

SWEET BEGINNINGS

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DERAILING WEDDING DAY DISASTERS

(Vancouver, BC)---When clients hire Sweet Beginnings, they're getting much more than a wedding consultant or event planner. They're getting a tailor, mediator, accountant and endless other personnel roles Sweet Beginnings will fill in handling the responsibilities of a wedding or corporate event.

The sewing kit Sweet Beginnings founder and president Elana Lancit carries with her at all times has saved countless brides and bridesmaids. One bridesmaid fell while dancing on a four-hour wedding cruise and tore her dress from top to bottom. On another occasion, a bride tore her train during the evening's first dance. Lancit quickly solved both potential disasters with her typical aplomb.

"While the bride was having dinner I was on my knees behind her sewing things up," Lancit said. "If I wasn't there, it would have been a nightmare. But solving problems is all part of the excitement. They're all the things you think will never happen, but happen. The more stress, the better it is for me."

Sweet Beginnings sweats the details and handles the stress for its clients. A full-service wedding consulting and event-planning franchise, Sweet Beginnings also offers full décor and chair-cover rental services for events ranging from small gatherings to extravagant galas. Each package is individually tailored to each client's budget, style and needs.

In addition to weddings and corporate events, Sweet Beginnings provides event planning for Christmas parties, grand openings, reunions, fashion shows, school events, birthday and anniversary parties, Bar/Bat Mitzvahs and other events.

Couples, especially, choose a Sweet Beginnings wedding consultant to save both time and money, while allowing them to enjoy their wedding day. Services can range from a one-time consultation to planning of the entire wedding. An affordable, customized package of services is assembled from Sweet Beginnings' fixed price list.

Sweet Beginnings also does decorating and has a full inventory of rental items including chair covers, overlays, linens, columns, trees, candelabras, arches, backdrops, centerpieces and more. Sweet Beginnings can do the work or clients can rent the items and handle set-up themselves.

"We provide more than just consulting," Lancit said. "We're basically three services combined within one company. It's convenient for our clients because they are not dealing with three different vendors."

It's indispensable for Sweet Beginnings' clients to have someone working on their behalf to handle every detail from creating a budget to selecting vendors and managing the contracting process. A Sweet Beginnings franchisee is always there on the wedding day, overseeing everything. Even the smallest details have been identified and resolved.

"You need experience. You need someone who is very detail-oriented," Lancit said. "It's the little things that are involved in a wedding reception, such as whether you want the plates cleared from the table before, during or after the toasts. It's all about timing. Unless you're trained or have experience, these are things people never think about."

Sweet Beginnings offers a complimentary initial consultation. Future brides come to Sweet Beginnings either unaccompanied or oftentimes with their mother, sisters or fiancé. Rarely do they bring friends. Lancit answers with a resounding "Yes!" when asked if Sweet Beginnings consultants often have to mediate differing views on wedding details.

“They know we’re not taking sides,” Lancit said. “We’re not personally involved so we can be honest. Sometimes mothers and daughters have certain ideas and they clash. We balance things out and try to get both sides to compromise.”

Sweet Beginnings has handled weddings as quaint as simply the bride and groom being wed in a park to as opulent and grand as a five-day wedding event for 400 mostly out-of-town guests in Vancouver, B.C., where Sweet Beginnings is headquartered. The estimated \$1 million affair featured a different theme each day leading to the wedding itself and included a boat cruise, horse-drawn carriages and a performance by Indian dancers.

While clients’ tastes might differ widely, Lancit said elegance and formality have remained staples of weddings.

“Weddings remain very formal,” Lancit said. “You see a lot of rich textures when it comes to decorating tables and chairs. Candles are also very popular and I’m seeing more classic dresses. Plus, people try to personalize things when they can.”

If there’s one common mistake Lancit sees among today’s brides, it’s that they try to please everyone when it’s an impossible task. Lancit told the story of one bride who felt obligated to pick up her out-of-town guests at the airport and also entertain them. Lancit’s solution: She told the bride to book a hotel room and stay there by herself.

“She thanked me over and over again,” Lancit said. “She had been worried so much about everything that she was missing out on the whole point of what was happening. She was concerned about everyone else but herself.”

With the average budget for a wedding today estimated to be about \$20,000, it’s too high a price tag for a bride and groom to have to be concerned with keeping tabs on every detail. The average age for a first-time bride and groom is 26 and 28, respectively. Many are dual-income couples who oftentimes have neither the time nor inclination to plan every aspect of their wedding, especially when it can interfere with their enjoyment of the wedding day itself.

“People see the difference when one has a wedding planner onsite and when one doesn’t,” Lancit said. “It’s really about educating people. Couples might tell me their venue has a catering manager. But they’re not your wedding planner. They’ll take care of your food, but they’re not going to tell the bride to touch up her lipstick before a picture is going to be taken. They’re definitely not looking at all the details.”

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