



QUALTRAIN AUSTRALIA

Ongoing Professional Development

qualtrain.com.au

support@qualtrain.com.au

1300 185 349

Registered Training Organisation Provider Number 51465

Resources for registered marriage celebrants:

- Guidelines on the Marriage Act 1961 Version 4 July 2018
 - The Guidelines provide essential information on the solemnisation of marriage in Australia – the most accurate information and guidance available.
- Marriage Act 1961
- Marriage Regulations 2017
- Information and resources for celebrants available on the Attorney-General's website:
<https://www.ag.gov.au/families-and-marriage/marriage/resources-marriage-celebrants>

QualTrain encourages registered marriage celebrants to regularly review the Guidelines and the resources on the Attorney-General's website.

QualTrain recommends membership to a celebrant association/network. A list of associations can be found on the Attorney-General's website: <https://www.ag.gov.au/families-and-marriage/marriage/resources-marriage-celebrants/networks-associations-celebrants>

Information in this OPD workbook has been reviewed and approved by MLCS. The information is updated regularly and is correct at the time of printing. Where case studies appear in workbooks, they are examples only and any comparison made with other persons either living or deceased is purely coincidental.

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P O Box 279, Maylands, WA 6931.

QualTrain Campus Office is situated at 193 Guildford Road, Maylands, WA 6051.

Telephone: 1300 185 349 Email: support@qualtrain.com.au

*Thank you for choosing QualTrain
We hope you enjoy your OPD activities*

21QT042 Develop the celebrant's customer journey map 2 hours

At the end of this activity participants will have learned skills and knowledge required to develop, implement and improve their customer journey map.

What is a customer journey map?

Customer journey maps are a visual representation of your customer's journey with your business. They can be used as a reference point for yourself when you are making business decisions. All decisions must keep the customer journey in mind because the customer journey directly relates to customer experience.

A customer journey map creates a logically ordered sequence of events for your customers to interact with your business.

Each touchpoint is a potential "customer moment of truth": a key moment in the customer journey where the brand has the opportunity to make a positive impression. A customer journey map is a powerful tool for helping you evaluate the quality of the experience the customer receives at each touchpoint. To ensure that no interaction or potential customer slips through the net, it is important for every touchpoint and interaction to be mapped.

The benefits of Customer Journey Mapping:

- It helps you create a more **efficient** customer journey. *Do you spend more time with clients than you have to?*
- It helps create a more **effective** customer journey. The route your customers take has to make sense to them. We all navigate sites differently or respond better to some things than others, and that's fine. The key is to create an experience that is overall effective and captures most of the wants and needs of your customer base.
- It helps you **understand your customers better**. To implement an effective customer journey, you need to understand your customers. This means you understand how they behave, what they want, and more importantly, what they don't want. This is an important part of running a successful business, but it's often missed by business owners who are too eager to create the perfect journey for them (rather than the customer).
- It helps you create better **goals**. By taking a more scientific approach to your customer journey, you're brought closer to the real things that make your

business work. You can make changes and assess their benefit in real-time. This can then drive your decisions and goals going forward.

- It helps you identify customer **pain points**. Customer pain points can cost your business. Before setting out on your customer mapping exercise, you might not realize just how many pain points there are for your customers, or how severe they are.
- It helps you **innovate**. Innovation doesn't happen by accident, and successful innovations certainly don't happen by accident.

Let's break the celebrant's customer journey map into 4 main areas:



1. AWARENESS & CONSIDERATION

The initial stage where a couple finds you and decides to book your services.

2. PURCHASE

The process of booking your services.

3. EXPERIENCE & ENGAGEMENT

The journey from once they have booked to when the wedding has been completed.

4. ADVOCACY

How you can continue that relationship after the wedding.

ACTIVITY

Background Analysis

Self reflection: In one or two sentences, regarding the journey that clients take with you, write a snapshot of where you are right now, where you have been and where you want to go.

1. AWARENESS & CONSIDERATION

This is the first step on the journey where the customer needs to find your services and consider you as their celebrant. There will be a number of factors that determine whether they choose to book your services or not.

Consider the following customer journey map. Where do you think your strengths and weaknesses are leading to the 'buy' phase?

CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:

SEARCH

How do clients find you? Online, referrals, advertising, social media, print, directories?

BRANDING

When they do find you, do you have a strong, striking and clear brand? Are you consistent across all channels? Your website, social media, directories, business cards?

REVIEWS

Do you have good reviews? Is it easy for them to find your reviews? Could you navigate customers to your reviews more easily?

MARKETING

- What marketing do you have in place to persuade them to book you? Content marketing? Social media posts?
- What info is available on your website? What info do you email them?
- Are you upfront with your costs and services?
- Are customers replying to your emails? If not, what could the reasons be?
- Are you receiving referrals? If not, what can you do to change that?
- Do you respond to inquiries in a timely manner?

TARGET




Do you target a specific audience? Do you make them feel like you are the right fit for them?

Is your location convenient?

The Celebrant Market

Before we continue looking further at the customer journey, let’s examine the celebrant market and your customer market. Understanding these markets will allow you to maximise the experience you give a customer when they are considering your services as their celebrant.



	Past experience	Awareness	Purchase	After purchase
THINK 	What is this product?	What makes this product different?	Is it worth my money?	Will I buy it again?
FEEL 	Curious	Intrigued	Excited	Excited
DO 	Look	Research	Buy	Excited

The **ABS** (2017) report on marriages in Australia
– <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/>

Number of marriages in 2017 were 112,954 of which 78.0 per cent were conducted by civil celebrants = 88104 marriages.

As there were 8486 celebrants in 2017, this means an average of 10.4 weddings per independent civil marriage celebrant per annum compared with 35 in 1999, and 64 in 1995.

Question 'are you happy with **your market share** of weddings?' Are you 'very satisfied' / 'fairly satisfied' / 'not satisfied' / 'seriously want more'.

Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Not satisfied	Seriously want more

Improving your customer experience will lead to greater recommendations and referrals which will result in more business!

Market Research

Market research is the process used to identify clients, determine their needs and expectations and identify existing and potential clients. Knowing your target marketing is crucial so you can create a customer journey map that's right for them.

Celebrants may find it helpful to evaluate their client base

The process of creating either a client profile or client persona will help you to clearly define your client's needs by understanding their motivations for requiring your services. Your clients should be the driver behind every marketing decision in your business. Consider the following points.

Who are your target clients and how do they behave?

- What are the specific demographics of your ideal client? (such as age, social status, education and gender)
- What are your clients' lifestyles, activities, values, needs, interests or opinions?
- Where are they located? What type of environment do they live in?
- What are the key phrases or quotes that they would use to describe their needs (that your celebrant service will remedy)?
- When are they likely to make a purchase? Is the service you provide associated with seasons or emotions – examples: Valentine's Day, Christmas, Mother's Day? How? Why? Statistics show that a lot of proposals happen around Christmas, the New Year and Valentine's Day.

Your Target Market

- **Self reflection:** In one or two sentences, summarise the key features for your target market. This may include the size and growth potential of your market, as well as key demographics such as age, gender, location income level etc.

Business Location

In regard to the **location of your celebrant business** – whether that’s a home office, leased office or local café... How convenient is it for your clients?

Consider the following:

- Easy to find – well sign-posted?
- Is it inviting? Comfortable?
- Good parking facilities or located near public transport?
- Centrally located?
- Workplace health and safety has been considered and hazards reduced for visitors? Well-lit / no potential trips or falls / pets out of the way / what else?
- Are there complementary businesses located nearby?
- If online – do you chat via a professional channel? Good connection?

2. THE PURCHASE

So the couple have gone through the first stage of a customer journey map and they want to book you. Congratulations! Then the next part of the journey begins.

Think about the next stage and the experience that the customer gets? Do you make it easy for them to book you? Do you send them a booking form? Agreement? Invoice? Is it easy for them to read and sign the agreement and pay your booking fee? Remember that the couple might be booking in multiple vendors at the same time so the more simple, easy and user-friendly you can make the booking experience, you will become a stand-out vendor.

Do you offer the couple different ways in which they can pay your booking fee? There a number of applications out there that provide small businesses with the opportunity to accept credit card payments.

Both Square and Paypal offer affordable and portable solutions.

- **Square** lets you accept tap-and-go cards, mobile wallets and chip cards, whether you're on the move or at your counter.
<https://squareup.com/au/en/hardware/reader>
- **Paypal** – customers purchase your service (or product) – Paypal processes the payment with financial details protected – your business receives the money.
<https://www.paypal.com/au/business>

3. EXPERIENCE AND ENGAGEMENT

Once the booking has been completed, think about the next stage of the customer journey. This is the longest time spent with the customer and will have the greatest impact on their overall experience with you.

In this phase, there are three areas to explore, nurture and complete:

- **LEGAL**
- **CREATIVE**
- **RELATIONSHIP**

LEGAL

First and foremost, we must complete our legal obligations which include signing the NOIM, seeing the appropriate documentation, preparing the Declaration of No Legal Impediment to Marriage and the required Marriage Certificates.

Think about the experience you create for the couple. Do you make it easy for them to sign the NOIM? Do you give them options? If they live far away, could you perhaps recommend they get it witnessed elsewhere and send it to you? Could you pre-fill the NOIM and send it to them? Do you give them options in how they can show you their documentation? In person, via email or online via a video call?

The key is to provide options to couples but don't bombard or confuse them!

Do you get them to double-check all the spelling and information on all the legal documents to try and minimise errors after the marriage has been solemnised? It's not a good look or a positive experience if a couple receive their marriage certificate and it has an error on it as a result of a celebrant oversight.

ACTIVITY

Self reflection: how you fulfill the **legal** requirements of getting married. Is there an area that you could change to improve the customer experience?

CREATIVE

This is where the real fun begins! The creative side is the journey the couple take with you to create their ceremony. How do you get from the very start to executing a beautiful, meaningful and heartfelt ceremony?

Most celebrants will meet with their couple and explain to them a range of different options from ceremony structure, music, vows, readings, involving family and friends and personalising the ceremony. After that meeting, it's important to provide them with information and resources for them to take home and digest. How do you provide these resources to couples? Are they modern, up-to-date and user-friendly? Whilst some couples still like to incorporate traditional elements, many couples these days are opting for more personalised and relaxed ceremonies. Do your resources reflect that?

Creating and Writing the Ceremony

When the time comes to writing the ceremony, how do you obtain the information from your clients? Some celebrants gather this information via face to face, others ask their couple to complete a questionnaire.

If you provide a questionnaire, is it simple, easy to complete, concise? Remember that every vendor is going to ask the couple to complete a questionnaire so make sure yours is detailed enough to gather all the information but not too long so it feels like a chore!

Delivering the Ceremony

Consider how and when you will deliver the ceremony to your couple. This may be influenced by when they return the information to you but do you aim to send them the ceremony enough time before the wedding, so they have plenty of time to review it and make any changes?

Is your ceremony clearly laid out with headings and easy for the couple to get a sense of how it will run?

Remember, whilst you may have done many weddings before, your couple have not so give them as much detail and instructions in the ceremony script as possible.

The Rehearsal or Final Meeting

What options do you give the couple regarding a rehearsal or a final meeting? Are you flexible to work around their schedule? Think of everything you need to cover. This is the time our couples can be the most nervous and anxious so it's imperative that you instil as much confidence and trust. This is a crucial touchpoint on the customer journey map, and for the couple, the final week is a very memorable and emotional time.

Use this time to confirm the following:

- All ceremony details – date, time, location
- All the people involved in the ceremony
- All legal documentation is correct and prepared
- All payments have been received (most couples appreciate a friendly reminder if they have monies owing)
- The couple understand how the ceremony will run and what is required of them

Whilst unexpected things will always happen on a wedding day, the attention to detail you have at this stage will only lead to a smoother ceremony and ultimately, a greater customer experience for the couple.

The Ceremony

Show time! This is the climax of the customer journey map and if you have delivered excellent customer service up until this moment, then it will all come together in a very incredibly special ceremony.

Think about the experience and the engagement a couple receive from you on the big day.

- Do you contact the couple the morning of to say good luck?
- Do you arrive at the ceremony with enough time to go through everything?
- Do you see the couple before they walk down the aisle?
- Are you constantly reassuring and guiding them during the ceremony?
- During the signing, do you remind the couple what's going to happen next?
- After the ceremony, do you take the time to say goodbye to the couple?

ACTIVITY

Reflect on the **creative** process. What area do you think you excel in? What area could you improve in?

RELATIONSHIP

There will be times throughout your journey when there are no legal or creative obligations to be met but they are **still** your customer... so are you contiously engaging with them? Are you still providing excellent customer service?

Here are some ideas on how to engage during this time:

- Post tips, hints and inspiration on social media
- Send an email just touching base and seeing how their wedding plans are progressing – set a reminder 6 months before their wedding
- Send newsletters to your couples
- Invite them to any expos or open days you are attending
- MOST IMPORTANTLY, respond to any of their messages in a timely manner, even if their wedding is 12 months away. Always make your couples feel just as important to you, no matter how far away their wedding is.

Overall, ensure that your customer feels valued, connected and engaged every step of the way. After all, it's all about the experience.

4. ADVOCACY

After the wedding and into the future...

Once the wedding is over, a crucial part of the customer journey map remains... advocacy. The aim is that the couple will recommend you to and it results in referrals.

Soon after the wedding, contact the couple to congratulate them and inform them about the process of obtaining their Official Marriage Certificate. This is the time to ask for reviews, photos and thank them again for engaging your services.

When should you contact the couple? Not too soon after the wedding for they might be on their honeymoon and basking in their newly married glow but don't leave it too long for it may seem unprofessional. You might want to follow up a day or two later with a very short and sweet congrats message and then a week or two later follow up with the legal information and other info.

Looking into the future – how can you continue to engage and make that couple feel valued? Some ideas include:

- Send them a thank you card or little present
- Post about their wedding on social media. Obtain professional photos, if applicable. Make sure you credit the photographer, vendors and of course, the couple!
- Contact them on their one-year anniversary to say congratulations
- If you do receive referrals from them, contact them again to say thank you for the referral.



Consider ... What is something you could do **after the ceremony** to make your couple feel valued?

Use competitors to improve your customer journey map

Examining your fellow celebrants and their experience and engagement they provide to their couples can inspire you to improve your own business.

Identify three main competitors, answer these questions about each one. And be objective. It's easy to identify weaknesses in your competition, but less easy to recognise where they may be able to outperform you:

- What are their strengths?
 - Price, service, convenience, extensive range of services are all areas where you may be vulnerable.
- What are their weaknesses?
 - Weaknesses are opportunities you should plan to take advantage of.
- What are their basic objectives?
 - Do they seek to gain market share? Do they attempt to capture premium clients? See your industry through their eyes. What are they trying to achieve?
- What marketing strategies do they use?
 - Look at their advertising, public relations, etc.
- How can you take market share away from their business?
- What do they provide couples during that "Awareness and Consideration" stage?

To gather information, you can:

- Check out their **websites** and **marketing materials**. Most of the information you need about products, services, prices, and objectives should be readily available. If that information is not available, you may have identified a weakness. Or is it really a strength?
- Evaluate their **marketing and advertising campaigns**. How a celebrant advertises creates a great opportunity to uncover their objectives and strategies.
- **Browse**. Search the Internet for news, social media and other mentions of your competition. Search blogs and feeds as well as review and recommendation sites.
- **Chat** to your competitors – at celebrant seminars, association meetings and OPD.

While most of the information you find will be anecdotal and based on the opinion of just a few people, you may at least get a sense of how some consumers perceive your competition.

Competitive analysis can also help you identify changes you should make to your business strategies and your customer journey map. Learn from competitor strengths, take advantage of competitor's weaknesses, and apply the same analysis to your own business plan.

A good business plan anticipates and accounts for new competitors. Now consider:

- Who are my current competitors?
- What is their market share?
- How successful are they?
- What market do current competitors target?
- Do they focus on a specific client type, on serving the mass market, or on a particular niche?
- How will your business be different from the competition?
- What competitor weaknesses can you exploit?
- What competitor strengths will you need to overcome to be successful?
- What will you do if competitors drop out of the marketplace?
- What will you do to take advantage of the opportunity?
- What will you do if new competitors enter the marketplace?
- How will you react to and overcome new challenges?

While your business plan is primarily intended to make sense of your business, keep in mind your strengths and weaknesses relative to that competition, and understand you will have to adapt and change based on that competition.

Ten good tips to help you stand out from the crowd:

- 1. Optimise your website for your target market** - Ensure your website is optimised for search engines. Make sure you research keywords and insert them into your pages to drive traffic to your business online.
- 2. Your website should be your 'home' of branding** - Once your potential clients act on your marketing campaign whether it be from print or online, they will connect with your website next. Having your website as the hub for your brand marketing is important.
- 3. Use the same logo, colours and fonts in all future marketing media** - Consistency will allow your target market to recognise you instantly, whichever way they connect with you.
- 4. Tell your story** - why you are in the celebrant business and how your business came to be. Your clients want to know who you are, why you do what you do, and how you came to be a celebrant. They want to like you and be able to trust you.
5. Make sure you work **to keep your name in front of your market** - 'Out of sight, out of mind'. This also applies in business. If your market can't see you or your brand on a regular basis, you won't be at the forefront of their mind when it comes to needing your services.
- 6. Provide hints & tips** for the clients on your database. Write a helpful Blog or send newsletters with helpful information through to your database either in print or via email. Keep in regular touch with your potential clients and let them know you are the best person in your field with expertise and knowledge.
- 7. Increase your content output** - Link your newsletter back to your website to allow your market to connect with you on several platforms. Create a blog, write articles, use this content to increase your brand awareness online as well as in print.
- 8. Use social media** - You can promote your brand further by using just a few social media outlets. Investigate Facebook for Business.
- 9. Think about multiple content platforms** to distribute your branding - using video as a way to get your content out to your clients via YouTube, also podcasts would reach your market easier.
- 10. Be visible in the community** - there is no better way to get your branding out to a wider audience than to support community events.

ACTIVITY Conduct a **SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)** analysis exercise on your customer journey map.

- Use a SWOT analysis to distinguish between where you are now and where you wish to be
- Be realistic about your strengths and weaknesses
- Be specific — only include key points and issues
- Relate strengths and weaknesses to practical success factors

- Always aim to state strengths and weaknesses in competitive terms
- Rank points in order of importance and
- Finally, keep it brief and manageable
- Draw up four quadrants on A4 paper ...

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS

Strengths refers to what you are currently doing well. Think about the factors that are going in your favour as well as the things you offer that your competitors just can't beat.

When identifying **weaknesses**, consider what areas of your business are the least profitable, where you lack certain resources, or what costs you the most time and money.

Consider your **opportunities**. This is your chance to dream big. What are some opportunities for your social media strategy you hope, but don't necessarily expect, to reach? For instance, maybe you're hoping your Facebook ads will attract a new, larger demographic. Maybe you're hoping your YouTube video gets 10,000 views and increases sales by 10%.

Writing down your **threats** helps you evaluate them objectively. For instance, maybe you list your threats in terms of least and most likely to occur and divide and conquer each.

Now that you have identified your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, what are you going to do next? A list of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats makes for a handy business guide, but you'll want to create strategies and plans to improve your business.

- Strengths and weaknesses are **internal** to your business and are controllable, whilst
- Opportunities and threats are uncontrollable **external** forces that act upon the situation.

21QT041 Crafting inspirational ceremonies 2 hours

The aim of this professional development activity is to provide both recently registered and experienced celebrants with the skills and knowledge to assist them to craft high quality, inspirational ceremonies, using good writing skills and incorporating appropriate use of the arts in ceremony. This includes the writing process, questions to ask the client, useful resources and developing ceremonies to meet client(s) needs and expectations.

The role of the celebrant in the community.

A formal description of the role of the celebrant in the community can be found on the Attorney-General's website: <https://www.ag.gov.au/families-and-marriage/marriage/become-marriage-celebrant>

Quote: As a Commonwealth-registered marriage celebrant, you'll play an important role in your community. You will also have legal responsibilities.

All Commonwealth-registered marriage celebrants must adhere to the Celebrant Code of Practice. You should regularly review the code, here is the link: <https://www.ag.gov.au/families-and-marriage/publications/code-practice-marriage-celebrants>

Consider this ... We've all been innocently enjoying a coffee in a café at some time or another when we have overheard people chatting about a ceremony they have attended and our ears pick-up.

Have you ever heard comments such as this spoken by people who are chatting *about anyone else's ceremonies apart from yours!*

- 'it was just the same old ceremony ...'
- 'fancy using that reading ... I didn't understand a word of it ...'
- 'I thought I was at the wrong funeral'
- '... it didn't sound like A's and X's ideas at all ...'
- 'boring ... I switched off straight away ...'

Working in small groups: Discuss the feedback you have received from your clients ... are there any indicators for improvement?

Exercise: How would being aware of these 'indicators' assist celebrants to improve their work? Review the following examples and make notes.

Comment	Indicator	Action
it was just the same old ceremony		
... a reading ... I didn't understand a word of it		
I thought I was at the wrong funeral		
it didn't sound like A's and X's ideas at all		
boring ... I switched off straight away		
<i>What else did you come up with?</i>		
<i>Anything else?</i>		

'Okay, now I'm ready to write the ceremony!'

So ... you have a great idea for crafting a ceremony ... how are your writing skills? Try this simple test.

Select **one of the three** writing prompts and write 30 - 60 words on the topic, taking care to employ effective writing skills. (five minutes)

- Prompt 1 = If you could have one super-power, what would it be and how would you use it?
or
- Prompt 2 = If you were a sauce, what sauce would you be and what why did you choose it?
or
- Prompt 3 = Imagine you could program a robot to perform one daily task for you for the rest of your life, what task would you choose and why did you choose it?

Write here ...

If you're happy, share your writing with colleagues in a small group.

Can you get some feedback from your colleagues? What do they say about your ...

- Grammar?
- Sentence structure?
- Spelling?
- Punctuation?
- Creative ideas transferred effectively into text?

Yes, that was a very quick test and you didn't have a lot of time to pay attention to most of the items above. However, when you are writing ceremony for performance it is tremendously important that you use **effective writing skills**.

Question: Why does it matter that you have effective writing skills?

Where can I get help to improve my effective writing skills?

Investigate the following sites, many of these are free and offer the option to upgrade:

- **Grammarly** is a free online writing assistant and scans your text for common grammatical mistakes (like misused commas) and complex ones (like misplaced modifiers). <https://www.grammarly.com/>
- **Microsoft Editor** - Write with confidence with Microsoft Editor, your intelligent grammar, spelling, and style checking writing assistant. <https://www.microsoft.com/en-au/microsoft-365/microsoft-editor>
- **Scribens** is a free online Grammar Checker that corrects over 250 types of common grammar, spelling mistakes and detects stylistic elements such as repetitions. <https://www.scribens.com/>

And many more to search for ...

Write effectively – Review the following points to develop structure, flow, tight writing – kill the adverbs!

Sentence structure - vary your sentence structure by using a combination of short, medium and long sentences. When used correctly, short sentences add impact whilst well-crafted longer sentences can develop a key idea, add in details and build to an important conclusion.

Flow is a word used to describe writing that has logical structure and varied language within and between sentences and paragraphs.

Avoid 'Wordy' writing - this refers to lengthy and grandiose phrases that clutter meaning with writing that has inappropriate word choices, unusual sentence structure, or instances of passive voice. Remove the redundant words to give power to the sentence. Example:

'For all intents and purposes, the reason Sarah arrived late for her wedding ceremony was due to the fact that the limo had to stop at so very many traffic lights that were red in colour.' = 32 words.

'Sarah arrived late for her wedding because the limo stopped at numerous red traffic lights.' = 15 words.

Avoid adverbs like *lovely, suddenly, perfectly, beautifully*. They are well-meaning words that do nothing for the value of the written piece and diminish the effect of each sentence. Good writing is specific and paints pictures in the audiences' minds.

Why use a Thesaurus? A thesaurus can allow you to have a stronger connection with your audience, as well as a better understanding of your topic. By learning what other words you can use, you can adjust the tone of your writing or speech, helping you to be as effective as possible.

Apart from printed thesauri, you will find many online, here are some examples:

- <https://www.thesaurus.com/>
- https://www.macmillandictionary.com/about_thesaurus.html
- <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english-thesaurus>

Read aloud what you have written. You may think you have a good feel for the flow of words, but you can't judge until you hear the words spoken. Record and listen for the content that doesn't make sense, or for the sentence that doesn't get the message across with sufficient impact.

What is the secret to creating high quality, inspirational ceremonies?

What connection can the celebrant make to each ceremony that will assist in achieving a dynamic and inspirational effect? Is it the setting or venue? ... the date or time of year or day? ... the relevance to history or tradition? ... the season? ... the inclusion of the arts: poetry, music, dance? Or is it about story? ... the couple? ... the subject? ... the community?

Question: What do your clients want and how can you be sure you are assisting them to achieve a personally meaningful and deeply rewarding ceremony? How do you identify and record their needs?

Discuss this topic with your colleagues in small groups, share knowledge and experiences and make a note of where you locate appropriate resources and how you incorporate relevant, meaningful readings, poetry, prose, ritual and symbolism in ceremony, for the benefit of your clients. 10 Mins

Groups report on their discussion.

How Do We Define 'Ceremony'?

A ceremony may be elaborate or simple, formal or intimate - ceremony conveys meaning even without the use of language.

A hug, kiss on the cheek, and handshake are in their own right 'ceremonies' capable of touching deep emotions and conveying meaning; sprinkling of water, anointing with oil, 'laying on of hands' or the joining of hands in marriage is also 'ceremony'.

Closing a casket in view of or with the assistance of the bereaved is a 'ceremony' within the funeral ritual. Committal, when the deceased's coffin 'goes out of sight', is 'ceremony'.

"All ceremonies on earth are healing gestures. They are all symbolic performances which heal psychic wounds and help us make the great transitions in life." *Marie Louise Von Franz*

"Ceremonies are celebrations that stand outside of time's normal flow. They are occasions for stepping out of our routines and preoccupations so we may touch something essential in life. We seek ceremony when we feel that something powerful and profound is happening." *David Oldfield (USA) from "The Journey"*

Establishing the Needs of Clients in Ceremony

"It is as though he listened
and such listening as his enfolds us in silence
in which at last we begin to hear
what we are meant to be."

Lao-Tzu

"Vasudeva listened with great attention. It was one of the ferryman's greatest virtues that, like few people, he knew how to listen ... the speaker felt that Vasudeva took in every word, quietly, expectantly, that he missed nothing ... He did not await anything with impatience and gave neither praise nor blame--he only listened ... Siddhartha felt how wonderful it was to have such a listener who could be absorbed in another's life ... " *Herman Hesse, Siddhartha*

Crafting the Ceremony

Statement of intention

Before you begin to create a ceremony, you should talk with your clients about what it is they hope to accomplish in this ceremony. The ceremony must state the intention clearly – the clearer the statement, the more powerful the ceremony.

Who will participate in the ceremony?

Participants should be identified before the ceremony is crafted. Who will be the principal participants? Define their roles – will they be actively involved or passive witnesses to the ceremony? If they are to be actively involved, they must be advised in advance so that they can prepare for their role – last minute invitations to participants, without preparation, are not wise.

Authoring the ceremony

The celebrant's role is to assist the clients in achieving a deeply rewarding ceremony. On occasions the clients will want to author their own ceremony, but more frequently the celebrant will author the ceremony and include the clients' specific wishes and personal thoughts to create a personally meaningful ceremony. Advise your clients about the appropriate use of rituals, symbols, poetry and music to enhance the ceremony.

Creating the space

What kind of atmosphere do your clients want to achieve during this ceremony? Is there a most appropriate time of day or night? What time of year would best suit this ceremony? Should the ceremony take place indoors or would outside be more appropriate? What can you advise your clients to do to enhance the space? Perhaps use soft lighting, or candles? Choose floral decorations with care; use oils to heighten the spiritual awareness. Select music carefully, or have live musicians playing.

Opening and closing the ceremony

Ceremonies are set apart from normal time through the atmosphere created in opening and closing the ceremony. Symbolic actions such as processions, music, singing, silence – all announce that something special is about to take place. Begin the ceremony by ringing a bell, or have people sprinkle herbs or rose petals before the participants in the procession.

Presenting ceremony

Ensure that everyone can hear and see what is going on. After working hard to create a deeply rewarding ceremony, it would be a shame if the guests were unable to hear or see it. The celebrant must deliver the ceremony in a dignified and professional manner, paying special attention to public speaking and personal presentation.

Enhancing ceremony through storytelling, ritual, symbolism and the arts

Storytelling in the context of ceremony refers not only to the general process of telling a story but also to cultures where the tradition/history is oral. Often the elders in a community may be the official storytellers. Storytelling is a communal event, intended to pass on information that will be remembered. Historically/ traditionally, they were often rhythmic, often sung.

Storytelling may be presented in ceremony in the form of poems, prose and song, or it can be a spoken as personal contribution. In many cultures, it is believed that stories have the power to heal, that they contain the rituals and ceremonies that can cure individuals and communities.

As a story is told communally or is shared by one person with another, it creates a sense of community between those people.

Rituals, Symbols and Ceremony Signpost Culture and are indispensable as they provide identity and recognition. Rituals and ceremonies unite people, strengthen their belief and transmit historical information. Rituals may involve eating certain foods or participating in sports or pilgrimage as well as song, dance, music and art.

'When people participate into these rituals and ceremonies, they gain a deeper understanding of their own history, famous figures, myths and legends and acquire a sense of belonging while experiencing shared values.'

From 'The Journey' by David Oldfield

Music, Dance and the Arts The following information is provided by Dally Messenger, International College of Celebrancy.

'A marriage ceremony, indeed, any ceremony, distinguishes itself from other human activities by a structured presentation of ideas and ideals, in the context of the visual and performing arts. Place, interior design, words, movement and symbolism all play a part. The atmosphere is also enhanced by other less acknowledged artistry, for example, the florist, the dress designer, the tailor, the hairdresser and so on.

'... consider the power of music ... of how music has the ability to inspire individuals in many human endeavours. Music is acknowledged to move the emotions, effect mood and heighten experience. The thoughts and associations, intensified by the beauty and joy of music at a Marriage ceremony, give much more emotional credibility to the values, the commitment between the parties, and the expression of sentiment. Heightened emotions, psychologically, have the power to create long term behavioural impact on the individual so moved.'

Dally went further in pursuit of incorporating meaningful music in ceremony by encouraging the guests to sing along during the ceremony ... quote from Dally's texts:

'Singing together: nothing beats this! Everyone must have a copy of the words of the songs; it must be played in a key most people can cope with, and it must be led by a competent singer or singers. Sometimes the singer can practice with the guests while waiting for the bride, or at least, have the celebrant explain what will happen later so everyone is prepared.'

Here are some examples of the songs he encouraged ... 'Annie's Song' by John Denver; 'I can't help falling in love with you', Elvis; 'Always', Willie Nelson; 'From me to you', Lennon-McCartney.

Resources

- **Music** (*warning: Downloading music for free from disreputable sites is not only illegal, but also unethical. Support the musicians who make the music you love by purchasing their art legally.*)
 - <https://music.apple.com/us/browse>
 - <https://www.amazon.com/music>
 - <https://m.youtube.com/channel>
 - <https://www.spotify.com/au/>

- **Poetry** (*be conscious of Copyright*)
 - <https://www.poetrylibrary.edu.au/poems-theme-occasion>
 - <https://librivox.org/short-poetry-collection-215-by-various/>
 - <https://www.bookrix.com/ebook-m-a-new-beginning/>

- **Traditions/rituals/symbols** (*Copyright!*)
 - <https://www.easyweddings.com.au/articles/10-awesome-wedding-traditions-from-other-cultures/>
 - <https://www.brides.com/gallery/wedding-traditions-around-the-world>
 - <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/13-amazing-coming-of-age-traditions-from-around-th/>