

Talking point

THIS ISSUE, WE DON OUR THERAPIST SPECS TO ASK:
HOW DO YOU KEEP YOUR RELATIONSHIP ON TRACK
DURING WEDDING PLANNING?

You're going through this whole crazy process as a show of your commitment to one another, so why are you falling out every five minutes? *Zoë Boothby* plays agony aunt

For better, FOR WORSE?

I'll let you in on a secret: I'm obsessed with star signs. Actually, scratch that – I can hardly claim it's a secret, when the zodiac is the cornerstone of at least four conversations a day for me. Like a lot of people, I got into horoscopes while going through a particularly bad break-up, when I needed to believe there was some greater cosmic power pulling the strings. I'm now fully recovered but I still check my Co-Star app every day – if you know, you know – and regularly blame my problems on Mercury being in retrograde. (What do you expect? I'm a stubborn-ass Leo.)

However, I'm beginning to accept that my reliance on astrology is, actually, nothing short of a crutch. Dating apps can let me filter out certain star signs all I want (Bye-bye, Capricorns!), but maybe it's time to accept the cold, hard truth: relationships require a lot of work, regardless of planetary alignment. And if you're currently in the midst of planning The Greatest Day of Your Life™, this is a pertinent lesson to bear in mind.

"Staying in tune with each other is one of the most testing challenges a couple will face while organising their wedding," says Alison O'Neill, founder of Lanarkshire-based planning service Pebblefish. "We don't all approach decision-making in the same way, and there's often a tendency for one person to assume control and head off at 100mph, while the other half feels left out, left behind or just completely uninvolved."

Despite the fact that, with that little 'yes', you've just made the biggest possible commitment to one another, it isn't time to lift your foot off the pedal. Far from it – no relationship should be taken for granted,

particularly when a wedding is involved.

With that in mind, the solution for stress-free nuptials is simple: plan, plan, plan. "Decide ahead of time who is doing what, and outsource as much as possible to avoid chaos and arguments further down the line," advises dating and relationship coach Kate Mansfield. "Ask your partner which aspects of the day are most important to them, and listen to what they say. Be open to compromise and don't take their views too personally." Happy wife doesn't always mean happy life – it's about the two of you creating something together.

One bride who knows the importance of strategic planning is newlywed Hannah Rosie, who got hitched to hubby Terry at Kirknewton Stables in June last year: "After spending an entire weekend looking for a guestbook (which we only realised afterwards was completely ridiculous!), Terry created a list of every task we had to do, no matter how small, and assigned a time window to each one, agreeing who would do what. He actually made me sign it, and, much to my dismay, his 'wedding contract' really worked!"

LABOUR OF LOVE

Mind the old adage 'prevention is better than cure'? As you advance towards the big day, it's best to anticipate the bumps in the road and come up with a game plan to evade them beforehand. If you're in the early days of post-proposal bliss, you'll likely be feeling sick to your stomach every time you think about having to orchestrate the biggest (and most expensive) event of your life. Our advice? Don't – at least not yet. "Enjoy your engagement for a few weeks," agrees Hannah. "Take some time to live in



Photo: ashley-livjamieson.com
[Above] Hannah and Terry didn't find wedding planning all plain sailing, but they still made it to the finish line of Kirknewton Stables with smiles on their faces

the happy little bubble before you immerse yourself in wedding planning. By all means get the venue and the date sorted, but the details can wait."

That's all well and good, but if the pair of you have decided that this is going to be an extended engagement, you might be struggling to summon up any excitement for a day so far in the future. "If it's going to be a long one, remember there's no need to rush out and book things straight away," says Alison. "Take time to work out your priorities and understand how all of the key elements of your wedding will fit together. That way you can create a plan that allows you to spread out the big decisions so that every month you are focused and, more importantly, relaxed."

Regardless of where you're at, the time is always right to focus on each other and remind yourselves of why you're embarking on this journey together. If that means banning the w-word, then so be it. "Terry and I would set aside weekends or even weeks where we agreed not to talk about anything wedding-related," Hannah shares. "We'd make time for each other outside of planning, and have regular date-nights, which helped to maintain the fun and keep stress at bay."



BRIDAL BULLETIN *talking point*

RELATIVE VALUES

As prepared as you might be, all the to-do lists and spreadsheets in the world won't be enough to keep the inevitable tension at bay. So what common issues should you be looking out for? "Although families can provide fantastic support, they can also at times be a major contributor to 'wedding politics'," warns Alison. "Guest lists and seating plans are always an adventure, unearthing a never-ending supply of problems concerning relatives you barely know but apparently have to invite. Too many couples find themselves navigating family disputes when they should be enjoying the excitement leading up to the big day. Unless an elopement is on the cards, a bit of strategic planning is the answer."

REMEMBER, IT'S JUST ONE DAY. IT SHOULD BE SPECIAL, BUT IS IT REALLY WORTH COSTING YOU THE RELATIONSHIP JUST TO HAVE IT YOUR WAY?

What else can throw you a curveball? "Budgeting," says Alison. "It's never too late to seek advice on the finances. If you sense a problem, step back, re-evaluate and talk it through with each other, or even with a planner – enlisting help from someone who can listen objectively will often prompt you to regroup, reorganise and find the enthusiasm and direction you need to carry on. If you're worried about money, the key is to stop."

For Hannah, one of the things that threatened to cause discord in her relationship with Terry was, surprisingly,

the DIY projects she'd set her heart on. "We made around 90% of our decorations, which was very stressful," she recalls. "I had so many ideas, and I'm a total perfectionist, so it was difficult to bring our vision to life. We solved this by taking it one step at a time and playing to our own individual strengths."

Kate, however, suggests that finding your inner *Blue Peter* presenter could actually bring you and your partner closer. "Making stuff for the wedding and being creative together can really lower the expectations of it having to be faultless – a small job that isn't too taxing can be fun and can connect the two of you." (Although maybe have one you 'made earlier' on hand just in case.)

TOGETHER FOREVER

Should tension get the better of you, try to get some perspective. "Remember, it's just one day," Kate cautions. "It should be special, but is it really worth costing you the relationship just to have it your way? Perhaps it's worth investing in couples' therapy to help you bond fully and iron out any differences before you get married – many problems that build into loaded resentments begin as minor miscommunications. Trust me when I say that this approach has saved people a lot of money in the divorce courts later on!"

And if you find you're personally struggling, don't forget that you've got your best resource standing right by your side – your partner. "I expected to get a lot more stressed, but Terry really balanced me out and kept me unnaturally chilled," Hannah recalls. "For example, four days before the wedding I had a mini beauty-prep nightmare that almost sent me into meltdown. He told me to forget everything and took me out to dinner. After a couple glasses of wine I felt much calmer!"

Besides, at the end of it all, there will be something super-special waiting for you on the other side. "Getting married really solidified our relationship and made us feel like more of a unit," Hannah smiles. "We're stronger than ever, like a little family with our cat, Wolfie."

Well, that's me told – time to stop spending so much time with my head in the stars and instead focus on the person sitting across from me. That being said, I'm still not about to mess with any Capricorns... ♥



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