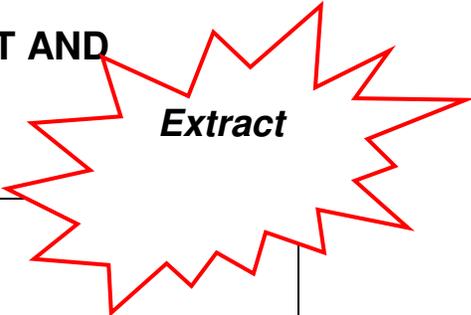


13. FIRST MEETING WITH THE CLIENT AND PROPOSAL TO YOUR CLIENT



Extract

OVERVIEW

In this module, we will cover the following topics:

- Preparation
- At the meeting
- Planning the ceremony
- Budget planning
- Proposal to client

PREPARATION

Before your first meeting with a new client you will have to be fully prepared. You cannot just breeze in and expect to come out with a clear understanding of your clients' needs.

In this section, we will look at what you should do to prepare for your first meeting.

WHERE TO HOLD THE MEETING

If you have a home office, you could hold your first meeting there. But only do this if it looks like a professional office.

Alternatively, you could suggest that you'll make a visit to their home. This is often a better option as your client will be more relaxed in their natural surroundings and will possibly open up more about their wants and needs.

Also, make sure you identify who will be attending your initial meeting. Ideally, it will just be you and the couple that are getting married. However, sometimes the couples' parents will want to be present, and this can confuse things. Always make sure you are taking in what the bride and groom want. Make sure they are happy with the plans that you make as a group.

SELF PRESENTATION

When you attend your first meeting with a client it is important that you make the right impression. Arrive looking like a professional. Make sure you look smart, tidy and organized. Take care of your appearance.

If you look the part, your clients will have more confidence in you. If you look like you've just got out of bed, they'll perceive you as someone who struggles to plan their own life effectively, and someone who's not capable of organising someone else's wedding.

YOUR MANNER

You must maintain a professional, yet friendly manner during your first meeting. Let your clients know that you take your business very seriously, but at the same time make sure that you come across as approachable and understanding.

WHAT TO TAKE TO THE MEETING

You'll need to take to your first meeting:

- A pad and pen to take notes with
- A copy of the 'who, what, where, when and how' questions listed later in this module
- A copy of the 'planning the ceremony' questions listed later in this module
- Some suggestions for locations, venues and suppliers etc
- Leaflets and brochures from your suggested suppliers etc
- Budget estimations
- A calculator

And if you take a mobile phone with you, remember to switch it off. You'll look truly unprofessional if halfway through a meeting a friend calls to see if you fancy going out for a drink in the evening. Keep your work life and home/social life separate.

EXERCISE 13.1

Start gathering the things you'll need for your first meeting. Go and look for a smart outfit and get a pad and pen etc, preferably in a smart folio folder.

BE CLEAR ABOUT WHAT YOU'LL ASK

Before setting out for your first meeting with a client, make sure you know what you want to ask.

In the next section, 'at the meeting', we cover the questions that you'll need to ask.

EXERCISE 13.2

Before reading on, attempt to come up with some questions that you think you should ask your clients on the initial meeting. Then see what you've missed out.

AT THE MEETING

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR CLIENT

As a wedding planner, it is your duty to make sure that your client's needs and concerns are taken care of during the wedding planning process. In order to do this, you must effectively communicate with your client. This means asking a lot of questions and clarifying ideas.

Effective communication decreases the instance of unnecessary errors and mistakes. Here are some methods to improve communication between you and your clients.

LISTENING SKILLS

The art of good conversation lies in getting the other person to talk about themselves. This especially applies in wedding planning.

You get people to talk about what they want from you by asking questions. And in asking questions, you gain valuable information. You can use that information to understand the client, and to help them understand how to fulfil their wedding needs.

So here are the two most important things you can say to a client.

1. One is to say nothing
2. The other is to ask questions

HIGH QUALITY QUESTIONS

Questioning the client serves to gain their attention, to understand their situation, and to learn about them. It also reveals what their needs are.

You should adopt a funnel approach in your questioning. Start with general questions, such as what time and date they'd like the wedding on, and then move gradually closer to the more complicated areas like who they'd like to invite and what food they'd like at the reception.

SUMMARISE

When the client has spoken, perhaps in a random way for several minutes, it is helpful to summarise what they have said. You can say:

- 'So you want a reception with a live band?'
- 'What you're saying is, you only want close friends and relatives present?'

This summary can put into a nutshell what the client is trying to say.

GETTING THE DETAILS YOU NEED

In order to serve your client you must discover all the important details.

In the beginning, your client may have a vague idea of what they want. But that is why they have come to you. They need help to make their wedding plans become a reality. Therefore, you must keep in mind the following guidelines when meeting with a client to plan an event.

- Who?
- What?
- When?
- Where?
- How?

WHO?

In order to plan the wedding, you initially need to find out:

- Who is getting married
- Who else will be attending the wedding
- Estimated attendance numbers

WHAT?

Your next task will be to find what your client's plans are for the wedding. Do they want you to arrange everything down to the hen/stag party, or do they want you to solely concentrate on the wedding ceremony.

It is your job to be able to successfully handle whatever you are presented.

WHEN?

Your next task is to find out when your client wants to hold the event. This is very important in order to develop a timeline of services.

Sample questions you should ask your client include:

- What month do you want the wedding to take place in?
- Is there a certain day the wedding needs to be held on? Would you prefer a weekday or a weekend date?
- Do you want the wedding to take place in the morning or afternoon?
- Is it a one-day event or will it take place over a series of days?

You must ask your client these questions in order to pick a suitable date. In many instances, a date may have to be changed. But whatever the case, this information will be needed in order to pick a suitable venue for the ceremony and reception.

WHERE?

Your next task will be to ask your client where they plan on holding the wedding. Consider the following:

- Will your client wish to get married locally or away from their home?
- Will they want to host it at a church, hotel ballroom, or country club?
- Do they plan on getting married abroad?

It is important to choose a location that will accommodate the correct amount of people, as well as a location that can properly handle hosting the event.

How?

The last question you need to ask your client in order to plan their wedding is 'How?'

The question of 'How?' is an open-ended question that can help you fill in any blanks. Here is a list of some possible 'How' questions.

- How long will the event last?
- How much do you plan on spending on your budget?
- How do you plan on accommodating your attendants? Will there be food, snacks, or beverages?
- How do you plan on notifying your guests about the event?

These are just some examples of possible 'How' questions you may ask your clients.

EXERCISE 13.3

Make a copy of the table on the following page that you can take to your initial meeting with a client.

TABLE 13.1 WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN CHECKLIST

Who	
What	
Where	
When	
How	

PLANNING THE CEREMONY

Congratulations, a couple has hired you to plan their wedding. You may offer:

- Partial planning of a wedding
- Complete planning and co-ordination of the wedding
- Co-ordination on the day of the service only

You have been selected to provide them with the most comprehensive service possible. You must be prepared to meet their wishes, desires and needs with absolute competence.

Wedding planning revolves around one singular event: the ceremony. There is a great deal of pre-planning and post-planning related to arranging the vendors, the dresses, the tuxes, the site and the reception. Yet all of these components are directly related to the central focus that is the actual ceremony.

WHAT TO OFFER YOUR CLIENTS

Prior to your first meeting with the couple, you will have already prepared a large number of resources to facilitate the planning sessions. A comprehensive wedding package would contain the following services:

- Ongoing communication with the bride and groom
- Budget planning
- Schedules, timelines and checklists
- Selection and booking of venues for wedding and reception
- Selecting and booking of the officiant
- Planning theme and style of the wedding
- Co-ordinating design, ordering and mailing of invitations
- Co-ordinating selection of wedding attire and accessories
- Co-ordinating or providing vendors (florist, caterer, photographer, musician, beautician, hair stylists)

- Co-ordinating transport
- Negotiating and reviewing all contracts
- Assistance with marriage licence
- Itinerary planning
- Ceremony planning
- Rehearsal oversight
- Direction of processional and attendant duties
- Planning the reception
- Wedding day gift co-ordination
- On-hand co-ordination on the day of the wedding
- Relieving the bride and groom of stress

If that list appears impressive, that is only a portion of what a wedding planner does. Weddings are a symphony of organized chaos with the wedding planner in the role of conductor.

Whether you offer partial or full wedding planning services, become very familiar with all aspects of planning a wedding.

EXERCISE 13.4

Visit at least two different weddings (if possible) take note of the procession, the venue, the officiant and the ceremony. Take notes and then ask yourself what you would have done differently and what parts you really enjoyed.

REMINDER

Have you completed the following exercises?

- Exercise 13.1
- Exercise 13.2
- Exercise 13.3
- Exercise 13.4
- Exercise 13.5

Tick each box when you have completed the exercises.

SUMMARY

1. You know how to prepare for your first meeting with a client.
2. You are able to conduct your first meeting with your client.
3. You are able to communicate effectively with your client.
4. You know how to prepare a proposal for your clients.

Well, that's the end of the extract. If you want to know more, you'll have to register!

We look forward to welcoming you on to the course, and helping you become a wedding planner.