

## *Mike Wabe - Toastmaster*

6 Cunningham Close, THETFORD IP24 2TQ

01842 755131

info@thetfordtoastmaster.org.uk

### **Tricky situations - wedding guests with a history**

When it comes to wedding protocol, two issues that frequently seem to cause problems are the seating plan and receiving line.

There is a traditional way of dealing with both, but if you've got divorced parents who really don't get on or feuding relatives who would rather commit murder with a cake knife than make polite conversation, before you know it, you can find yourself tearing your hair out. And that's not going to look good in the photos. So here's a little practical advice to help you deal with these potentially tricky situations.

#### **Table tantrums**

The traditional top table can be difficult to organise. It's the focus of attention and any difficulties are going to be obvious. The traditional way to seat everyone is down one side of a rectangular table, facing the rest of the room. From the left, the order is as follows: chief bridesmaid, groom's father, bride's mother, groom, bride, bride's father, groom's mother, best man. An alternative to this is to swap the fathers so that the bride's parents sit together and the groom's parents set together.

But what do you do when there are divorced parents? Here are some other variations:

#### **If the bride's parents have divorced and remarried**

From the left: bride's stepfather, chief bridesmaid, groom's father, bride's mother, groom, bride, bride's father, groom's mother, best man, bride's stepmother.

#### **If the groom's parents have divorced and remarried**

From the left: best man, groom's stepmother, groom's father, bride's mother, groom, bride, bride's father, groom's mother, groom's stepfather, chief bridesmaid.

#### **If both sets of parents have divorced and remarried**

From the left: groom's stepmother, bride's stepfather, chief bridesmaid, groom's father, bride's mother, groom, bride, bride's father, groom's mother, best man, bride's stepmother, groom's stepfather.

#### **Roundly does it**

If you want to avoid any awkward hierarchies, particularly if there is any resentment or bitterness lurking between current partners and exes, why not have a round table rather than oblong one? This way, you'll also be able to speak more easily with everyone, rather than having them miles away.

"I went to a friend's wedding where both sets of parents were acrimoniously divorced and all four parents had re-married people each other couldn't stand," remembers a guest.

"The bride and groom wanted everyone there, but no one would accept the various top table plans the couple suggested. In the end, the bride and groom decided to have a big circular table in the centre of the reception, with guests on other circular tables around it. Each couple sat next to each other with a

bridesmaid or best man or bride or groom separating each warring couple. It was unorthodox, but it worked!"

### **Better the devil you know...**

While it's best to avoid seating sworn enemies next to each other, sometimes it's unavoidable. If this happens, warn each person in advance. Susan and Sam had a best man and bridesmaid who couldn't stand each other. The newlyweds spoke to both of them beforehand, and told them that they had to put their (huge) differences aside for just one day. And credit to the both of them, they did.

One of the most important things to remember is that the onus is on others to co-operate and be at least civil to each other. It's not for you to come up with the seating plan from heaven that will magically wipe out all tension. Of course you want people to get on and be happy on your special day, but don't let their issues become yours.

If you're finding it impossible to organise a harmonious top table, do away with tradition and have a romantic top table for two -- the bride and groom!

### **Church dilemmas**

It's traditional for the bride's family and friends to be seated on the left-hand side of the altar, with the groom's bunch on the right. But what if you've got mutual friends? When they are asked by the ushers whether it's the bride or groom that they know, it can be embarrassing for them to choose. So why not let the ushers know what side you want them to sit on in advance? It prevents congestion at the church door and makes everyone's lives a whole lot easier. And if you have a very uneven ratio of guests, just have the ushers fill up the seats equally on each side as guests arrive.

### **Getting in line**

The receiving line can be organised as the guests leave the wedding ceremony or as they arrive at the reception venue, which is the most popular choice. The conventional way of arranging this is to have the bride's mother and father first, then the groom's parents and then the bride and groom. You may like to add the best man and chief bridesmaid on the end too.

The order of the receiving line is based on the notion that the bride's parents pay for the entire wedding - something that is obviously becoming less and less the norm nowadays. There's no reason why you have to stick to the traditional order or even have a receiving line at all, although it does give you the chance to talk to every guest individually and thank them for coming.

Instead of a full line-up, the bride and groom could do the welcoming on their own - it's a lot quicker and avoids any potential family problems completely. Alternatively, if you don't want guests to wait in line, take time to walk around each table during the Wedding Breakfast.

This guide clearly will not solve all potential issues but, hopefully, it has given you a few ideas.

Congratulations on your forthcoming wedding, and have a wonderful day!

*Mike Wabe - Toastmaster*

Member of the Executive Guild of Toastmasters and Town Criers