

HOW TO BE A GREAT DJ—LESSON #3—Weddings

So far, we have covered two main topics DJ's must learn if they want to become *GREAT DJ's*: (1) **Know Your Client**, and (2) **Know How to Handle Music**. In this third lesson, we'll give some tips on how to do Great Weddings.

Let's be honest: A DJ could go his (her) whole life without ever doing a wedding—and they tend to take more effort than the average birthday party or car rally. However, there are two reasons why I recommend DJ's get into the wedding business: Weddings reward you (1) Financially, and (2) Emotionally, I might almost say *spiritually*.

THE REWARDS: Weddings reward you financially more than other events because wedding couples budget specific dollars for music at these events much more frequently than for any other type of event—and they are happy to pay top dollar if they get what they want. The emotional reward arises out of the events themselves, the food, the flowers, the unique dress and themes from one wedding to another; wedding couples frequently make a point of complimenting the DJ on what a great job he or she did at the reception, and everyone is happy—it's almost impossible to do a bad wedding even for an average DJ, and a great DJ can make these events just rock!

THE SECRET TO SUCCESS: So, what's the secret about how to do a great wedding?—The greatest difference between a wedding and most other events (at least, when a GREAT DJ is playing for the wedding) is the planning that goes in to the event. For most other events, a brief phone call is usually all the preparation a DJ needs to do in order to make it a great party (obviously, (s)he needs to have experience and skill to observe the audience, select the music, etc., but little advance preparation is needed).

COMMUNICATION SKILLS NEEDED: A wedding, on the other hand, must be *communicated* between the wedding couple and their DJ, and the DJ must know what questions to ask in order to facilitate that communication. Several pieces of information must be learned by the DJ, or (s)he won't rise to the level of "GREAT" DJ: (1) MUSIC TASTES of the bride & groom (and the decision-maker, if not the bride & groom), (2) LOCATION, (3) EMCEE RESPONSIBILITIES, (4) GUESTS, (5) AGENDA, and (6) COLOR AND THEME. Meet at least one 2-hours with the wedding couple to sort out all these items; this meeting should take place where the music library of the DJ is available because, in 9 wedding planning sessions out of 10, the couple will not have planned much of the music, and the ability to hear and choose songs like the bride & groom's special dance, the father-daughter and mother-son dances, cake-cutting and money dance music, etc. will result in a far better selection of music for each individual couple.

MUSIC TASTES: The bride & groom's tastes are critical, as well as their "special" songs. This is the #1 priority, even if the wedding is being planned by a loving and well-meaning sister or parent. Playing Rap music for a retro couple would be calamitous; 70's music for an Alternative Rock couple, unfortunate; Celine Dion and Barbra for Country fans, catastrophic; and Brittany Spears for just about anybody, disastrous (kidding, just kidding). The way to keep from these blunders is called planning and communicating.

LOCATION is important to know, because it impacts the DJ's entire show: His or her dress, manner of speech, selection of music, and the whole "ambience" of the DJ. If the wedding and/or reception is located at a community center, horse ranch, or houseboat, the DJ's dress, speech and mannerisms will be more down-to-earth, straightforward, perhaps warmer and more practical than if at a five-star hotel or country club, where the speech, humor, dress and mannerisms should be more professional, subdued, and elegant.

EMCEE RESPONSIBILITIES must be ascertained well in advance of the reception, especially if the bride & groom intend to lean heavily on the DJ to keep things moving, as well as for great music. If the DJ is going to announce the names of the wedding party, (s)he should be able to pronounce the names, please. . . I once had a groom from Indonesia by the name of Chulavalvong Suralertrungsrei. I have travelled in countries of various languages, and studied 6 of them in college, but yes, I practiced and rehearsed the name 50-100 times so I could say it correctly, even if it was with an American accent. If you announce an artist of a song, also, please pronounce the name correctly, even if it is the wonderful (deceased) Hawaiian singer, Israel Kamakawiwo'ole. Take your cues about humor from the audience: If blue-collar workers are dressed casually, you can be comfortable with some earthy (not explicit!) humor; if the audience is filled with grammas and grandpas dressed in gowns and tuxedos, and if you want to be a *GREAT DJ* for them, tone it down (listen to Dave Letterman for a night or two before the event).

HAPPINESS OF **GUESTS** is also the province and responsibility of the *GREAT DJ*—you don't have to meet with them for two hours before the wedding, but you should listen to them at the event and especially observe them: See what jokes make them smile or laugh, and what music makes them unconsciously bob their heads to the beat while speaking to a friend. One word of caution: It is NOT NOT NOT, I say, NOT your job to kick inebriated guests out of the party—it is not your job to be sergeant at arms, but the *GREAT DJ* knows who to contact if someone needs removing, if the champagne glasses need filling, if the lights need dimming, and where the restrooms are.

THE AGENDA (with a capital "A") is critical if you are to have any semblance of order at some receptions—in short, it keeps you from arriving at the bride & groom farewell before they have tossed the garter and bouquet—very important that they attend to the basics. You are not necessarily being paid for doing secretarial work, but I say "get over it"; neither is anyone else, and if it doesn't get done, the subsequent disorder that will result will not get pinned on the flower caterer or even the photographer. So, please, do a simple agenda—after you get the hang of it, one can be produced in 15-20 minutes, and it will be time well spent. The average DJ will turn up his or her nose at this assignment as Not Being My Job Description, but the *GREAT DJ* realizes that he or she will benefit from a written agenda communicated to the bride & groom before the ceremony begins (or to their second, if someone else is seeing to the program).

COLOR may not be as important as the preceding five items, but I throw it in for good measure, and for consideration by DJ's who consider themselves a cut above the average plebeian DJ's. Consider, if you will, a male DJ, who has a black bow tie and cummerbund, plus a burgundy set, and a royal blue set. He is partial to the royal blue, so he dons the blue, and walks right into a forest green and silver theme, making him look, well, like he dressed for the wedding on the OTHER side of the hotel. For the unusual color, the black & white tuxedo combination is always elegant, never out of style, never out of step, but sometimes a knowledge of color will allow the DJ to "match," and this is something the bride, at least, will notice and appreciate. It is very important for the DJ to know the THEME; otherwise, he shows up to a country-western church hall decorated with hay bales and gun belts dressed in a tuxedo, or like a *salsero*, or like Kamehameha (fine for a Luau theme, but. . .you get the idea).

Alright, you've been waiting for me to say it—you've just been waiting for me to repeat the Boy Scouts' motto: "Be Prepared!" so there, I've said it, and it's a wonderful, simple, genius piece of advice. In dj-ing for a wedding, nothing can take the place of the 2-hour conference and 2 or 3 phone calls to make sure everyone is on the same page. Failing to plan is planning to fail or, at least, planning to be an average DJ, not a *GREAT DJ*. And don't forget: Stay Young, Keep on Dancing.

—*Dave Crosby, Fresno, CA*