

Modern manners

Times change, but wedding etiquette doesn't.



by KIM WADSWORTH | illustration by LAUREN REBBECK

As more couples take ownership of their weddings, they find themselves challenged with which traditions to follow and which to forget. While timeless rituals like exchanging vows and cutting the cake deserve to be included, outmoded rites – the garter toss and the groom's cake, for example – may need tweaking or eliminating all together.

Changing family dynamics, the internet and the couples themselves are putting the rules of wedding etiquette to the test. This rite of passage has shape-shifted considerably, but according to Kelly Coronel, a Williamsburg-based wedding and event planner for more than 20 years, it's all the more reason to be aware of current guidelines.

"It's not that these rules are forgotten, they're just temporarily lost. It's our job as planners to guide (couples) to do the 'right thing' in a gracious way," notes Coronel.

Gracious communication can start with the engagement. Social-media platforms like Facebook and Instagram may be a tempting place to share your exciting news, but it's important that your inner circle – parents, siblings and, where applicable, children from a previous marriage – learn about it first. Partners are still encouraged to ask permission for their beloved's hand in marriage and should initiate a gathering with all parents as close to the engagement as possible.

Once the wedding date and location are established, there is protocol for sharing that information, too. The internet has influenced the wedding paradigm through personalized websites, but couples should still stick to some hard-and-fast rules.

"Your formal invitation should never have your website nor registry printed on it," Coronel says. "You can put it on a separate card that is included with the reply card and envelope. Or it can be on the save-the-date card sent immediately after the date has been determined."

Invitations, whether paper or digital, should follow some standard guidelines when it comes to content: naming the happy couple and who is hosting; the date, time and location of the wedding; and a "request the honor of your presence" line. Let its design, color and font reflect a modern departure. Remember, your audience ranges from grandparents to best friends so make the invitation comprehensible for all ages.

One of Coronel's pet peeves involves the RSVP. It stands for "please reply" in French, and the ac-

companying response card and envelope (complete with stamp) makes it easy for invitees to tell the couple whether they'll be attending. But nearly 40 percent of guests don't RSVP for many weddings, requiring the host or the planner to track them down for an answer. Nothing is more stressful than discovering unaccounted for attendees on your wedding day.

While some may consider it formal and old school, the RSVP is a necessary component to planning a reception dinner.

"When it asks for your name and whether you prefer meat or fish; or are a vegetarian or vegan, know that this is vital information needed to ensure that each guest enjoys a beautiful meal that meets with their dietary considerations," says Coronel.

Speaking of planning, a big etiquette conundrum is whether or not to begin the ceremony at the designated hour even when all the guests have not yet arrived. It's understandable that everyone wants to revel in the couple's moment, but you can't expect friends and family who made the effort to arrive on time, as well as the musicians, officiant and vendors, to wait. Once a bridal party is lined up, ready to go down the aisle, the show must go on.

"You cannot 'jump the party line' to grab a seat," Coronel says. "It's a bride-and-groom's moment, not the tardy guests." The only exception is an unforeseen hold up transporting people from a hotel to a destination.

As new traditions replace old and weddings get more complex, it's easy to feel overwhelmed by the planning process. Incorporate today's technology with support from savvy professionals with grace and confidence and let the tried-and-true mix with a modern approach to create an event that is uniquely yours. ■

Kim Wadsworth has been a source of etiquette protocol for 20 years. She conducts etiquette presentations for corporate and academic events and is a contributor to the Mind Over Manners podcast at WHRV.org/MindOverManners.

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