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# DREAM WEAVERS

Wedding planners can bring sanity to a chaotic time.

**Linda L. Esterson**

Special to the Jewish Times  
**W**hen her daughter Marnina became engaged to Spencer Rubenstein, Donna Goldman excitedly set out to plan the wedding.

But as she thought about all that was involved, it became overwhelming. The location, date, band, clergy and caterer were just the beginning. The list went on and on.

Then her friend Gloria Goldman, to whom she is not related, offered to help. Donna Goldman was thrilled. Gloria Goldman owns A Pampered Affair and was happy to assist in Marnina's dream wedding.

"I spent less time," Donna Goldman says. "I was working and it cut down on the phone calls and e-mails I had to make during the day."

Not only do wedding planners reduce the time family members spend on minute details, they offer their experience to help manage through the mania of planning a wedding in today's world.

"For most people, it is overwhelming," says Anne Berman, special event and wedding consultant. "There are so many decisions to be made. People don't know where to go and where to start."

Echoes Gloria Goldman: "The bride and groom need a wedding planner because there's so much going on in their lives at the time they are getting married. They need someone to direct them and get the right resources within their budget."

Most planners are found through word of mouth, bridal magazines and ads in the Yellow Pages. It's helpful to speak to former clients for their thoughts on how their planner helped pull off the wedding of their dreams.

"People don't give a lot of thought when they attend to the planning of this wonderful, seamless affair," says Iris Sauber, interfaith minister and wedding planner in Baltimore, "and all that went on behind the scenes to make it appear that way."

At her initial meeting, Ms. Berman helps the client determine a budget, since most don't realize the costs

associated with a wedding. Many experience "sticker shock" when they see price lists.

"The wedding planner's job is to guide them through this and pick things most important to them," says Ms. Berman. "You have to be able to work within their budget."

For instance, if the family suggests a \$40,000 budget but reveals a guest list of 200 and the desire for a band, designer dress and elaborate flowers, it's up to the wedding planner to determine how to make it all work. If the flowers are important, Ms. Berman may suggest a disc jockey instead of a band to reduce the total cost of the affair.

"I try to get a good hold of the vision of their wedding," says Ms. Berman, who recommends that brides cut pictures out of bridal magazines to illustrate their dream wedding.

The planner's experience helps deliver a wedding that fits as closely to the bride's vision as possible. For instance, Ms. Berman will suggest a few florists whose style most closely aligns with the vision of the bride but also fits within the budget. "A newly engaged bride doesn't know one florist from the next or how expensive they are," she explains.

The planner may accompany the bride and her mother for meetings with vendors like florists and caterers, serving as an advocate. Gloria Goldman accompanied Donna and Marnina Goldman to interview two caterers and impressively fired questions at them like how long they will stay to clean up, how much help will be there, what will be provided. And she knew what to insist be included in the contract.

"We relied on her experience," says Donna Goldman. "She knows about contracts and deadlines and all of the things I didn't think about and that did help."

Ms. Berman suggests that the bride, her mother and, perhaps, best friend share the special time of shopping for her wedding dress. Bringing the wedding planner and the other nine bridesmaids along to shop for the attendants' dresses is an invitation for trouble. Getting five or six women to



PHOTO: SARA GELIK

agree on a dress is virtually impossible. Instead, brides and their moms should find what they like and suggest the girls find something at least in the same color and material.

Wedding planners are hired based on the services they provide. With all-inclusive service, the planner assists the bride with all aspects of planning the wedding as well as coordination of the event. Others choose to hire the consultant to coordinate the wedding from about eight weeks out through the big day. The major vendors are already hired, but there are questions and details that require assistance. Others solely hire the consultant to coordinate the wedding day itself.

Some wonder why a coordinator is needed at the event itself when all of the arrangements have already been made. Picture this: At the meetings with the caterer, the bride reiterates that a cousin has a peanut allergy and no foods are to be served with peanuts. At the cocktail hour, the coordinator can police the food and if an item with peanuts is served, she can have it quickly removed.

Wedding coordinators also are helpful when it comes to making sure every detail is remembered. If the bride wants to carry her late grandfather's handkerchief as she walks down the aisle, the coordinator will gently remind her to take it along. She can also ensure that the great-grandmother's cake knife is used and then put away for safekeeping.

Being detail-oriented is essential, but so is having a sense of calm under

pressure. Gloria Goldman assisted with a wedding that endured a power outage. Ms. Berman watched a bride's earrings fall to the floor as she walked down the aisle. Quickly, she pulled the pearl and diamond earrings from her own ears and the bride looked perfect. At another wedding, the bride's hot pink lipstick had stained her beautiful white strapless wedding gown. Ms. Berman mixed up a solution that removed the stain without damaging the fabric.

"No one knows what you're doing backstage — you make it all happen," she says. "You make it right and don't discuss it with who's in charge. You just get things done."

And sometimes, of course, the planner must roll with the punches. Following a fireworks display at an Eastern Shore wedding, a storm rolled in and the bride, groom and their guests were soaked.

All of a sudden, the assembled broke out in songs from "The Titanic." "I looked at the bride and groom and they were laughing and thought it was a great ending. Then I knew to go with it," says Ms. Berman.

The job is not as glamorous as portrayed in movies like "The Wedding Planner" or "Father of the Bride." Instead, the work is hard and the hours are long. But all in all, planners enjoy making the perfect wedding.

"It's extremely rewarding," says Ms. Berman, who sees couples a year later with smiling faces. "Parents thank me for making their children's dream come true." □

Linda L. Esterson is a free-lance writer in Owings Mills.

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