

Your Wedding, His Wedding

Overheard at the Seattle Wedding Show...

One groom to another: "This place is wall to wall flowers, and she says she can't find what she wants! What is she looking for? To me, they're just flowers. To her, they mean something—what, I have no idea."

Are there times when your fiancé sounds like this gentleman? Times when he can't quite seem to get with the program? Times when he just doesn't understand how important it is to have everything just right? At these times, do you feel like he doesn't really care?

If you feel this way, you are not alone. To us, the wedding is a symbol of our love and our future. Of course, we want everything about it to be beautiful and special. We also want our fiancés to feel the same way. But the reality is that very often they don't. Men and women are different. If you are upset with your fiancé because he doesn't care enough about the wedding details, it's time to take a step back and ask yourself what his attitude means to you.

The groom at the Wedding Show put his finger on a very important fact--weddings mean something different to men than they do to us. For many men, the wedding and the marriage are two completely different realities. Your fiancé may like the idea of a party. He wants his friends to be there for him and wish him well. He wants to celebrate your marriage. But his enthusiasm for marriage may or may not translate into a passion for wedding logistics. He may not see the need for symbolism in all the details the way you do. He probably doesn't feel like his taste and skills as a host are on display in the same way you do. And frankly, he just doesn't know what all this stuff is for, the way you do.

If your fiancé has a deep interest in evening gowns and decorating, that's great and you can have a ball together coming up with your color scheme. But if he wasn't interested in these things before you got engaged, why would he be interested in them now? Do you really think this means he doesn't care about you? When you buy a house, you may or may not suddenly develop a fascination for home repairs. Does this have anything to do with how much you love your husband?

In a sense, you are lucky if this conflict has come up. Why? Because dealing with each other's differences is one of the big challenges of marriage. You will be facing it in different forms again and again. Learning to handle your differences well is essential for a happy marriage. If you start now, you'll find it much easier later on when you have to make decisions about work, money, and children.

Here's a crash course in marital differences. Very often, the qualities that attract you to your partner are the very ones that later start to drive you crazy. We are often attracted to people with qualities we don't have, so that we can have more balance in our lives.

For example, take the classic emotional differences between men and women. Women tend to have wider mood swings. They can learn from men to take things more in stride and not suffer so much from their down moods. Men, on the other hand, can learn to enjoy a richer emotional experience by being with women. Men can learn that sometimes you need to talk about your feelings. Women can learn that you don't always have to talk about your feelings. Sometimes a movie or a game of tennis is a better idea.

Sounds great, doesn't it? It is—until for a variety of reasons we start to want the other person to be more like us. Instead of appreciating the other person for their differences, we start to criticize them and try to change them. A wedding is often one of those times. You will have a much

happier wedding, not to mention marriage, if you stop wanting to change your fiancé start focusing on how his perspective enriches your life.

Here are some ideas to try:

1. Sit down with your fiancé and ask him how he views your wedding. What is important to him? What is he enjoying? What is a burden for him? If he could have the wedding exactly as he wanted it, what would it look like?

When he talks, don't interrupt him or disagree with him, even if he pushes some hot buttons for you. Your job is just to listen and understand his perspective. You may be surprised at how much he appreciates this and how much you learn.

Then switch places and tell him your perspective. If you have been feeling distant from him because of your disagreements, this exercise will likely bring you closer.

2. In the exercise above, your fiancé may have said some things that bother you or hurt your feelings. To begin with, don't look at this as a problem to solve as much as an issue to explore. Try this technique from cognitive psychology to learn more about your own feelings.

Write what bothers you. Then ask yourself these questions:

- What's the evidence for this?
- Is there any other way to look at this?
- Am I taking something personally that really is not personal to me?

3. Choose one or two things that you would like him to be involved in that are really important to you. Tell him how you feel about them. Offer him some specific ways to help and leave it up to him to choose between them.

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