

the **buzz**



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HERE COMES THE PROJECT MANAGER

WEDDINGS AREN'T ALL that different from any other big project. There's a finite deadline, broad scope, strict budget, extreme stress, high risk potential and nervous stakeholders.

So it only makes sense that more project managers are walking down the aisle, so to speak.

"Project management can definitely strengthen the wedding planning profession," says Heather Fleming, PMP, director of project management at The Knot Inc., a wedding planning conglomerate in New York, New York, USA. "Each wedding can be treated as a project with a schedule, budget, resources and tasks that need to be executed and controlled."

Melissa Wagner-Gens, PMP, considers herself a modern wedding planner with fresh ideas—one of which is using her Project Management Professional (PMP)[®] credential to set her apart from the competition.

“Most brides have no project background and panic at the amount of vendors, decisions and tasks necessary to pull off a wedding,” says Ms. Wagner-Gens, owner and senior coordinator at Emerald Events & Weddings, Allen, Texas, USA. “Although I had been using basic project management skills to plan weddings [before earning my] PMP® credential, I found that I was able to manage a better event post-certification. I enhanced my control of the budget and schedule. I learned to keep a tighter rein on the scope creep, which happens constantly in weddings. And I improved suggestions of backup plans for wedding day emergencies.”

A MARRIAGE OF CONVENIENCE

As with other sectors new to project management, the high-gloss wedding industry may not immediately see the advantages. Yet the same basics apply, Ms. Wagner-Gens says.

“Instead of viewing event planning as mostly style and design with just enough management to get through the day, I approach each event as a ‘project with pizzazz.’ All the style in the world won’t help you as a wedding planner if you don’t have a solid grasp on time, expense and vendor management,” she says. “In placing the project management ideals foremost, you can streamline the entire planning and design process.”

An average wedding, for example, takes more than 100 hours of planning, according to Ms. Wagner-Gens. So as soon as a date is set, planners can tap into their time management skills to ensure everything the couple wants to accomplish is feasible in that timeframe.

“Setting milestones such as booking the reception space, photographer, music and florist will help set goals for the schedule as the plan is executed,” Ms. Fleming says.

As with any other project, not everything always goes according to plan—and wedding planners aren’t always prepared.

“Risk assessment is one area in which most event planners are lacking. They are reactive to

» GREEN IS THE NEW WHITE

White may be the dominant color in most Western weddings, but many bridal parties are adding a shade of green to the mix.

A traditional wedding produces 63 tons of carbon dioxide and 400 to 600 pounds (181 to 272 kilograms) of trash, according to the Green Bride Guide. With approximately 2.4 million weddings in the United States alone each year, that’s a lot of garbage. And it’s a big reason why eco-friendly weddings are becoming all the rage.

There are no hard statistics, but bridal magazines and the veritable industry of green wedding websites and online stores clearly see potential.

Even so, it’s difficult to define what constitutes a green wedding. Project practices range from cutting back on power needs to using locally grown flowers instead of, say, having orchids flown in from overseas and refrigerated overnight.

As with many wedding traditions, interest in environmentally friendly practices varies from country to country. In Estonia, for example, sustainability comes at too steep a price, says Kadri Kalle, project manager at Eesti Maaülikool, a university in Tartu, Estonia.

“In the United States, green weddings are becoming a trend, but in Estonia, weddings in general are so expensive that people cannot afford to take extra things into account,” she says.

emergencies, not proactive. Using critical thinking to assess major and minor impacts and develop contingency plans is an essential project management skill,” Ms. Wagner-Gens says. “Having solutions prepped ahead of time lets the planner move swiftly.”

Take the cake, for example—it could be damaged in transit or never show up. The project manager needs a backup plan, whether it’s bringing along a repair kit or having an alternative bakery on speed dial.

It can also be helpful to implement a post-project review. “While no one can predict every disaster or issue, holding a lessons-learned session after the event with their employees to discuss issues and possible solutions to implement could cut down on the issues these wedding planners are dealing with on a recurring basis,” Ms. Wagner-Gens says.

And the project manager and stakeholders can all live happily ever after. —*Rachel Zupek*