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YOUR WEDDING, INC.

PLANNING A WEDDING IS LIKE RUNNING
A SMALL COMPANY, AND YOUR BRIDESMAIDS
ARE PART OF YOUR STAFF. AND GETTING
THE RIGHT PEOPLE FOR THE JOB IS KEY

WHEN TANYA EKLUND got married last fall, five of her closest girlfriends were at her side. “I had originally set out to have six,” she says. According to Eklund, in the early days of announcing the wedding, people were excited to be asked to participate. Then, as the planning started, they began to realize the commitment. In Eklund’s case, five of her original six bridesmaids stayed. One had to go.

Choosing people to stand by you on your wedding day is a tricky business. There are people you want to ask, people you should ask and — let’s be honest — people you need to avoid. A bride is recruiting an important team and needs to set expectations for her bridesmaids early.

A PERFECT FIT

Sharon Naylor, author of more than 30 wedding books, including *The Essential Guide to Wedding Etiquette*, says the number one complaint of bridesmaids is that the brides don’t respect their time or budget. She recommends taking into account the personal situation of each person you consider for the role of bridesmaid before you ask them. That means thinking about how your wedding plans may affect them financially,

or in terms of their current commitments. This is especially important if there are travel requirements involved in your wedding.

According to Naylor, typically a larger wedding requires a larger number of bridesmaids, and vice versa. However, she adds there really are no set rules, and that four to six is an average number of bridesmaids.

Naylor also notes that brides should be aware of the reactions of both those who are asked and those who weren’t. >>

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“If you find out someone is disappointed that they have not been asked, do talk to them directly,” says Naylor, “but don’t assume there is disappointment.” She also advises against offering up a side job instead, as that’s just making the person work without getting the recognition and perks of being a bridesmaid.

Eklund learned smaller bridal parties are easier to manage, because there are fewer personalities involved. With five bridesmaids to keep track of, there was always a helping hand, but also a lot more people to have to find work for. “It was kind of hard because everyone wanted to contribute and everyone wanted to help,” she says.

MONEY TALK

Lisa Hanslip, owner of Calgary-based The Wedding Planner, recommends telling your attendants right away what you will and won’t pay for. This helps minimize surprises on both sides.

She also advises brides to consider each bridesmaid individually when selecting the dresses.

Hanslip has seen a trend toward choosing a colour palette, then letting each bridesmaid select her own gown. But, she says, if you go this route, be sure to set clear guidelines. For example, she says, request your bridesmaids to select a similar style by telling them, “a black cocktail dress that is sleeveless. No longer than this, and no shorter than that.”

For her bridesmaids, Eklund chose a two-piece dress because she felt bridesmaid gowns had a stigma. She wanted something they would be excited to wear again. “We ended up finding an Alfred Sung that was a bustier style with an A-line skirt to the knee. And the girls loved it,” she says.

THE BEST LAID PLANS

Despite a bride’s best attempts at accommodation, sometimes a bridesmaid just doesn’t make herself available or is hard to deal with. According to Naylor, when a person’s behaviour becomes disruptive, it is time for them to go. Fortunately for Eklund, the decision for her sixth bridesmaid to bow out was a mutual one, but that is not always the case.

Naylor says when a bride needs to “fire” one of her attendants, there are a few

important rules to follow. First, she says, find out if there is something going on in her life that you may not be aware of. Maybe she is depressed, or having trouble at work. “If there is nothing, then you need to be direct,” says Naylor. “Let them know you can see that they are not excited to be part of the wedding party and that you need them to step down.”

Naylor says this should always be done either with a phone call, or preferably in person — not by e-mail. She also says it is important to reimburse the departing bridesmaid for any expenses she has already incurred for the dress, travel or other things.

THANK YOU TO YOU, AND TO YOU, AND TO YOU, TOO

After all the support your bridesmaids provide, there are many ways to say thanks. Hanslip says it often makes most the sense to present gifts at the rehearsal dinner, which was Eklund’s approach. She gave each of her attendants a Tiffany bracelet and was delighted by the screams of excitement as the gifts were opened. Jewellery, watches, and jewellery boxes are all traditional bridesmaids gifts.

However, gifts don’t have to be expensive. Naylor says sentimental gifts are perfectly acceptable as well. “If you’ve been friends with the bridesmaid for a long time, a framed photo of the two you together as children and then as adults is nice,” she says.

Finally, Naylor says it is very good etiquette to make time for your bridesmaids on a personal level during the process of planning your wedding.

“It’s important to keep a relationship outside of the wedding. If you have always had a Friday night girl’s night, keep doing that. Just don’t talk about the wedding.” Try to make it easier for your bridesmaids to be excited for your wedding by not overwhelming them with the plans for the whole year ahead.

Eklund seems to have found the right balance. “All the bridesmaids I had contributed in their own way,” she says. “The five girls standing up for me were fantastic. I have no regrets. If I had to do it again, I would do it the exact same way.” 🐼