

Don't hear wedding bell money blues

by Jason_Alderman

Many people recall their wedding day as one of their happiest, filled with cherished memories and promises of a bright future. But at an average cost of more than \$27,000, it's not surprising that some weddings start couples off on the wrong financial footing, setting the stage for future money problems.

Don't hear wedding bell money blues Marriage unites two lives, including two separate financial track records. While you each may bring assets and savings to the table, if one or both of you are burdened with student loans, car payments or high credit card balances, that can have a bearing on how you start out life together.

Given that financial problems play a major role in many divorces, doesn't it make sense to start your marriage off on the right foot by communicating openly about finances?

A good place to start is with the wedding itself. Long before making any concrete wedding plans, have a candid discussion with your spouse-to-be about what you can and cannot afford. Economizing doesn't mean doing without a memorable wedding - there are many ways to reign in costs by planning carefully and being flexible.

First, create a budget. Unless you're a professional wedding planner, you probably have no idea how many off-the-wall expenses you'll encounter: invitations and postage, marriage license, clergy and location fees, flowers, bridal gown and groom's tuxedo, rehearsal dinner and reception, photography, catering, limousine, parking attendants, engagement and wedding rings, gifts for wedding participants, honeymoon expenses - and that's the tip of the iceberg.

There are many good wedding budgeting tools available online, including those found at www.weddingdetails.com and www.weddings.about.com/library/blbudgetworksheet.htm.

Ways to trim costs. Will inviting people you barely know make your wedding any more enjoyable or memorable, or would you rather spend more time with the people you love? Does it have to be a Saturday in June, or can you be more flexible on the date? Is an expensive sit-down dinner reception a must?

And don't be afraid to negotiate on prices for photographs, flowers, food and other items. A good wedding planner can more than pay for himself or herself by bargaining on your behalf.

Play it safe. You wouldn't invest \$20,000 in a car and not insure it, so consider wedding insurance that can protect you in cases where severe weather, family illness or other situations force cancellation or postponement. Ask your insurance agent what's available and carefully check policy conditions for payment. And don't forget liability coverage, in case Uncle Albert has one too many glasses of champagne and trips.

Of course, planning your wedding is only one of many financial decisions you and your spouse will make together. The more you know about each other's financial state and philosophy going in, the better your odds for a successful marriage.

Practical Money Skills for Life, a free personal financial management site sponsored by Visa USA, contains a comprehensive guide to many of these considerations, including: what to ask about each other's credit history, divvying up financial chores, necessary legal document changes, budgeting, debt management and much more. Go to www.practicalmoneyskills.com/marriage for details.

A little thoughtful planning can have you singing a happy tune at your celebration instead of "Wedding Bell Blues."

Don't hear wedding bell money blues by Jason_Alderman