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Make Proposals Special & Successful

A marriage proposal is a couple's first official step toward the altar. Tradition dictates that men pop the question, with their surprised, and hopefully soon-to-be-fiancées, ultimately deciding if wedding bells will be on the horizon.

Proposing marriage can be nerve-racking. However, if the time seems right and love is in the air, popping the question can be exciting. Regardless of who is proposing marriage, the following strategies can help make proposals memorable and successful.

TURN THE TIDES

An old Irish tradition known as "The Lady's Privilege" was established in the fifth century by a nun named St. Brigid. She decided to create an opportunity for women to propose marriage. This day fell on every leap year, February 29. Centuries later, women can still use this tradition as the impetus to take the marriage reins into their own hands. But women need not wait for the next leap year to propose.

Many women view proposing as an empowering action that is tied to the evolving view of independent women. Couples are negotiating more in the marriage process, and the dissolution of commonly held practices is occurring more often.

CHOOSE A SENTIMENTAL LOCATION

Couples will remember the proposal for the rest of their lives. So choose a proposal location that has sentimental connections. Think about where

the first "I love you" was uttered or where a first date occurred. These can be prime locations to pop the question.

NOTE HER STYLE

Engagement rings play a big role in many couples' proposals. One person's style is not necessarily what his partner will like. Bigger isn't always better. Rather, choose a ring that reflects your partner's preferences and personality. Take your partner jewelry shopping and see which types of jewelry he or she is most drawn to. Certain preferences can serve as a jumping off point for ring designs.

ASK FOR THE FAMILY'S BLESSING

Men no longer need to ask their girlfriends' fathers for "permission" to wed their daughters. However, asking your partner's family for their blessing is a sign of respect and can add a romantic and heartfelt touch to the proposal.

CAPTURE THE MOMENT

Though we live in an age when every moment of people's lives is documented with videos and photographs posted to social media, proposals still stand out as extra special moments. Hire a professional photographer to discreetly capture the proposal and your partner's reaction so it can be cherished for years to come.

A wedding proposal is a special moment in couples' lives together. It can be made even more special by following some guidelines.

Selecting A Comfortable Wedding Gown

Many brides-to-be visit bridal shops with specific goals in mind regarding the style of their wedding gowns. Some women come equipped with magazine tear-outs or pull up ideas on their mobile phones. Others may have an entire scrapbook filled with various ideas they've been compiling for years.

Much consideration is given to wedding gowns. The cost and silhouette of the dress may garner the bulk of that consideration, but brides might want to spend more time considering comfort.

Depending on the time of day their weddings take place, brides can spend 12 hours or more in their wedding gowns on their wedding day. However, when shopping for their gowns, brides may prioritize beauty over comfort, even though it's entirely possible to find a gown that's both stunning and comfortable. When staff and friends or family who have come along to offer advice start to blush over wedding gowns, brides-to-be may feel pressured to downplay any discomfort they feel.

To make sure brides look flawless and elegant but are still comfortable in their wedding gowns, consider the following tips.

- Know what to highlight and what to cover up. No two body types are the same, and many women feel certain parts of their bodies are their best assets while they want to downplay others. Try on gowns that play up your best features. If you have shapely legs, consider a dramatic gown with a slit to show them off. Certain gowns can enhance the décolleté or show off an hourglass shape. Remember, many gowns can be modified so that

you feel secure and confident. Sleeves can be added or fabric placed to cover up any perceived flaws. Confidence and pride are important parts of the comfort factor.

- Get sized correctly. Bridal gown sizes do not coincide with street sizes. Depending on the manufacturer, brides may have to select gowns that are several sizes larger than they would normally wear. This should not be a cause for alarm. Brides should go by their measurements. Attempting to squeeze into a dress that is too small will only lead to discomfort on the wedding day.

- Purchase the right undergarments. Improperly fitting bras, shapewear and other undergarments can lead to discomfort as well. Some seamstresses can sew in supportive cups to remove the need for separate bras. Brides can explore various options to reduce the visibility of certain accoutrements.

- Move around in the gown. Brides should not just stand in front of the mirror and smile when trying on gowns. Put them through their paces. Try sitting, bending and even a little dancing. Make sure the dress is comfortable to move around in.

- Try different options. The gown brides have in mind may not be the one they ultimately go home with. Explore different styles and materials. Choose cooler, breezier fabrics and lightweight gowns, like crêpe, georgette or organza, for summer weddings. Heavier fabrics, such as brocade, may be more comfortable in the winter. Wedding gowns can be both beautiful and comfortable for those who know how to shop.

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Wedding Transportation Tips

Weddings are momentous events for the couple tying the knot as well as all of the friends and family invited to share in the big day. Before couples can tie the knot and cut a rug at their receptions, everyone, couple and guests included, must arrive at the location (or locations if the ceremony site differs from the reception area). Though arranging wedding day transportation can be difficult, there are ways to make the process go more smoothly for guests and bridal party members.

DETERMINE YOUR NEEDS
Before a transportation plan can be made, couples must first map out their needs. Everything should be built around the ceremony. Once the ceremony time has been set, the rest of the day can be arranged around that time. Determine how much time is needed to travel from the ceremony to the reception area. Allocate enough time before the cocktail hour to allow for traffic, photos and any other needs that may take up time. Couples do not want anyone, included themselves, to feel rushed. Once the timing has been orchestrated, couples can figure out exactly which types of transportation will be required.

BOOK PERSONAL TRANSPORTATION FIRST
Happy couples must make their own transporta-

tion their top priority. Arrange for the couples' transportation between five and seven months in advance of the wedding. It could be preferable to book it even further in advance if a couple is getting married around a holiday or during prom season when limousines and party buses are in high demand. Remember, unless the bride-to-be plans to be seen by her groom, couples will need separate transportation to the ceremony site. Factor multiple vehicles into the wedding transportation budget.

HAVE YOUR GETAWAY CAR READY
Couples generally opt to arrive to the wedding and reception in style, but take their own vehicles or cabs home afterward. This requires some advanced planning. Enlist the help of friends to park the return-trip car in a convenient location. Check with the catering hall to see if a vehicle can be left in their lot overnight. Otherwise, arrange to grab a ride home with friends or family.

CONSIDER OTHERS' NEEDS
Have the names and phone numbers of taxi or ridesharing services available for those who may not be able to drive after the party. Elderly or disabled guests might appreciate prearranged transportation as well. Although couples can arrange for transportation as a courtesy to others, they don't need to make arrangements for everyone.



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Reconnect During Wedding Planning

Wedding planning can be intense and often requires dedication and many hours of work. Coordinating a wedding often requires that couples make many different decisions and spend a considerable amount of time in the wedding-planning trenches.

Couples expend so much energy planning their weddings that it can be easy to lose sight of the bigger picture — namely the relationship that is the basis for the marriage in the first place. But as easy as it can be to get lost in wedding planning, couples can use this time together to connect on a deeper level and learn to work cooperatively.

- **Divide and conquer.** Separate wedding planning duties so that both of you feel you are contributing equally and no one person gets overly stressed out. Stress can lead to short tempers and arguments.

- **Establish a mutual budget.** Even the healthiest couple argues over finances from time to time, but budgetary debates should not set a negative tone for wedding planning. Couples should discuss their potential budget before they even

begin to plan their weddings, and both partners should do their best to compromise while also understanding where the other person is coming from.

- **Schedule time for fun.** Do not let wedding planning be all-consuming. Schedule days that allow you to enjoy yourselves together without having to think about or discuss your pending nuptials. This may include date nights that may have fallen by the wayside since getting engaged or periodic day trips to get away from it all. Explore your mutual hobbies or try something new.

- **Learn to laugh at the little things.** Not every detail will go off without a hitch. How you react as a couple may influence how much you enjoy your wedding. Recognize that certain things will not go your way, but that unforeseen circumstances will not ruin your wedding day, no matter how unpleasant they may seem. Laugh at what cannot be changed and recognize that, in the long run, the details you think are major today may actually prove trivial when you look back on your wedding day in the years to come.

Weddings & Nontraditional Families

Families come in all shapes and sizes. During special events, particularly those steeped in tradition, such as weddings, blended families may have to employ certain tactics to ensure the events go off without a hitch.

When planning their weddings, couples must give consideration to the needs of their families. Even though a wedding is about the union of two people, oftentimes couples engaged to be married must contend with the politics of divorce or other familial issues. This includes if and how to incorporate stepparents and stepsiblings into the ceremony and celebration.

There are no traditional rules regarding how to handle blended families, so brides- and grooms-to-be can customize their decisions based on their own unique situations. Even when families have been happy through the years, the unique circumstances and traditions surrounding the nuptials can dredge up former insecurities, and certain aspects may require extra patience and tact. Here's how to navigate the process.

- **Consider stepparents and stepsiblings VIPs.** Brides and grooms who are not particularly close to their stepfamilies still have to recognize the role they play in the family dynamics. These people are still family, so

respect and courtesy should be offered. If there is any lingering animosity, extend the olive branch on this day and try not to let anyone be made to feel as if they are unimportant. A simple announcement of who stepparents are at the wedding reception or inclusion of their names on wedding itineraries can help smooth over any potential bumps.

- **Put others' needs before your own.** While the wedding may be about you and your future spouse, you must consider the feelings of others. Biological parents and stepparents may act defensively if they feel uncomfortable or hurt, and that can create an air of negativity to the day. Try to avoid this by considering potential areas of conflict. For example, mothers might be hurt if their ex-husbands' new girlfriends are asked to be in a group family photo. Instead, select separate times to have everyone included. Remember to give parents and stepparents priority seating

as well, and they each should be seated next to someone they love and someone with whom they can converse comfortably. You may think everyone can play nice, but it's best not to push the issue just to make a point at the wedding.

- **Recognize that some families break the mold.** Recently, a father made waves on the Internet when a video of him pulling the bride's stepfather up to assist in walking her down the aisle went viral. This was a wonderful image of families making it work despite their differences or the awkwardness that can result when brides or grooms have parents and stepparents in attendance. Although this scenario might not play out for all, find ways to impart a special touch, especially if you're close to both your biological parents and your stepparents. For example, your biological father may walk you down the aisle, while your stepfather may enjoy the first dance.

- **Order flowers and gifts for all.** Purchase flowers and wedding party gifts for all of the special people in your lives, including your stepfamily. Weddings can be complicated affairs when factoring in blended families. With patience and compassion, such families can enjoy a beautiful and happy day.



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While weddings are largely about the couple tying the knot, it's important the couples do not overlook the comfort of all of the well-wishers at the ceremony and reception. Every effort should be made to ensure guests are comfortable and feel welcomed at the event.

- Plan for inclement weather. The weather is unpredictable, so establish a backup plan should the weather not cooperate on your big day. Outdoor weddings in warm, sunny locations can get hot quickly, so make sure there is shade available. If there's a chance for rain, have umbrellas or a tent available to keep guests dry.
- Choose a venue that can support your guest list. Guest comfort can be compromised if everyone is packed into a

reception room that is much too small. Everyone should be able to sit and move around freely. This notion also applies to the dance floor. Be certain guests can dance comfortably and have a good time.

- Verify basic needs can be met. When selecting venues or ceremony sites, investigate whether guests will have an easy time getting to and from the room. Are paths easily accessible for those with mobility issues? Are restrooms located close enough to seating areas so elderly guests won't have to walk far to use the bathroom? Put yourself in your guests' shoes and figure out solutions to any potential obstacles that might affect your guests.

• Offer welcome drinks and snacks. A cocktail hour might be on the horizon, but guests may arrive with an appetite. Make a few light refreshments available, such as crackers, chips, pretzels, and some soft drinks. Ice-cold water or lemon-

ade can make an outdoor ceremony more comfortable in the heat. Conversely, hot chocolate or coffee warms up a body in chilly weather.

- Provide a program of events. Clue guests into what will happen and when. This way they can adjust their schedules around the wedding. If photos of the bridal party will take place immediately following the ceremony, mention it on the program. Guests will appreciate knowing what to expect and when to expect it.

- Provide other creature comforts. Stock extra toiletries in the restrooms, and consider making inexpensive sandals available for guests with sore dancing feet.

Weddings may focus on the couple tying the knot, but guests play a key role in the festivities as well. Keeping them happy and comfortable is a benefit to all. Couples can treat wedding guests special by increasing their level of comfort throughout the day.

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