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Expert advice to avoid wedding disasters

By JENNY ZHANG
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Cake, flowers, band, catering, guests — you can check and double-check them, color-code the reception seating chart and micromanage the musicians. But something can still go wrong on the wedding day: A button pops off the back of the satin designer gown; the officiant gets stuck in afternoon traffic; or the table linens catch fire from the candles. From the minor to the disastrous, things that can go wrong on the big day can overwhelm even the most prepared bride.

Luckily, there is help. Four wedding experts from metro Atlanta share their stories of wedding day (near) catastrophies and offer advice on how to keep your day picture-perfect.

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ELAINE SLAUGHTER RAKOCZY, catering and special events manager, Glorious Events

Short on time: The hotel booked two weddings back-to-back for its outdoor courtyard, and the bride found out two days before the wedding that hers was the second one. The first ceremony was to end just half an hour before guests arrived for her ceremony. The florist, in particular, was in trouble, since the bride had a major floral budget; even with additional labor, she needed at least an hour to set up the décor — not 30 minutes.

Resolution: Cocktails, anyone? Rakoczy pulled together a mini-cocktail reception inside the hotel before the ceremony so the florist could have a full hour to set up. Because she had been notified of the scheduling crisis 48 hours earlier, Rakoczy worked with the catering company and came up with passed hors-d'oeuvres to treat arriving guests. "We posted signs in the parking lot and had the hotel attendant direct guests inside to the hors-d'oeuvres. It went off without a hitch. The [ceremony site] looked beautiful, and the guests never knew what happened," Rakoczy said.

[\(ENLARGE\)](#)
Elaine Rakoczy



Advice: "It's important to work the best you can with the given circumstances. Know there's always a solution," Rakoczy said. "It's also important to work with good people — whether florists, bakers, caterers or wedding planners, who can be flexible in responding to your needs regardless of what happens, she added.

SUSAN GRAHAM, owner, Bella Sera Weddings and Special Events

Car trouble: The bride's family had contracted with a shuttle company to drive 100 guests from a downtown hotel to the ceremony site. However, the prearranged pickup time came and went, and there was no sign of the shuttle.

Resolution: Graham immediately began calling the shuttle company, but there was no response. She switched gears and called the valet service at the hotel, spoke to the person in charge and asked them to call every cab they could to shuttle the guests. "It all happened on the fly and we had to pay the cabs in cash, but we started the ceremony within five minutes of the original start time," Graham said.

Lesson: "Always hire a professional, reputable, experienced company. It's critical to work with a company that's actively interested in making sure it has all the up-to-date information and that will give you the drivers' names and cellphone numbers so you can contact them directly. For a no-show vendor, she recommends: "Act quickly, be in touch with someone at the pickup site and event site, and don't let the bride know; it's important to shield her and the family from this kind of stress. Also, arrange for guests to be at a hotel [with a high level of service] so you can call the valet to pull something together for you quickly."

[\(ENLARGE\)](#)
Susan Graham

RHONDA EGGERT, owner, My Wedding Planner

The way the cake crumbles: A few minutes before the wedding, a waiter walked into the reception site with a large tray and bumped into the table where the cake was sitting. The four-layered cake toppled over, and one of the layers was completely cracked and crumbled.

Resolution: "We put it back together as much as we could. We took it to the caterers and the chef used pieces from the destroyed layer to reconstruct the cake. We smoothed it over, decorated it with additional flowers, and cleaned the linens underneath. Most people didn't even realize it was ruined, and they thought it was just a three-layered cake," Eggert said. If there's time, however, it may be possible to call the bakery and have someone come in and fix the cake, she added.

Advice: "Be aware of the surroundings and put the cake in a place where there's not a lot of traffic. Or you can roll out the cake later; you don't want to leave it exposed to the crowd, so get it in a safe place. Designate someone who is not a member of the wedding party as a go-to person for anything that goes wrong. Have them be on the lookout for you and check and watch things. They don't necessarily have to watch the cake, but they can watch the reception, keep track of the guests, etc.," Eggert said.



NICOLE FANTZ, owner, Peachtree Weddings and Events

Pesky guests: It was an outdoor wedding in October, unseasonably warm with clouds that were threatening rain, but the weather held and the ceremony went smoothly ... until the mosquitoes showed up. Worse, the bride was allergic to insect bites, and large, red welts began to form on her back.

Resolution: Fantz had come prepared with a comprehensive wedding-day emergency kit, so when a groomsman told her about

[\(ENLARGE\)](#)
Rhonda Eggert



the situation, she was ready. "I ran out with my can of Off and sprayed the bride with mosquito repellent. Having big red welts all over her was not something she wanted for her wedding pictures. The bug spray prevented future welts," Fantz said.

Advice: Fantz recommends hiring a wedding coordinator with a complete emergency kit (bug spray, first aid, small toys for unruly children, pins and needles for mending tears or sewing buttons). "There's just so much that goes into the day of a wedding— no bride could possibly be responsible for everything, and with a coordinator, she doesn't have to be worried about the details or logistics," Fantz said. For allergies, Fantz advises, "Come prepared with an EpiPen (emergency treatment for allergies) or make sure a trusted friend or family member, if not a coordinator, has one on hand."

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Special

Nicole Fantz

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