

BRIDE'S GUIDE

May 1, 2008

Balance of Power

You've compromised on the reception location, the color scheme and the band, but you just can't agree on how many attendants to have at their wedding. Here's how to play the numbers game if this happens to you

By Anna Sachse
CTW Features

She wants her best girlfriends from elementary school, high school, college and her first job, as well as her sister. He just wants his two brothers. Neither the bride nor the groom will budge on the number of maids and men who will share their one-and-only walk down the aisle. Both bride and groom have important, personal reasons for whom they want standing by their side as they make their vows, but someone's simply got to give, right?



"It will probably help couples quite a bit to know that the number of attendants doesn't have to match," says Anna Post, producer of the Emily Post Institute's podcast series and author of "Emily Post's Wedding Parties" (Collins, 2007). "According to proper etiquette, it doesn't matter at all. If the difference in numbers is small, the last groomsmen can walk with two ladies – what guy wouldn't want to walk down the aisle with two lovely ladies on his arm? And vice versa if there are more groomsmen."

Another good option is having the groomsmen stay at the front by the altar while the bridesmaids walk by themselves, adds Brooke Sheldon, a wedding planner for Lilybrooke Events, which has offices in Chicago, Grand Haven, Mich., and Kennebunkport, Maine, or the groomsmen can take turns walking midway down from the altar and meeting the bridesmaids midway up.

"It's fine to have different numbers," says Sheldon. "I wouldn't suggest going too many additional on one side, but a few won't hurt."

Although it is technically acceptable to have a larger difference in the number of attendants, such as 10 bridesmaids and two groomsmen, Post also cautions against it.

"The problem is that instead of focusing on the ceremony, your guests' attention will shift to

wondering why there is such a big disparity,” says Post. “A difference of one to three usually works out, but four and over can get distracting.”

For the same reason, Post also thinks it best to avoid sending two women or two men down the aisle together; it’s definitely not wrong, but, again, your guests’ focus could shift due to the unusual nature of the procession.

However, if you are willing to trade a fraction of the spotlight for the opportunity to stand with the people most important to you, it is not that uncommon anymore to mix up the genders of who stands at the altar with you. If a bride wants close, male friends or family on her side or a groom wants close, female friends or family on his side, these people are usually referred to as honor attendants. The men on the bride’s side might wear lighter suits while women on the groom’s side might wear knee-length black dresses.

Alternatively, these special people can take another role or stand with your fiancé.

“I find many people stick to tradition when it comes to weddings,” says Sheldon, “so if a bride has a male friend who she truly wants in the wedding, I often see her either giving him a different role, such as an usher, or having them stand on the groom’s side. If the bride has a brother, it is very common for the brother to stand with the groomsmen.”

Post agrees that it’s a nice idea to invite your future spouse’s siblings to be in the wedding party. “It’s a wonderful way to build relationships,” she says. “And hopefully they will be part of your life for a very long time.”

But family and friends alike, there is always a role for everyone, says Sheldon. If there are lots of special people in your life, but you want to keep your attendants numbers even, you can simply have more greeters, ushers, readers during the ceremony, people holding the chuppah, candle lighters, etc.

And, adds Post, when trying to keep your numbers down, keep in mind that selecting attendants is not a matter of quid pro quo – just because someone asked you to be in their wedding, doesn’t mean you have to ask them.

Both bride and groom can make a personal decision about how many people they want by their side on their wedding day, which frees them up to argue about other things, like the flavor of the cake.