and groom considering this formality for their reception.

Tradition holds that the person who catches the bouquet may be the next bride. It used to be a foregone conclusion that the bride would toss the bouquet, then the groom would remove the garter from the bride's leg and toss it to the single gentlemen in the crowd. After that, the guy that caught the garter would place it on the lady that caught the bouquet.

In recent years, a lot of wedding traditions are being abandoned by brides who prefer to do things that suit their needs and tastes. Often times, the bride will toss the bouquet, but eliminate the garter removal. This is all a matter of personal preferences.

When the bride chooses to toss the bouquet, she usually has a "throw-away" bouquet specifically for this purpose. One word of advice to any bride tossing a bouquet, is to check for low ceilings or overhead obstructions prior to making the toss. Often, a "line drive" toss is necessary when a low ceiling or chandelier is encountered.

When you and your husband are ready to leave, try to take a few minutes to say goodbye to your parents and attendants and thank them for helping make your wedding day so special. A "farewell" dance by the bride and groom is a great way to end the reception on a positive and sentimental note.

In the Orient, rice means "May you always have a full pantry" and a red slipper thrown on the roof of a house indicates that a honeymoon is in progress. The custom of throwing rice and shoes after the couple has now lost its original significance and the throwing of rice and tying of shoes to the back of the couple's car remain only as symbols of good luck.

The shoes are rapidly fading as a custom and rice has been replaced with bird seed as the preferred method. One word of caution on bird seed. More than one bride or groom has been injured by an overzealous guest who throws the bird seed too forcefully. One alternative (that is a bit pricey) is to use rose petals or confetti.

It is a good idea to have the best man prepare the car for departure after making sure that everything is packed away and in order. When you're ready to leave, the guests form two lines and the couple runs through a hail of bird seed or rose petals to their waiting car.

As you can see, there are a lot of details that need to be planned, if you want your reception to run smoothly. With our entertainment service, all of this planning is absolutely free of charge! ♥