

Etiquette

THE FINAL WORD ON STICKY SUBJECTS.

Q We're finally engaged, and we can't wait to celebrate it with friends and family. We want to have an engagement party. But who should throw it? Can we throw it ourselves?

A Traditionally, the bride's parents host a party to announce the couple's engagement to friends and relatives. These days, newly engaged couples are eager to share the news almost immediately via phone, email and/or social media, so the engagement party has evolved into more of a celebration rather than an announcement.

As such, the tradition of who is responsible for hosting has loosened significantly. Family can easily be spread out across the country (and sometimes farther), so it's common for close friends of the couple to host a party or for the couple to host their own. "If no one offers to throw you an engagement party but you're itching to celebrate, consider throwing an informal party or backyard bash," says Kirsten Fischer, owner of Twin Cities-based Fab Event Design. "Have the two sides meet, mingle and get excited for the adventure to come."

Q My fiancé and I created our wedding-day budget, but we didn't even think to include tipping. Now that we're coming up on the big day, we're wondering whom we should tip on the wedding day—and how much?

A Tips show your gratitude for exceptional service, but no one should feel obligated to give one. That said, there are some common practices you can follow when navigating the murky waters of tipping. Typically, you do not need to tip the owner of a company—for example, if the photographer or florist is self-employed. You also want to be mindful of "double-tipping" for services that already include gratuities in their total price, as is usually the case with venues and caterers.

"There are services that do rely more heavily on tips, though, such as your servers and bartenders, drivers, hair and makeup people, DJs and bands," says Nicolle Sellers, owner of Mother of the Bride, an Excelsior-based wedding design and coordinating business. The universal tipping range is 10 to 20 percent, but is completely at the client's discretion. Another option is to give gift cards instead of cash. Sellers recommends financially recognizing anyone who's exceeded your expectations: "When you see that a vendor in any category of your wedding has gone out of their way for you and made your day over-the-top amazing, give them a token of your appreciation."

Q A lot of out-of-town guests will be attending our wedding, and my fiancé and I can't decide where to cut off the guest list for the rehearsal dinner. Who should be invited? And should a formal invitation be sent?

A Certainly, anyone involved in the ceremony should be invited to the rehearsal dinner. This includes the bridal party, parents,

grandparents, ushers, greeters, readers and officiant, plus their significant others. Invitations should be mailed about four weeks before the event and include a cue to guests on how formal the dinner will be.

A recent trend has opened the guest list to more friends and family. While it's common to include out-of-towners and guests staying at a hotel, those numbers can add up quickly—and as Amy Fuerstenberg of Minneapolis-based Mi Mi Design puts it, "the rehearsal dinner then becomes 'the wedding before the wedding.'" It's important for couples and parents to agree on the guest list early on to avoid added stress, especially the night before the big day.

Q I've been to weddings where it seems like the guests aren't even paying attention during the ceremony, speeches or other major moments of the big day. I don't want this to happen at our wedding. How can I encourage guests to refrain from taking photos during the ceremony and posting them on social media?

A "Now that just about everyone owns a smartphone, it's easy for guests to get caught up in photo frenzies," says Rachele Mazumdar, director of weddings and events at Style-Architects in Minneapolis. Cameras (other than those used by your wedding photographer) are usually unwelcome guests at the ceremony, but it seems Facebook and Twitter have become the new wedding crashers. For couples concerned about their vows going viral, Mazumdar suggests a few ways

to curb the enthusiasm, such as citing social media guidelines on the couple's wedding website, making an announcement before the ceremony or posting signs near the entrance.

On the flip side, a growing number of couples are choosing to embrace their snap-happy guests. "Most of my couples encourage Instagram and 'hash tagging' of the event," says Sarah Trotter, owner of Minnetonka-based Lasting Impressions Weddings and Event Coordination, a wedding planner company in the Twin Cities. If couples aren't hip to that idea, she suggests simply adding a note in the program that mentions you're having an "unplugged" ceremony.

Q My friends and family have been so very generous with their time as we've planned and prepared for this wedding. What's the appropriate way to give back to them?

A Whether they helped with setup, cake-cutting, or hair and makeup, friends and family who take the time to help you out on the big day should definitely be recognized. "A heartfelt, hand-written thank-you is always the right idea!" says Fischer. If budget permits, Sellers also suggests a lovely personal gift, but nothing too costly or elaborate. "They are doing it out of the goodness of their heart," she explains. "They are not expecting anything in return, but a little something is nice."

Q What's the rule on favors? Are we obligated to give them, and if so, how much is appropriate to spend on them?

A Giving favors is a lovely gesture, but it's not essential. Joan Nilsen, founder and president of Ambiente Wedding and Event Planning in Minneapolis, advises that if you're including favors just for the sake of giving *something*, remember that you are providing guests with a lovely dinner and save the money you'd otherwise spend on favors. "I've seen many last-minute, inexpensive favors that guests tend to leave [behind]—at the end of evening, there they sit." That's unfortunate, since the favors can cost a couple anywhere from \$1 to \$10 apiece.

The decision should come down to how meaningful the favor is to the couple, says Trotter. "If there is a great idea that ties into the wedding or is special to the couple, then that's the proper opportunity to give a favor."

If you're excited about giving favors but are on a tight budget, Fuerstenberg says edible items are always popular. She also suggests giving one favor per couple versus per guest. In place of take-home gifts, Trotter is also seeing clients going with alternatives such as late-night snacks, dessert tables or photo booths. *



◦ THE GREAT HALL ◦

HISTORIC ELEGANCE • CLASSIC ARCHITECTURE
 CEREMONIES UP TO 300 GUESTS • RECEPTIONS UP TO 400 GUESTS
 PREFERRED CATERING LIST

180 East Fifth Street | St. Paul, Minnesota 55101
 651.291.3579 | thegreathall.net

Ad designed by Bellagala | Photos courtesy of Fishtale Photography