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**BRIDES**

**How to successfully negotiate with wedding vendors**

The average wedding tends to be one of the most costly ventures in a couple's life together. Many couples seek ways to cut costs, and negotiating with prospective vendors is one way to do just that.

Too often couples overlook haggling for better prices because they may be intimidated by the process or simply want to plan the most memorable day regardless of cost. Many vendors build some wiggle room into their prices, and the key for cost-conscious couples is to find the right strategy to unlock that lower price.

- Explore your options. Weddings are big business for vendors, and the competition is stiff. Visit a variety of vendors and compare their services and prices prior to making any decisions. This will give you an accurate range of costs and information for future negotiations. Vendors may be willing to match competitors' prices, so knowing what the photographer down the street charges can provide you with some negotiating leverage.
- Dress modestly for meetings. It's tempting to want to dress to impress, but very often wedding vendors judge potential clients by their appearances. If you walk in with a designer handbag and driving the latest model luxury vehicle, a vendor may get the impression you have extra money to spend. While you do not have to play the pauper, dress modestly so your appearance doesn't hurt you at the negotiating table.
- Never take the first offer. A good business person will tell you there always is room for negotiation. Avoid the loaded question of "What can you spend on this?" by the vendor. Instead, let them bring up a price first, and realize that

this first quote can almost always be negotiated down. Inform the vendor that you would really like to work with them but he or she needs to lower the price. See if they can offer a different package or provide a discount.

- Negotiate the big-ticket items first. Discounts on big-ticket items, such as the reception venue, will save you the most money. For example, you will save more by getting 20 percent off at the catering hall than if you save 20 percent on your wedding gown. Once you free up extra money, you may find you don't have to negotiate as hard with smaller vendors.
- Walk away if need be. Always have a Plan B in place. This way if you tell a vendor that their price is too expensive and you have to pass, you really have a fall-back option. Some vendors will sweeten the deal, but others will actually let you walk out the door. And remember, you're more likely to get a better price by being amenable and well-mannered than making threats or arguing.
- Some deals aren't actual discounts. A vendor may be able to work with you by offering additional services in lieu of actually taking money off of the price tag. Extra photo prints, a dessert bar and an extra hour of time in the limousine may seem like great deals, but that's only the case if you truly need these bonuses. Even if it's a great deal, you're still spending more than you had hoped.

Wedding prices can be overwhelming. However, negotiating for lower prices is always an option for cost-conscious couples.

**BRIDES**

**Why a Valentine's Day wedding might be right for you**

Valentine's Day evokes strong emotions in so many people. On the official day of all things love, many eagerly anticipate the chance to spend time with their sweethearts.

Couples who already have hearts in their eyes and are enamored with all things Valentine's Day may want to tie the knot on this special holiday, and few can argue when a couple decides to become husband and wife on this day devoted to love and affection.

Valentine's Day is a popular day to tie the knot, as more than two million people choose February 14 to walk down the aisle in the United States alone.

Valentine's Day is an easy day to remember, meaning it will be hard for husbands and wives to forget their wedding anniversaries.

Another benefit to getting married on Valentine's Day is the ambiance may already be taken care of by various establishments in the community. Reception halls may be embellished with flowers, balloons and other décor, while businesses may already be displaying hearts in their windows and twinkling pink, red and white lights for Valentine's-focused customers.

Couples who may not know which colors to choose for their wedding parties and table linens can just go with the colors and themes of Valentine's Day if they decide to tie the knot on

**Did you know?**

The timing of when a couple cuts the wedding cake can have a specific meaning. Long ago, the cake was usually cut at the very end of the reception and would signal to the guests that it was the end of the festivities.

Today, cutting the cake is an unspoken signal that represents that the formal wedding is nearing a close, and guests who would like to leave can do so without worry of being rude.

Many couples will cut the cake right after dinner as a courtesy to older guests who may want to get started on their trips home. This affords them the chance to make an earlier exit, rather than staying through the dancing that could extend into the wee hours of the night or missing the cake entirely.

Cutting the cake mid-reception also serves another practical purpose for couples who are paying a photographer by the hour. Photographers typically go home after the cake-cutting, so a mid-reception cutting can save couples a substantial amount of money.

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