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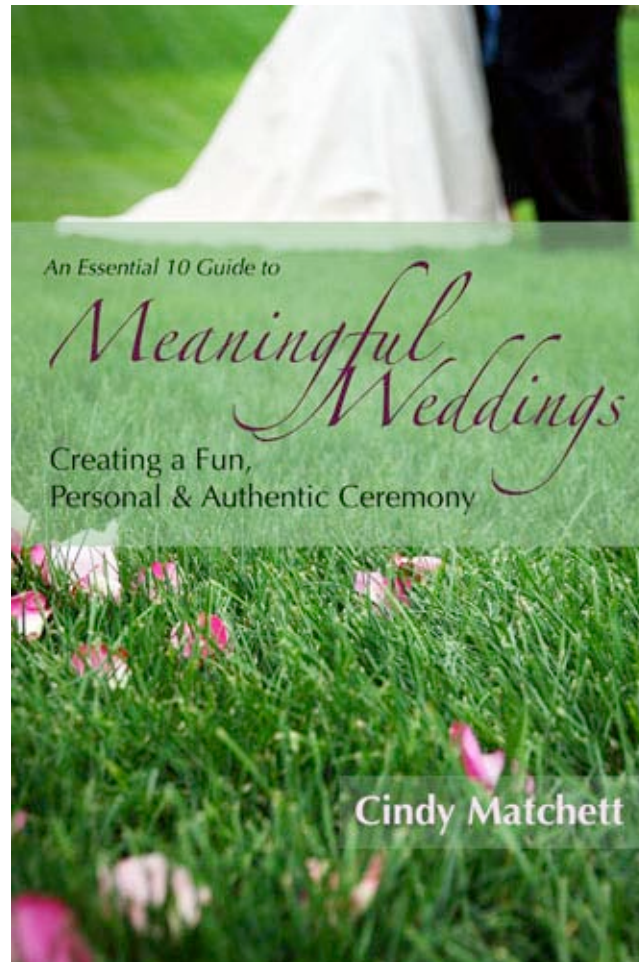
Welcome to Essential 10 Books!

An Essential 10 book is different than any other because it contains only the essentials relevant to a given topic. Our books are written by passionate people who believe that everyone ought to know 10 essential things about their topic. Our books are concise, to the point, and are meant especially for busy people who want to cut right to the chase.

This Essential 10 book, *Meaningful Weddings*, is about creating a personal and meaningful wedding celebration. By the time you finish reading it, you will understand how to bring your own values and beliefs to the heart of your wedding day. The author Cindy Matchett, a ceremony specialist and non-denominational wedding officiant, hopes to offer you a vision of how exciting this can be, and how empowering. To learn more about Cindy, please visit her bio at the end of this book, as well as visiting her website, www.meaningfulweddings.com.

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An Essential 10 Guide to Meaningful Weddings
Creating a Fun, Personal & Authentic Ceremony

Cindy Matchett



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An Essential 10 Guide to Meaningful Weddings

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Introduction

If you are getting married, or know someone who is, this guide will help you make your wedding a memorable and meaningful experience. You will learn how to design a personal and authentic celebration that reflects who you are and what is important to you, while staying connected to those around you.

With today's shifting concepts of spirituality and marriage, the popularity of non-denominational and interfaith officiants, the exciting developments in marriage laws for same-sex couples, and a new focus in wedding media on personalization, the options for planning a wedding can be daunting.

Some wedding guides focus on manners—the etiquette of invitation wording, the proper order of the processional, guidelines for seating charts, and so forth. Etiquette itself is not a bad thing; but when it becomes a set of static and elite rules that alienate people, the standards no longer serve a beneficial social purpose. In reaction to this, other guides tell the bride to “do whatever she wants” and that this is “her day.” Unfortunately, besides completely ignoring the opinions of grooms, this approach encouraged the phenomenon of the “Bridezilla” by creating stressed-out brides who felt they needed to control every last detail—sometimes at the expense of family and guests.

Some couples succumb to overwhelming industry pressure and bury themselves in intricate reception details, or choose a “less is safer” route that seeks to offend no one but may not fulfill their needs or dreams. Or maybe they just don't know *how* to be meaningful, or where to begin.

I encourage you to be yourselves.

You and your partner, together, can create a day that respectfully honors your relationship while thoughtfully including those you love. It is not only possible—I have seen it again and again in my work as a wedding officiant, and it is truly transformative. Your wedding can be a celebration that holds all of you. You can dispense with rules that do not hold meaning for you, and you can be true to yourselves rather than playing characters in a forced performance.

A meaningful wedding is authentic and inclusive and nourishes all those involved. And everyone will love it—most especially you.

When you make the decision to be married at the top of an apple orchard instead of in a church because that was where you had your first date, or to have a trained Celebrant officiate your interfaith ceremony to bring your two worlds together, or serve barbeque, corn bread and cotton candy at your reception because those are your friends' and families' favorite foods, you are acting with great integrity and dignity. You are respecting who *you* are, as individuals and as a couple, and inviting those in your community to do the same.

I encourage you to be courageous. It is a powerful act to create a day that communicates who you really are, and to share yourselves with those you love.

I also encourage you to be gracious.

As you start making your meaningful choices you also want to remember to be extremely good hosts. With some of the traditional structures and rules no longer in place, you will need to go the extra mile to welcome your loved ones, put them at ease, and help them feel included. Make them comfortable, physically and emotionally.

I encourage you to be kind.

Be kind to yourselves and your families. This is a big milestone for everyone, no matter how long you have been together, or whether you own a house or have pets or have made your own personal commitment over and over again in the many ways you are there for each other. Every couple I have married said they felt different afterwards (in a good way!) even when they didn't expect to. Your lives are changing and it brings up a wide range of emotions for everyone. Plan as much as you can, be patient, and take care of yourselves.

And in the end, I encourage you to let go, relax, and enjoy whatever comes.

As you work with this book, I invite you to draw on what makes sense to you. In the planning of a life-changing event, often the questions will be more important than the answers. Traditional ceremonies such as weddings tap deeply into our value systems—the conversations you have about your wedding will reveal what is important to each of you, and help you understand each other better.

I wish you all the best for a fun, happy and *very* meaningful wedding.
Enjoy... and congratulations!

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Boston 2009



Essential 1: Find Meaning From The Inside Out

*"Your vision will become clear only when you look into your heart.
Who looks outside, dreams. Who looks inside, awakens." — C.G. Jung*

I could have titled this chapter “Be careful of wedding guides.” If you are engaged, it is almost certain that someone is going to send you or your fiancée a wedding planner, or you will find your hand inexorably drawn to the glossy wedding magazine at the grocery store, or unwittingly lose hours scrolling through “Real Wedding” blogs.

Don’t get me wrong—I love wedding magazines and websites. I look at them all the time (especially late at night when my family is sleeping, for what I tell myself are professional research purposes). They are exquisite, and they will captivate you with romantic ideas. But you will not find your story out there.

You will find it *in yourselves*.

As you run or jump or tiptoe into the world of creating your own wedding day, you may find lots of voices telling you how things ought to be. There may be times when you feel overwhelmed, or can’t seem to remember who you are—or who your partner is— or why you are doing all this. Don’t worry!

Simply remember this principle that will bring you back to yourselves – always plan and create from the Inside Out. This means: start with you, both of you, and who you two are individually and to each other. Focus on what you enjoy, rather than worrying about what is out *there*, or what *should* be.

Let your choices come from within you.

Each meaningful wedding reflects the two people getting married. Merely importing things from someone else's wedding will not make them meaningful for you. Think about what the significance of your choice is to *you* and your loved ones.

Listen to your instincts; what you think matters.

If you find yourself leaning more toward tradition than you expected, and it makes you happy, go with it. Some people surprise themselves, for example by realizing they are looking forward to that special moment of waiting to see each other for the first time at the ceremony itself. Tradition connects us to others and helps us find our place in the world.

But don't stick with tradition if it is coming from a place of "I should..." or "It's supposed to..." You can do whatever you like as long as it is respectful and makes sense with your values as a couple. You could deliberately create a private moment to first see each other before the ceremony instead, or spend the evening before the ceremony together and get ready that day as a couple.

As you prepare pay attention to your energy around certain tasks. Choose to spend your time doing what you like to do best—if you like to make things, make them. If you don't like to make things, it will not be meaningful for you to tie tulle bows on your programs, or hand cut paper for your invitations—shop for them instead!

When decisions come from you— and your tastes and experiences and quirky personalities— the elements feel truly authentic. Guests feel this honesty, and appreciate it. The best compliments I ever get after a couple's ceremony is when people say, "That was so 'them!'"

You two are the heart and soul of your celebration.





Essential 2: Respect Self, Relationship & Community

Once you start planning, your wedding might begin to feel like it has a life of its own.

The wedding *does* have a life of its own. There is actually a system of three entities moving together in this process to create meaning: You, Your Relationship, and Your Community.

The trick is for you to keep all three “meanings” in balance.

➤ *You: The Self Getting Married*

If you never thought you’d get married, or be allowed to get married, or would get married again, you need some time to think about what this means to you personally now, and what is possible for your wedding. If you have always dreamed of getting married, you have years of fantasies to distill down into one real wedding day, a day that reflects who you have become, and the person you love sharing your life with.

As you think about various aspects of your special wedding celebration, big or small, your own self needs to have a voice large enough so that you can feel comfortable and present. A very shy person might shut down in front of a large crowd; an outdoor person might wilt in a hotel ballroom. On the other hand, some normally quiet people love the validation of a big public to-do, and mostly-indoor people might feel more spiritual close to nature. So...

Who are *you*? What inspires you? What do you enjoy doing?

Do you have any ideas for the wedding day already? What are your priorities?
What tone would you like? What do you definitely *not* want?

What role have your family/friends played in your life? What would it mean to you to have them at your wedding ceremony?

➤ *Your Relationship: Two Parts of One Whole*

Couples create an amazing world between them. You build a shared history, a common understanding, and an inspired vision for the future. Your coupleship has a personality all its own, and this too has an important role in your planning.

How do people “know you” as a couple? How do you want to bring these aspects of your coupleship into your celebration?

What are some of your most favorite things to do together? Are you “sporty,” always involved in games, marathons and hikes? Or are you movie buffs, or “geeks” (I mean this in the best way!), or hikers, or beach people? Are you private, or very social? Are you family-focused, or kid-focused, or pet-focused?

What do you admire about your partner? What has she or he taught you? How has he or she made you better? What does it mean to you, as a couple, to be married?

Your wedding celebration can also be an opportunity to reveal to your community who you are and what matters to you. And this allows them to connect even more deeply with you.

What do you care about that you want your loved ones to understand? What have you two learned about love, about communication, about trust and challenge, about the world and being human? How do you hope to inspire your guests?

Communicating these intimate and fundamental values of your relationship are the most precious and most powerful parts of the wedding. You have found something magical with one another, something unique to the two of you, and it is such a gift for you to share it with the world.

They will remember it forever.

➤ *Your Community: Your Context*

Your community also has gifts to offer you.

What ways can you bring the values, traditions, and shared memories of your extended families, friends and community into your wedding? What new traditions do you want to create together?

When a young interfaith couple is raised up on chairs on the dance floor in the Jewish tradition, they become a part of a long line of couples honored as royalty on their

wedding day. When an intercultural couple re-creates the Russian bread and salt ritual in the U.S. and explains it to their guests, they are honoring history as well as the bride's family. It is wonderful when families reach out to fold one another in, across tradition and time and space, creating bridges of kinship.

There is also an amazing energy that springs to life when any group gathers. You don't know what is going to happen, or what surprises they will bring. In a trusting environment, if you make space for it, the group can touch you as you touch them. They can come on the journey too, and you create a singular experience in time—together.

Perhaps a young child will call out "uh oh!" just as the officiant announces it is time for the vows, creating a knowing ripple of laughter that relaxes you just when you need it. Perhaps a friend will offer some unexpected words of witness and love when she or he stands to do a reading, which moves you to tears. Perhaps the room will give you a standing ovation when you are pronounced 'legally married,' words you never expected to hear in your lifetime.

➤ *All Together Now: Finding Overall Harmony*

So how do you bring these worlds together while still being true to yourselves?

Balance is an ongoing practice! Even being aware of the dynamic puts you way ahead of the game.

Some places to pay attention to as you design a day that includes you *and* your community:

☒ *Too Much Emphasis On "Self"*

A day too focused on an individual can lean towards personal indulgence, a day that feels a bit selfish, a bit "bridezilla" or "groomzilla"—reflecting more of a childhood fantasy than a mutual celebration.

➤ Be careful if you are making whimsical decisions on your own.

☒ *Too Much Emphasis On "Relationship"*

This insular approach can feel exclusive, private, or inaccessible—details based on inside jokes people can't appreciate, or personal preferences for music or food that don't engage others. One person in the relationship could also be compromising his or her own needs for the "good of the couple."

➤ Be careful if you have to explain your choices too much to others, or wish irritably that they would "just go along with it for your sake."

- Be careful if one partner starts making most of the plans on behalf of both of you, or if you are letting things pass without much input or consideration of your own.

✂ *Too Much Emphasis On “Community”*

On the other hand, the coupleship can get lost altogether in the planning, and you can end up doing things mostly “for the guests” (or “for our families”). In this case, you might find yourselves focusing more on the reception than the ceremony, or more on what others think than on what you value.

- Be careful if you are feeling consumed with details that don’t matter to you.





Essential 3: Follow Your Personal Meaning Compass

A meaningful wedding emerges from the values and personalities of the couple it honors, but how do you determine what those are?

Consider it an adventure.

You and your partner get to explore what matters to you most, and who you are together.

You will find your personal meaning in your own shared jokes, in the place you had your first date, and where your first said 'I love you,' and in how you take care of each other. You will know it in memories of weekends away, in visits with each other's families, in the things you decorate your home with.

See if you can incorporate as many aspects of your histories and talents and hobbies as you can into this happy celebration. From music to transportation to readings to clothing, draw on aspects that are important to you, that you love and enjoy. Be creative. Have fun.

This approach will be your True North, the grounding that will guide you as you go, and keep you on the right track.

Ask whenever you can:

- How can we bring who we are to this aspect of our celebration?
- How can we make this ceremony more personal for us?

Allow yourselves to enter fully into the decisions that need to be made, even little ones. Each offers an opportunity for conversation. Laugh a lot, take notes, leave some conversations and come back to them later if you need to, and let the process help you get to know yourselves better.

Questions about flowers on the reception tables, for example, can lead you to explore your feelings about nature and the environment. Research on officiants can begin dialogue about faith and spirituality. Discussing seating charts can provide opportunities to talk about friendships and family dynamics. With your thoughtful answers, you can be creative in exploring solutions that feel right to you and your guests.

As the first step on your adventure, choose or make a small object that will help you remember to think of your own values and personal meaning as you are planning, and keep this object where you will see it regularly.

Use this as your Personal Meaning Compass on your wedding journey.





Essential 4: Focus On The 7 Core Wedding Elements

I know it feels like there is an incredible amount of stuff to consider in planning a wedding, but here's the truth:

There are only 7 core elements you need to get married.

That's it. The rest is all enhancement and style.

Begin by considering each one of these elements with your Personal Meaning Compass in hand. What options feel most true and authentic to you? How can the core of the wedding take its shape from who each of you is at heart, and who you are together?

➤ *Time*

Your ceremony will happen at a specific date and time. What season do you like best? Do you like mornings, or later in the day? What month did you meet? Do you want to be married on your parents' or grandparents' anniversary? Did you imagine a Saturday, or a Friday or a Sunday ceremony? Or maybe a weekday? Do you need to work around special people's unique schedules – children, elders, teachers, travelers?

➤ *Place*

Your ceremony will happen at a specific site. What spaces are special to you? A ski lodge or a farm? A museum or dance center or canoe? Or do you love your town church, or your parents' synagogue? Do you want to travel to a destination, or get married at home? How many guests might you have, and what kind of setting do you picture for them?

➤ *Officiant*

Who would you like to pronounce you married – a family friend, a beloved person of faith, a non-denominational officiant, a poet? Do they have any restrictions?

Will they need to travel? How do you want to work with this person – closely with a lot of involvement, or on your own, with her or him guiding the process for you?

➤ *Spoken Words/Vows*

What do you want to say to each other on this important day? Are there words you have been collecting over the years? Do you want to write them yourself, or speak impromptu from the heart? Will the moment be emotional? Lighthearted? What *do* you want to promise each other? What do you hope for your future together?

➤ *License*

Is your marriage recognized where you live? Do you have a choice about which town you can apply to? Do you need to make a special trip to fill out the application? Does it feel like an errand, or an event of its own? Will you take pictures, or go out for lunch afterwards?

➤ *Married Name*

You will need to decide if you will change your name. What do names mean to you and your families? Will you share a name, or each keep your own? Will you create a new name? What is the legal process for making these changes?

➤ *Witnesses*

Who will be there for you on this big day? Just the Celebrant? A community of friends and family? Who do you think of immediately when you picture people standing with you? Who knows you well? Who do you admire? Will you need special people to sign a ketubah or marriage document for you?

Many couples are surprised when they see how short this list is.

They smile and say that planning a wedding seemed like so much more, and that to their relief, it's not all so overwhelming when you look at it this way.

Hold on to that feeling.





Essential 5: Enrich Your Wedding with Personal Meaning

Start with the Site, the Date, and the Officiant, then work with combinations of the seven Core Elements a while. Note where you can enrich each choice with personal meaning. With these foundations in place, other decisions will begin to emerge.

- ✦ A Quaker wedding for 200 people may determine the time and date of your celebration, based on when the meetinghouse is available. The site will probably guide the service and the vows you say, and will also determine the nearby areas where the reception might be held. All the guests are invited to sign the wedding document as your witnesses.
- ✦ A plan for a Costa Rica destination wedding may determine the number of guests that can be accommodated, and may narrow the ceremony and reception location options available. Standard pre-written ceremonies are included in some travel packages. You would need to factor in additional paperwork and research for the wedding license.
- ✦ A backyard wedding at your parents' house for 70 close friends and family would be best held in warm weather months. You could write your own ceremony with a non-denominational officiant, or in some states, have a friend or family member perform it for you.

Make a list of your initial thoughts and “best wishes,” or start a shared notebook. Keep your notes on top of your growing pile of wedding planning materials and treat yourselves to a romantic dinner now and then to do some focused brainstorming. Post highlights on your fridge.

Once your core planning is in place, you can have fun thinking of even more ways to bring in your personalities and symbols in ways that are important to you both. Some other places to bring personal meaning to your wedding celebration:

- *Family Traditions*
- *Cultural Traditions*
- *Religious Traditions*
- *Readings & Quotes*
- *Music*
- *Wedding Rings*
- *Flowers*
- *Clothing*
- *Veils/Hats/Pins*
- *Transportation*
- *The Night Before The Ceremony*
- *Memories & Photos*

Here, you get to tell your story in so many ways...

- ✘ A groom who plays music for his church choir began his own wedding ceremony by playing his guitar with a friend as guests arrived, as well as for the processional. It kept him relaxed and happy, and everyone loved it! Later in the ceremony, just before the vows, he played a special solo for his soon-to-be wife.
- ✘ A Taiwanese couple incorporated the traditional tea ceremony into their more Western-style public ceremony, and chose lucky red as the color for their unity candles.
- ✘ For a couple who had shared special e.e. cummings poems with one another at an important time in their relationship, reading them aloud again on their wedding day as part of their vows added a personal level of meaning that was very moving.

When beginning this process, simply notice any responses you have to the list above, and see where your own memories take you.

What are some memorable trips, or holiday traditions, or favorite meals? What have others in your family done about wedding clothes or adornment? What are some of your own treasured books, or faded quotes you have taped above your desk? Do you share memories with your partner of a special song or great concert? A flower or gift brought for a magical date? An unforgettable email that changed everything?

Share these stories with your partner, and see what else you come up with together. Ideas spark ideas. Keep your notes around, even if you don't think you will use them. These stories can give you insight about what you don't want as much as what you do want—it's all helpful information!

You can decide at any point how much of the story behind the symbol you want to share.

Maybe you will have a small carnation in a vase on the ceremony table, in memory of your beloved pets, which you look at when you come in but don't need to tell everyone about. But maybe you do ask your officiant to explain to everyone that you had your rings custom-made years ago, as promise rings, and then build a moment into the wedding ceremony for each of you to pause and read the new engravings in them which you have arranged as a surprise for the other.

Meaning can work on many levels.





Essential 6: Be Welcoming

If you are not eloping you will be celebrating this great day with friends and family, and as you consider your guests and the reception some further aspects of your planning become important.

You need to be fantastic hosts.

These funny, loyal, busy, needy, marvelous people love you. They are your friends and family, and it is a gift for them to be there with you. They have brought you to this point and will hopefully continue to support you throughout your life together.

Plan an “emotionally generous” day for your loved ones, to thank them, and to welcome them fully into your union.

Bring your Personal Meaning Compass to this social aspect of planning your event as well. Remember,

- How can we bring who we are to this aspect of our celebration?
- How can we make this ceremony more personal for us?

So, what does community mean to you? How can you bring your warmth and love to your guests on this special day? What do they need to be comfortable, and to feel connected to you and to each other? What do you need from them?

Consider:

➤ *Reception Site*

The reception site can be the same place as the ceremony, or elsewhere; formal or informal; outdoors, indoors, or under a tent. It can be a special place you've spent time together as a couple, or a neat place you've just discovered that reflects your values.

Do you want to decorate the site, or is it beautiful as is? You can introduce a theme that reflects your hobbies or interests, special lighting, unique tables or rentals, handcrafted lanterns, place settings and so forth, or bring personal items from home.

➤ *Food & Music*

Any meal can be a celebration: dinner, picnic or brunch; a wedding cake or wedding pie. What are your favorite foods? What do your guests like to eat? Think about food values you wish share: vegan, organic, vegetarian, local.

Music can play for a cocktail or social hour, for dinner and/or for dancing. You could choose a band you love or know, or a DJ, or make a mix for a family member or friend to play for you, or arrange for a quartet. Keep in mind the tastes of your group!

➤ *Participation*

When people are active participants in an event—in ways they feel comfortable—they are more invested, and therefore feel more connected. Loved ones can help you prepare, can help make things, can give toasts and readings, can sing or perform, can play roles in your ceremony, can greet people, can help you organize, can help you clean up. What feels right to you?

With groups, you also want to consider how they move in and out of places smoothly. For the ceremony, conducting a rehearsal or walk-through is a good idea. Think overall about movements: guests' initial arrival, a ceremony procession and recession, moving from ceremony to reception, a possible first dance and parent dances, endings and departures. Transitions can be coordinated with formal announcements or informal cues. Would you prefer a choreographed or organic flow through your celebration?

➤ *Guest Comfort*

Remember to consider your guests' comfort: shade for summer, water or other refreshments as they arrive, parking, shuttles, maps and signs, a well-considered rain plan, chairs for everyone, restrooms. What makes you feel "at home" somewhere?

If you have family and friends coming from different parts of the world and don't speak the language, plan for people to act as translators, guides, or transportation. Tend especially to these family members at the rehearsal and ceremony; be sure they understand the events and feel included.

Good hospitality involves a lot of communication. In ways that feel true to you, explain as much as you can so people know what to expect: save-the-dates, invitations, websites,

phone calls, emails, programs. If you would suggest warm clothes, or will be providing babysitting, or can recommend a great B&B, let people know.

➤ *Receiving & Giving Gifts*

If friends and relatives want to give you gifts you might create a registry based on merchants who represent your values, or ask for donations to the causes you support. You might also wish to offer gifts yourselves, such as thank you gifts to parents, to attendants or witnesses, perhaps favors to your guests, or donations in their names to an organization that matters to you.

Remember, you can host your community in a meaningful way, at the scale you want, based on what is important to you (with a little necessary give and take, as is part of life!).

- ✂ One couple chose to greet their guests personally as they arrived, outside on the lawn of the park grounds of their Sunday late-afternoon autumn ceremony. Warm cider was being served, and everyone mingled until it was time to move to the great tree where the ceremony would be held. The bride and groom didn't want a formal processional, so they walked in the midst of the group, relaxed and chatting. We all laughed when we began and the bride still had her cider mug in her hand!
- ✂ Another couple provided shuttle buses to their Boston waterfront ceremony from a nearby grand hotel. The brides chose the date, July 3, so guests could enjoy the city's elaborate fireworks the next evening. As the guests arrived at the historical pier building, the two women finished their preparations together upstairs with their close friends and immediate family at their side. One of the brides is a floral designer and she had a wonderful time creating the arrangements for both the ceremony and the reception tables. The couple ended the evening with classic sparklers for all the guests.
- ✂ A large house rented for the weekend was the perfect setting for two grooms and their intimate group of friends and family who all stayed with them. "Teams" cooked meals together, and everyone spent the day before the ceremony setting up the tent. The grooms entered the ceremony from opposite sides of the lawn, each with their parents by their sides. Their closest friends stood in a row behind them at the ceremony and each read a line of the closing blessing. After the ceremony, guests mingled as caterers passed hors d'oeuvres and the band played in the background.
- ✂ A couple who had both been married before created a personal ritual honoring their step-children and newly-formed family at the ceremony, while the officiant read from *Harold and the Purple Crayon*. The mid-day ceremony was held in the same sculpture park where the two had had their first date. That wonderful first date (which turned into an eight hour day!) included a lunch at a local inn where the 20 wedding guests were also invited for lunch after the ceremony. The groom had carved small favor boxes for everyone, out of a wood special to his business.



Essential 7: Be Honest

You are allowed to be whoever you really are on your wedding day.

A few years ago, I met with a young man and woman to begin planning their wedding ceremony, a formal affair with their families and over a hundred guests. The conversation was friendly, but I could tell that they were holding back. Eventually, they confessed that they were, in fact, already married; they had needed to make that decision for military reasons several months before. Their parents had been hurt. They didn't want guests to know. They figured they would have to pretend.

You don't have to pretend, I said. At whatever level you feel comfortable, let's be authentic.

We decided to create a celebration that was more of a renewal of vows than a new beginning. We included a part where they honored their parents and asked for their blessing. We used wording that was honest, yet open to interpretation.

We created what they needed, in a way that was sincere. It felt true.

And then, amazingly, things shifted even more for them. They didn't mind so much if people knew their status. They worded their invitation as a re-commitment, and asked

me to include the story of their simple civil marriage in the ceremony. With their guidance, I spoke of their initial decision, their loyalty to one another over time, and their ongoing journey grounded in the certainty that they had chosen the right partner. Their parents gave their blessings in tears. The couple was beaming the whole day.

The courage to be honest can transform and restore you.

There are appropriate and meaningful ways (public *and* private) to acknowledge what is really happening for you all, both at the event and “off-stage.”

- ✘ If this is a second marriage, you can pay tribute to your perspective on relationships, and your gratitude that you came to find one another at this time in your lives.
- ✘ If you have children, you can talk to them about being included in various ways if they wish. (Bear in mind that they may feel more comfortable taking a back seat. You could do something as a family before or after the wedding instead, for example.)
- ✘ If you are gay and have been together for a long time, the ceremony can affirm all you have shared already, and validate the challenges you have faced over the years as well.
- ✘ If you have struggled with an illness, or a family member has, you can talk about the journey and where you are today, or why a family member can't travel, and ask for good wishes.
- ✘ If a beloved grandparent or parent has died and you wish more than anything that he or she were there, you can honor this privately by wearing or carrying something of theirs, or with a general public mention of loved ones not present, or bring in his or her spirit fully with photographs, mementos and tributes.
- ✘ If you and your partner are from different faiths or cultures, you can create one ceremony that brings together your values and perspectives, or have two ceremonies or officiants in order to honor each.

In a meaningful wedding, this honesty also applies to your own feelings during this engagement time.

A wedding commitment is a leap of faith, and though you know in your heart you truly want to journey with this person, it's still a big thing to do. Small conflicts can sometimes seem like symptoms of something larger. Remember, you are doing something quite intense in planning a wedding celebration (and quite unlike most of the things you will do as a married couple!), with complex logistics and emotions to manage. Ups and downs are very understandable.

So talk about your feelings with each other now and then.

How are things going? What are your best hopes? What's concerning you right now? What does it feel like you two are doing on your big wedding day—beginning a journey? Starting the next chapter? What do you need from each other during this time of change?

Include your explorations and answers in your vows if it feels right. Or choose readings for different parts of the ceremony that reflect your unique philosophy on relationships. Or write each other love letters now, to open on a significant anniversary in the future.

It is all part of your story.





Essential 8: Be Reverent

Your wedding day is a paradox. It is one of the most important days of your life, and yet it is only one moment in all that is going on in the world.

A meaningful wedding affirms both.

To “revere” means to regard with the deepest awe, respect and esteem. This is a momentous day, one that changes your life forever. Let yourself have this time. Go ahead and sink into the role of “groom” or “bride.” Get into it. Have fun.

I recently had the privilege of performing a legal wedding ceremony for two women who had been together for 25 years. Though they usually lived very simply, they splurged on a luxury suite at a downtown Boston hotel for the weekend, filled the room with flowers, and invited five friends to join them there for the intimate ceremony. When I arrived and asked the gentleman at the front desk to call up to their room for me, he broke into a huge grin. Apparently, they had been telling *everyone* that today was their wedding day. The hotel had sent up champagne, and one of their new friends on the staff came to the ceremony. And yet the couple had gifts for all the guests, tended to everyone with genteel hospitality, and thanked us again and again for being there. It was such a perfect mix of triumph and graciousness.

A reverent approach to your wedding sets the tone for everyone.

When you respect the power of the event with thoughtfulness and intent, you two will feel it in your relationship, your families will feel it in your planning, and your guests will feel it in your celebration. It is a unique and magical time that embraces you all as you take that significant step.

And yet, you two are part of a magnificent universe. All around you people are balancing their own joys and their own struggles. Your wedding holds its humble place amidst all this other life energy as well. Be as warm and courteous and grateful as you can.

The more you can open your mind and your heart to others during this intense transition, the more your own heart and mind will be open for your own celebration.

There is a beautiful Buddhist view that marriage is dedicated to the happiness of all living beings, a rich practice-ground for the inner work of understanding ourselves and the outer work of caring for others with compassion. Take your own moments along the way to be thankful for all you have, as well as to help those around you. If your florist mentions in passing that her child is sick, send her a kindly note or a small gift. If your grandfather is having a hard time, visit for the evening after that appointment with your caterer. If a friend has just broken up with someone, reach out and encourage a conversation.

This awareness gives you perspective, and keeps you connected to the wider world. It's an excellent stress-reliever!





Essential 9: Champion Your Vision

It is not always easy to make your own way in the world, especially if it goes against the grain of those close to you. It may take courage, but you will find so many people out there who want to co-create with you, to help you make your vision a beautiful and exciting reality.

The clearer you are about what you are trying to create, the easier it will be to explain to others.

Using the template below as a guide, develop a brief Meaningful Wedding Vision you can express in a few sentences.

- Together, we love: _____
- Our shared wedding priorities are: _____
- We don't want: _____
- The image which guides our planning: _____

These phrases will help you articulate your wishes with confidence.

A Meaningful Wedding Vision might look like this:

- Together, we love: *woods, old houses, books, antiques, simplicity, sincerity*
- Our shared wedding priorities are: *fine food, heartfelt ceremony, live music*
- We don't want: *tight schedules, traditional ceremony, parking stress, a lot of fuss, trite favors*

- The image which guides our planning: *“Casual elegance:” a relaxed yet special day, with an outdoor ceremony and our close community around us, people dressed up, lots of good comfort food and dancing*

Some very common places couples can get a little rattled include:

- *Budgets*

A meaningful wedding can be done on any budget. Once you have your vision, identify your shared top three wedding priorities, and focus your time and money on these. Planning meaningfully will help you be more satisfied with where your resources are allocated. Not that it isn't a challenge to keep within a budget. You'll want to work on balancing all your worlds for this process too.

Our shared *top three* wedding priorities are: _____

- *Timelines*

You will be happiest if you can set limits around your time and schedules. No one can do everything. Couples wear themselves out trying to finish those last favors the day before the wedding, or dropping off table arrangements to the site at midnight after the rehearsal dinner, or printing programs themselves the morning of the ceremony. Choose a day, well before the wedding, to have as much completed as you can. Work towards that goal, and then either delegate, or let it go.

Remember your “Core.” That's what matters.

- *Family Dynamics*

The way your family approaches your wedding is likely going to be the same way they approach most things—only perhaps with more intensity, and a few surprises here and there. Some families jump right in and are supportive 100%, and some find it hard to believe their “babies” are getting married. Your wedding is a momentous day for parents, grandparents and siblings too, and brings out many feelings, memories and expectations.

The biggest gift family could give you is respectful support that honors your values and allows you to create what you need for your rite of passage.

- *Wedding Vendors*

Surround yourself with a great team. This can be a mix of professionals, friends and family, all working to make your day the way you hoped. When hiring vendors like caterers, florists and photographers, some of the most important factors to consider are personality and professional competence.

Trust your instincts. You want to feel really at home with your vendors—that they “get you” and respect your choices, as well as are able to offer suggestions that feel right when you need advice. In initial meetings, assess how they respond to your ideas; they should be open, enthusiastic, and knowledgeable. A sense of humor is great too! Feel free to ask for references and examples.

Your team should be behind you all the way.





Essential 10: It's All Going To Be Ok (or, "There Are No Mistakes")

When I lead a wedding rehearsal for couples and their families, I like to begin with the words our wise officiant shared with us at our own rehearsal. She said there is no such thing as a mistake in a wedding. Her words had a physical impact on me, and I see the same in the couples I share it with now—I felt weak with relief. We all laughed, and I knew it would be ok, whatever happened. And it was. There is a lot of talk about “perfection” around weddings. If we mean perfect in that nothing will go wrong, that is probably not possible. A wedding is a gathering of human beings, and when human beings get together, things are always a bit unexpected.

It doesn't mean that you don't plan. You *do* have to plan. For even the most happy-go-lucky couples, a significant event like this requires deliberate attention, especially if you are hosting others.

But then you let go.

You let go and trust that those around you love you and are trying their best, that everything is just part of the day and the experience and the story—of you.

At our wedding, our brothers forgot the programs and had to run back and get them just before the processional music began. My dad and I missed our cue completely as we were waiting to enter, and our officiant, also our guitarist, had to extend the song as the concerned site manager came out of the garden to find us. The three-year-old ring bearer wouldn't give up “his” pillow, and thunderclouds gathered behind us as we spoke our vows.

But it was perfection.

Perfection in that you all get to spend the day together in a beautiful place, connecting with friends and family, and joyously celebrating the beginning of a marriage, and the incredible hope and renewal which that commitment brings to the whole community.

You too can have a perfectly meaningful wedding.

Cindy Matchett is currently working on a comprehensive Guide To Meaningful Weddings—stay tuned! You can contact Cindy at www.meaningfulweddings.com.

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Resources

Meaningful Weddings

To learn more about bringing personal meaning to your wedding, please see the following.

Websites

- Meaningful Weddings, www.meaningfulweddings.com
- Indie Bride, www.indiebride.com
- So You're EnGAYged, www.soyoureengayged.com
- 14 Stories, www.14stories.com
- Celebrant Foundation, www.celebrantinstitute.com
- 100 Layer Cake, www.100layercake.com
- Style Me Pretty, www.stylemepretty.com

Books

- *Wedding Blessings*, by June Cotner (Broadway Books, 2003)
- *Into The Garden, A Wedding Anthology*, by Robert Haas & Stephen Mitchell (Harper Collins, 1993)
- *The New Wedding*, by Khoren Arisian (Random House, 1974)
- *The Conscious Bride*, by Sheryl Paul (New Harbinger, 2000)
- *100 Hard Questions to Ask Before Saying I Do*, by Susan Piver (Tarcher, 2007)
- *I Do, Questions for the Biggest Day of Your Life*, by Evelyn McFarlane & James Saywell (Villard, 2008)

Other

- Etsy, online community of handcrafted gifts, clothes & accessories, www.etsy.com
- J+K's Wedding Entrance, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4-94JhLEiNO>

About Cindy Matchett Meaningful Weddings

Cindy became a Celebrant to help people honor the milestones in their lives. And she loves every second of it! Since childhood, she has been drawn to finding the meaning in everyday life events. She earned a B.F.A. from the Massachusetts College of Art, in Sculpture, specializing in fibers and textiles, and a B.A. from Smith College, in Psychology, specializing in language development. Her artwork—photography on fabric, weaving and installation—has been shown in galleries across the United States.

However, it was not until she got married and heard about the Celebrant movement that she knew she had found her true calling. In 2005, she became certified as a Celebrant by the Celebrant Foundation & Institute and earned her licensing as a Massachusetts officiant and interfaith minister. She has composed and performed meaningful life ceremonies with hundreds of families from all over the world since then, and is the also Institute's longest serving faculty member. Her specialty is getting to know her clients from the inside out, and guiding them to design a ceremony that expresses their uniqueness.

Above all, her professional focus is on helping people discover and express *meaning*.

From how to survive a wedding to creative suggestions for incorporating cultural traditions into ceremonies, Cindy's sound advice and contagious passion inspires people to reconnect with themselves and their loved ones as they make and renew their most deeply felt commitments.

Visit her website, www.meaningfulweddings.com for more information.

