

Chapter 1

Best Man Basics

In This Chapter

- ▶ Understanding the best man's role in the wedding build-up
- ▶ Knowing what to do on the wedding day
- ▶ Grasping the qualities of a best man

Every member of the wedding party has a precise and well-defined role. The groom's job is to turn up on time and behave like a saint all day. The bride smiles, looks gorgeous, and keeps one eye on the reception. The minister or registrar directs the ceremony. The ushers get everyone seated and organise the car parking. The bridesmaids fuss about the bride's dress. The bride's father worries about how much everything's cost him. And the bride's mother cries like a baby.

Interconnecting these roles in order to keep everyone happy and everything running smoothly is the linchpin of the wedding party. Yes, that's you, the best man. But don't worry: I'm here to help.

I'm the Best Man! What Am I Supposed to Do?

Your role as best man is a multifaceted one. You have to get the groom to the ceremony on time. You have to ensure that the guests are seated correctly and make the journey to the reception. At the reception, your speech is the one that everyone's waiting to hear. And as well as the bride and groom, how you perform on the big day is what everyone remembers after the wedding.

As best man, your *key* roles are these:

- ✓ **Organising the groom's stag do.** You can find plenty more details on how to have fun in Chapters 2 and 3.
- ✓ **Getting the groom to the ceremony.** Read Chapter 5 before kicking him out of bed on the big day.
- ✓ **Witnessing the wedding.** Finest pen and best handwriting at the ready, all is revealed in Chapter 6.
- ✓ **Organising people for the wedding photographs.** Get an idea of who's in the big picture by heading to Chapter 6.
- ✓ **Helping guests to the reception.** Help yourself to help the guests by reading Chapter 7.
- ✓ **Making a speech at the reception.** Find out what to say and what not to say by studying Chapters 8 and 9.

Fret not! You're not expected to do everything. Sure, you've got to plan ahead, be prepared, keep lists, run a tight ship, and think on your feet. But lots of eager people are available to whom you can delegate tasks. The ushers are there to be at your beck and call, and you find that plenty of other guests are willing to lend a hand.



A wedding's like a supertanker. Making a slight alteration in course takes days. As long as you're aware of this and plan everything well in advance, you'll stay clear of the rocks.

Some weddings are well organised and some are chaotic. As best man, you want to pray for the former but accept that you may get the latter. Whatever happens, keep your diary organised. With military planning and teamwork, being the best man can run smoothly. I've included a handy checklist of what to do and when to do it, as shown in Figure 1-1. The Cheat Sheet also has a copy for you to pull out, write on, and pin to your fridge for easy reference.

Best Man's Countdown**12 months to go**

- * the groom appoints you as best man
- * block out the whole week before the wedding in your diary

9 months to go

- * engagement party (see Chapter 1)

5 months to go

- * help the groom choose his ushers (see Chapters 1 and 4)
- * begin organizing the stag do (see Chapter 2)

3 months to go

- * review the wedding plans with the bride and groom (see Chapter 1)
- * accompany the groom to get fitted for your suits (see Chapter 4)
- * start writing your speech (see Chapter 8)

2 months to go

- * finalise the plans for the stag do (see Chapter 2)
- * buy your present for the bride and groom
- * keep practising your speech (see Chapters 8 and 9)

1 month to go

- * the stag do (see Chapter 3)

2 weeks to go

- * make the ushers aware of their duties (see Chapter 4)
- * check the groom has bought the ring
- * finalise your speech (see Chapters 8 and 9)

1 week to go

- * wedding rehearsal (see Chapter 4)
- * finalise the wedding schedule with the groom and print it out (see Chapter 4)
- * hire the wedding suits (see Chapter 5)
- * buy confetti and decorations for the wedding car (see Chapter 6)

1 day to go

- * the last supper (see Chapter 5)
- * charge up your mobile phone
- * stuff your wallet with cash
- * ask the bride and groom for messages from absent friends (see Chapter 8)
- * check the groom has the ring in a safe place (see Chapter 6)

Figure 1-1: The best man's countdown to the wedding day.

The first of the best

Don't panic – best men have been around for centuries. Some historians believe that the role developed during the latter days of the Roman Empire. Back then, when the local village had run out of eligible girls, young Goths (black eyeliner, pointy shoes, and all) were forced to raid neighbouring villages in search of a bride. Not the most romantic way of proposing to your future wife, eh? When the fathers and brothers realised what was going on, they did their utmost to protect the honour of their daughters and sisters, even if it meant a full-on Gothic brawl.

This period is where the best man came in. His job was to help the potential groom wrestle his chosen bride away from the family. He'd then act as henchman right up until the wedding ceremony, when he'd stand guard at the altar just in case the bride's family staged a last-minute rescue attempt.

Fortunately, nowadays, most brides have given their consent. You'd hope that their fathers were in agreement, too. The modern best man's role is now more about organisation and moral support than pure physical force.

Important Advice to Heed

The best man receives advice from all corners, some of which is good, some of which is bad. This book gives you plenty of great advice, but before you go any further, I've pulled together some basic tips to bear in mind right from the start.

Acting as the middle man

Getting married is a stressful business. Second only to moving house (oh . . . and divorce), this occasion puts more pressure on the bride and groom than most of the trials and tribulations they're likely to face during their life together – which is why you need to be tactful at all times.



Think of the bride and groom as two neighbouring countries who've just signed a peace treaty. As the diplomat chosen for the tricky job of liaising between the two, you have to be tactful. Although your loyalty ultimately lies with the groom, you must be able to support both halves of the marital divide.

Start off by reassuring the groom that you are the best, best man he could possibly have chosen. He wants to know that you're definitely not the sort to mess things up. You've taken on a tricky task. First of all, you're expected to host the stag party to end all stag parties (party on down to Chapters 2 and 3 for some help on sorting this). Then a few weeks later, you've got to don a penguin suit (check out Chapter 4 for all your sartorial needs), charm the socks off all the relatives, and regale dozens of guests with a scintillating speech (read more on speeches in Chapters 8 and 9).

You may be shaking like a leaf at the prospect of all of this responsibility. But don't let the groom know. He wants his right-hand man to be as cool as a cucumber.

So does the bride. She wants to pretend that the stag party isn't really going to happen. (So when you do mention the event, play down the rowdy elements.) And on the big day she wants everything to run as smoothly as the silk tie around your neck. Reassure her that this is the case – if you don't, she may tighten that tie rather uncomfortably.



TIP

Arrange a meeting with the bride and groom soon after the engagement. Offer your services in any way you can. You may find that the bride has some very solid ideas about how she wants the ceremony and reception to pan out. Before you get together, read Chapters 4 and 5 to gain a better understanding of what you may be asked to do and what a sample wedding schedule looks like. Your job isn't to stick your oar in at this juncture – what the bride says, goes.

Where you can help is with the inevitable disputes between future husband and wife. Minister or registrar, marriage and reception venues, caterers, florist, parents-in-law, pageboys, photographer, table plans – just some of the areas where the nuptial harmony gets ruffled . . . totally wrecked even. Your job is to reinstate that harmony, even if that means you making suggestions on what colour the napkins should be.



WARNING!

Apart from driving the groom to the wedding venue, and helping the photographer to get people together for the group shots after the ceremony (covered in Chapters 5 and 6), the bride is in charge of virtually every other wedding detail. In meetings with the bride and groom, don't contradict the

former or take sides with the latter. Bride is always right. From little details like ushers' buttonholes, all the way up to the big things like who does the catering.

Keeping in with the in-laws

As far as the bride's parents are concerned, you're a bad influence on their daughter's chosen husband. You're the irresponsible young tyke who takes him out drinking until dawn, gets him into scrapes, and generally keeps him off the straight and narrow.

At the first possible chance, you need to reverse this image that the bride's parents have of you. They're probably both going to be present at the engagement party, but if you don't already know the bride's parents, ask the bride and groom to arrange a meeting beforehand. At the very least, call them on the phone. They want to know that you're responsible and that your side of the wedding duties is in safe hands. Ease their troubled minds, especially the father of the bride. He could well be pumping his life savings into this wedding and he doesn't want you mucking up the seating plan or delivering a crass speech.



Things get complicated when the bride's parents are divorced. All sorts of familial politics come into play and if you're not careful you could ruffle a few feathers. Take your lead from the bride. Dad may well be paying, but Mum wants her say too – even if she and Dad no longer see eye to eye.

Shining at the engagement party

This celebration is your first chance to meet all the key players in the wedding. Use the engagement party as an opportunity to show both families that you really are the man for the job. Introduce yourself to those outside the immediate family. And make a mental note of the dynamics between all the different characters. Are you aware of a potential clash of personalities between the two mothers? Does the bridesmaid drink too much? Is Auntie Ethel really mad, or just eccentric?



Even this early on in the marriage process, people look to you for some sort of guidance. Your job has officially started and you're already somewhat on parade. So turn up on time, dress smartly, and don't, whatever you do, drink the bar dry. If you misbehave at the engagement party, then who knows what you're going to get up to at the reception?

Being the best, best man a man can get

The clue is in your title. *Best* man. Not mediocre man. Not quite good man. But *best* man. That means all the qualities you require must be honed more finely than anyone else's.

Presumably, if you were totally unreliable then the groom wouldn't have appointed you as bestie. Saying that, you can brush up on the qualities you need in a number of ways.

Married or single?

So what happens if the groom doesn't turn up? Are you, as best man, expected to step into his shoes and marry the bride yourself? In centuries past that was the tradition, which was why bestie had to be a bachelor. Fortunately (or unfortunately, depending on how keen you are on the bride) that requirement is no longer applicable. If the groom jilts the bride at the altar, you may well get the blame. But you won't be obliged to take over. (For more advice on dealing with the disaster to end all wedding disasters, flick through, if you dare, to Chapter 6.)

This fact means that your marital status is irrelevant. Intruth, married best men are often more competent than unmarried ones, by dint of the simple fact that they've already been through the whole rigmarole themselves. They know full well what the groom's got in store. But if you're still single, you can be an equally good best man, so you don't need to start dating just for the job.

Being responsible and and tactful

Even during the wildest moments of the stag party you should have a little voice at the back of your mind reminding you that the buck stops firmly with you. The groom is expected to act like a fool during his stag celebrations and then wander down the aisle in a blissful daze, before trotting out a 3-minute speech, but you my friend have a lot more on your plate. You have to be responsible – yes, even at three o'clock in the morning in a nightclub. You have to be tactful – especially when the content of your speech is concerned. And you have to maintain this responsibility and tact even if things start to go awry.

Talking and listening

The best man's role starts off very much as a listening one. Listen to the bride as she frets about the table seating plan. Listen to the groom as he cries on your shoulder just days before the wedding. Listen to the registrar as he fumbles his lines at the wedding rehearsal.

Then, very quickly your job turns into a talking role: talking loudly into the groom's ear when he oversleeps on the big day; barking instructions at the ushers; herding the guests from the ceremony to the reception; and then, delivering a rousing speech.



Communication may come naturally to you. If you're not a natural, then developing this skill is something you must work on, especially when it comes to the speech. No one's expecting a Churchillian oration or a West End-quality stand-up comedy show. Yes, your audience wants to have a laugh and be aroused emotionally. But at the same time, they all know that you're the groom's mate – not a professional speaker. With a bit of practice, most people can get by. Chapters 8 and 9 give some hints and tips on dealing with this big occasion. You may also like to seek out Kate Burton and Brinley Platts's *Building Confidence For Dummies* and Romilla Ready and Kate Burton's *Neuro-linguistic Programming For Dummies* (both published by Wiley).

Being presentable and punctual

You can't avoid the fact. You're going to have to wear a suit. You also have to wash, shave, and get your hair cut. Under the spotlight at the ceremony and the reception, you're expected

to look your best. So make an effort. And err on the safe side: A mullet haircut and an earring may look great at your local pub, but 20 years down the line those wedding photos will come back to haunt you.



Make sure that you get the groom to the ceremony on time (Chapter 5 points you in the right direction). Timekeeping is your responsibility. At the engagement party, at the stag party, and on the big day, punctuality is crucial. Your groom has got enough on his mind, what with the emotional stress of getting hitched, so make sure that he's on time.

