

Wedding Etiquette In The 21st Century: A How-To Guide

Business Journal Chats With Great-Great Granddaughter Of Etiquette Guru Emily Post

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Wedding celebrations are one of many special events where formalities are engrained in their tradition. But as Millennial-generation couples begin to ring wedding bells, the traditions of yesteryear have been slowly fading and upgrading with the 21st Century.

Lizzie Post, great-great granddaughter of the famous etiquette guru Emily Post, is an author and member of The Emily Post Institute, which has published five editions of Emily Post's Wedding Etiquette. Post told the Business Journal that there are still proper



Lizzie Post

ways of distributing the responsibilities that come before, during and after the wedding while being realistic in today's world. Trini Randazzo, president and founder of Nozza Studios Wedding Planning and Invitations in Belmont Shore, has read Post's Wedding Etiquette and provided her perspective on some of the traditional wedding protocol that is still included in her clients' weddings.

Covering The Costs

Traditionally, the groom's family pays for an engagement party as well as the rehearsal dinner, while the bride's family pays for the wedding and reception. However, according to the 5th edition of Wedding Etiquette, only 27 percent of weddings are completely paid for by the bride's parents.

Today, anyone can pay for anything. "We've really come to respect that not everyone comes from the same place and that the best thing to do nowadays is to have a candid and respectful conversation about the expenses of the wedding and what people are willing to contribute to," Post said.

Randazzo said she has seen parents of the bride and groom contributing on certain items, such as the bride's parents buying the dress and accessories, but otherwise the cost is mostly on the couple. However the bill is split, an important thing to remember is to not



Trini Randazzo, president and founder of NOZZA Event Planning Studio in Belmont Shore, consults her clients about proper wedding etiquette as part of her planning services. She also designs and creates stationery for things like wedding save-the-dates, invitations and thank-you notes. (Photograph by the Business Journal's Thomas McConville)

spend beyond your means. "Just because mom and dad are wealthy doesn't mean mom and dad want a \$100,000 wedding on their hands," Post said.

Before dealing out payments and tips, couples should check their vendor contracts to make sure gratuity hasn't already been included in the charges. Randazzo said her clients make all final payments ahead of schedule, putting everything in separate envelopes for each vendor. Tips should be included in a separate envelope, and all envelopes are delivered at the end of the night. Typically, vendors that receive gratuity are musicians, caterers and wait staff, delivery truck drivers, limousine drivers and bartenders. The officiant also receives a donation or tip. Gratuity is somewhere between 18 and 20 percent and is given as long as the vendor performs adequately per the contracted agreement.

Engagement Photos, Save-The-Dates And Invitations

Traditional engagement announcements are not invitations to the wedding. Post and Randazzo have seen the announcement become a photo or photomontage of professional engagement pictures.

Randazzo also operates a stationery boutique through NOZZA, and helps her clients create announcements and save-the-date

cards. She recommends only sending out save-the-dates if the wedding is on a holiday weekend, if there are a lot of out of town guests coming or if the wedding is on a Friday or a Sunday. "If, typically, your wedding is on a Saturday and most of your guests are in town and they're not flying from far away, or if you want to keep your guest count to a minimum, then I don't recommend that they send save-the-dates," she said.

Couples are also using engagement photos as save-the-date cards, which are sent out to those who should expect an invitation to the wedding and may need extra time to plan for travel to the big day. The purpose of the invitation is to clue in guests what type of attire they wear and what kind of experience they are going to have at the wedding. Handwritten or printed invitations are both perfectly acceptable, as long as the essential "who, what, where and when" are included, particularly who is inviting and who is being celebrated.

"Because the costs are often shared, it's important to make sure that if the groom's parents have contributed that you ask whether or not they would like to be on the invitation, or vice versa," Post said. Traditional wedding etiquette is to not put a deceased family member on the invitation as a host. The best way to include someone who has passed away is to

honor the person in the wedding program instead, Post said.

Each delivered wedding invitation comes as a packet with the invite, response card and reception card – which are sometimes combined – and a stamped and addressed return envelope. Both Post and Randazzo said it's a no-no to include any registry information on the actual invitation letter, but it could be written on an insert. In Randazzo's business, she said she recommends creating a card that goes with the stationery of the invitation, following the same style, so it doesn't look out of place in the invite.

Delegating Responsibilities

Traditionally, the duty of the mother of the groom is to be the host of the engagement party and to make the first step to reach out to the bride's parents after the engagement to arrange a time to meet each other if they haven't met before. "Both should be supportive of the events," Post said.

If there is no planner and the mother of the bride is paying for the majority of the wedding, Randazzo said the mother typically fills that role by talking to the vendors, negotiating contracts, going to appointments with the couple and all of the follow-ups leading to and on the big day. Traditionally the mother of the bride hosts a bridal luncheon the day before or the day of the wedding. Both mothers should take responsibility for talking to each other about what to wear to the wedding, and the couple should be respectful of what their mothers are comfortable wearing, Post said.

The fifth edition of Emily Post's Wedding Etiquette, written by the etiquette guru's great-granddaughter in-law Peggy Post, has details on the before, during and after elements of a traditional American wedding. (Image courtesy of The Emily Post Institute)

Post noted the responsibilities of the maid or matron of honor should include being a witness to the marriage certificate signing, helping select the bridesmaids' attire, address invitation envelopes, carry the bride's dress train if applicable, hold the bouquet and ring during the ceremony and gather guests for the bouquet toss and the reception. Both the maid of honor and the bridesmaids are responsible for the purchase of apparel and all accessories needed for the wedding and must be able to afford transportation to and from the ceremony. The attendants are also most likely going to contribute a gift from the bridesmaids to the bride, if being at the wedding is not the gift itself, Post said.

The opposite supporting role is that of the best man. "He's your responsible friend," Post said. The best man's duties can include being a witness to the marriage certificate signing, organizing the bachelor party, coordinating the groomsmen's gift to the couple, making sure the groom's payments to vendors are prepared, delivering those payments at the ceremony, instructing ushers in the correct seating of guests, making sure the groomsmen are properly dressed, keeping the bride's ring, offering the first toast, dancing with the moth-

ers, the bride and all of the bridesmaids, and is often responsible for returning rented garments and accessories. The best man may also drive the couple to the ceremony if they have not hired transportation.

If a couple decides to hire a planner, Randazzo said a planner should sit down with clients to review what responsibilities the bride and groom are expecting members of the wedding party to carry out. Sometimes, she said, those expectations are too much, and if not properly delegated they can cause friction within the bridal party. "The purpose of them is to be there to support you through the process and mainly to support you the day of your wedding, basically to help you get ready and all of that; nothing from the planning process," she said.

Calling Off The Wedding

Once the final decision to cancel the wedding is made, the first people who should know are those involved in planning the wedding. All vendors have a clause for cancellation that allows bridal parties to cancel for any reason up to 30 days before, but must forfeit their deposit. "The only way it's refunded is if there's a death in the family or a serious injury to a member of the wedding party," Randazzo said. Planners typically work a year in advance, so the more notice you can give the better for everyone. Randazzo said she always recommends that couples get wedding insurance in the event of accident or bad weather. "It's a small price to pay for peace of mind," she said.

Start notifying guests immediately in a letter. "This should not be a Facebook announcement," Post said. A potential script, Post said, could be, "We're terribly sorry. This is not the path we should be going down." Couples don't need to explain how or why they made the decision to call everything off. There are laws in some states on giving back wedding rings. Post said the ring usually does not need to be returned, but if it's an heirloom from the groom's family it should go back to them. "It's supposed to be a representation of a promise that's [now] not holding true." ■



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