



Get the Wedding YOU Want

Learn from a bride who
stopped being a pushover
By Johannah Haney

"You don't want to have your wedding the last Saturday in April," the reception-site manager insisted, seemingly horrified I would suggest that date. "It's too close to tourist season."

"That's a great point," I lied through clenched teeth. "What do you have in May?" My fiancé and I know late April marks the end of tourist season in our tropical wedding destination, but we chose it because it's the best time for his Chilean family to travel. Still, something kept me from explaining our date to this woman. I crossed the resort's name off my list of potential

sites, my mouth agape at my own feebleness. I had no idea I would be such a wimp planning my wedding.

We're all aware of the stereotype: Normally sane woman turns dictatorial in a white tulle—and-French manicure flurry from the moment she says "yes" to the man on bended knee. Since I got engaged, I have been a little kooky myself. I am petrified of being perceived as a monster in white satin, so instead I roll over and play dead.

Prior to my own bridal adventures, I was all business. For my sister's wedding, I coolly bargained for limos. "We

don't want the wedding package," I declared. "Charge us the Point A to Point B rate, as you would for a corporate client." Negotiating was easy. So why, for my own wedding, am I so entrenched in the spineless depths of pushoverhood? Am I scared of turning into a cliché? Or am I so insecure that the approval of strangers means more to me than having a perfect wedding?

I'm finally realizing that what turns some brides into control freaks and what makes me such a pansy is the same thing: a desire for perfection. When I envision my wedding day,

I want it to be relaxed for everyone. My problem is that I am confusing a carefree wedding with carefree wedding planning. In fact, the more concessions I make in the name of a cool facade, the more problems I'm likely to face. Case in point: My florist asked what time she should deliver the flowers. I wasn't sure, so I panicked: "Oh, you know, whenever it's convenient for you." I didn't even mention that our ceremony takes place at an unusually early 10:30 a.m. Later, I felt a wave of terror as I envisioned myself frantically dodging bees while picking flowers from the church garden, just seconds before walking down the aisle. If I were to fulfill my dream of a laid-back wedding day, I had to fix my people-pleasing tendencies—and fast.

I decided to call a reception site and pretend to be a wedding planner. I'd ask for details far grander than what I actually wanted. In disguise, I could be brazen without worrying what they thought of me. I would be polite but firm. When the event manager listed menu options, I said, "Oh no, that won't do. This bride wants a customized menu with fare from her fiancé's native Chile." I told her "my client" wanted to bring in a designer to install free-standing arches and yards of white chiffon. I was amazed at her response: "No problem. We'll make it work." It was the perfect practice round.

Now I had to incorporate this boldness into my real planning. My fiancé and I were desperately trying to book a particular resort, but our contact would not call back. My previous messages were wishy-washy at best: "Call if you get a chance... but I know you're super busy." I had to do better. I wrote a script to recite on her voicemail. "I always try to be respectful of people's time," I read after a few opening pleasantries. "However, I'm concerned that I've been unable to reach you for so long. I need to know that if we have our wedding there, I can get in touch with you within a reasonable time frame." She called me back right away.

Every wedding call I make now goes a little better than the last one.

The entertainment agency I hired insisted that DJ Tom would be perfect for us. Excited, I checked out his Web site, only to discover his obvious frat-party style (complete with racy photos). "That's a nightmare," I declared. "You've got to find us someone better." And they did. Speaking of nightmares, that bee scenario has been haunting

me lately, so I called the florist today. Politely, firmly and, this time, with no script in hand, I told her to deliver the flowers at 8:00 a.m. Sharp.

Johannah Haney is a freelance writer in Boston. She will marry her fiancé, Andrés, on April 29, despite it being the end of tourist season.

Stand Up For Yourself!

If the thought of choosing a caterer, much less negotiating with your new mother-in-law, has you running for cover, you're not alone. Many brides are uncomfortable being the center of attention or they feel overwhelmed making so many major, and often expensive, decisions, says Dale Atkins, Ph.D., a psychologist and coauthor of *Wedding Sanity Savers*. "You don't want to hurt anyone's feelings, so you think, Well, I guess I can live with that. And you risk losing control of your day." Here's a crash course in Bridal Assertiveness, to help you stay in the driver's seat.

Remember that it's fine that you're not a wedding expert. You don't need an advanced degree in botany to choose flowers. "Brides often feel like they're playing in an arena where everyone else is very experienced, and they aren't," says Dr. Atkins. "But the only expertise you need is knowing what's appropriate for you and your fiancé." Make sure the two of you talk over your plans before everyone starts offering their two cents. If you have a clear sense of what you want, you'll feel more confident standing your ground.

Choose a wedding planner who's an ally. "Every planner has a certain style, so make sure you have the right chemistry," says Ann David, a New York-

based wedding planner and co-owner of David Reinhard Events. "Do you want a personal assistant to handle every detail, a friend to brainstorm with you, or more of a mom type, who will tell you what to do?" Whatever your choice, make sure the planner will support you and simplify the process, not run roughshod over your ideas, making it harder for you to speak up for what you want.

Don't sign until you're sure. "It's easy to feel steam-rolled by vendors who want you to think they're the only game in town, or that you might lose out on a great deal," notes Dr. Atkins. Don't commit until you've had a chance to think things through—just say, "This is very interesting, but we'll need to talk it over first. I hope you'll work with us on that."

It's okay to say "I don't like it." Ask your vendors for tastings and a prototype bouquet and decorations a few months before the big day, and remember: "We have thick skins, so if you hate it, say it," says David. "If you don't, you'll just walk away unhappy." You don't have to be rude to make your point; simply explain "This just isn't me" and tell them what you had in mind.

Ease tensions with family and friends. "Be respectful, even if you don't like their ideas," says Dr. Atkins. "Explain that you've thought it over, and while you don't want to hurt their feelings, you've decided their suggestion isn't right for your wedding." It can be tough to shoot down their idea when your loved one is also helping foot the bill, but as long as you're staying within the budget, you should be able to have the wedding you want.

—Virginia Sole-Smith