



Jacqui and Grant Van Wyk,  
1<sup>st</sup> September 2007.

Photographs by Ryan Graham

Matthew Stubbs is a visionary in his own right. As the owner of Oakfield Farm and the pioneer of the Bridal Library, he has been a leader in the wedding industry for the past 16 years. If nothing else, Matthew is a perfectionist with a knack of understanding what makes the wedding industry tick. Matthew has three wonderful children and enjoys family life with his supportive wife Kathy.

Co-Ordinating the

# *Big Picture*

By Matthew Stubbs

At almost all weddings, the couples go to extraordinary lengths to ensure that everything will be perfect. The venue is carefully selected, the invitations are often hand-made, the cake is a masterpiece and the decor simply amazing. The bride is radiant in her wedding dress. Surely the wedding will be perfect.



Not always! Often there is a lack of understanding as to what makes a function tick. The successful function revolves around the co-ordination of events in such a way that the mood is captured and enjoyed by the guests. This is what memories are made of.

One of the biggest problems is that venues promise "co-ordination" in their package and the couples assume that this vital part of the function will be taken care of. The co-ordination of the event is not only about choosing specialists and ensuring that all arrive on time. It is about the selection of music, lighting, and food, all tied up with flawless timing, so that emotions

are heightened to match the occasion. This requires excellent leadership and an experienced team who really care.

Every function needs co-ordination. A laid back wedding or a ritzy black tie affair will be organized differently but each will be planned to create their own mood and style as the wedding couple intended. In fact, the mark of success is when the planning and implementation seem invisible.

The best way to start is to think of your wedding as a production. Think of yourselves as the lead performers and your guests as your audience. This means that the wedding

is planned around the guests, not yourself. As an example, the music should be a track that will create the right atmosphere, not just your favourite cd. Timing and music cannot be separated. On planning your entry, ensure that you wait for the music to start and enter, not on the prelude but rather the crescendo. The lighting must also announce your presence. Don't forget to walk slowly.

Once you start to think in this way, you will soon get the idea, and your wedding will move to a new level.

This does not mean you are not important. It also does not mean you cannot focus on



essentials such as good photos. It simply means that your individual needs are written into the script so nobody is caught out, nothing is forgotten and nobody needs to get flustered. People can simply relax, go with (the carefully prepared) flow and savour the moment. It does not require fancy dress rehearsals only good planning and co-ordination.

One of the causes of inadequate co-ordination is that, although you have specialists with great expertise, they are concentrating on their piece only and nobody is assigned to direct the whole "cast". This, by the way, is not the role of the MC who is a guest, not a professional. His role is to act as spokesperson as and when prompted by the management team.

Ultimately, the venue staff are still the best people to manage the co-ordination and should be trained to do so. They should also have every contingency plan tucked up their sleeves so that the procedure moves quickly to plan B, if required. Like a fire drill, the venue team should have practiced so that the atmosphere remains calm.

Remember too that the serving of the food is an integral part of the function. Even the style of the meal and the number and serving times of each course should be considered for each individual wedding. Your guests must feel important. Don't keep them waiting

for ages for your photo session to end. Sit them down, give them refreshments and give them time to get to know each other at their tables. They will appreciate your efforts and, by the time you arrive, they will be happy and relaxed and your function will get off to a great start. Again, start thinking from this perspective and it becomes easier.

Having said that, it is best that the venue managing the proceedings is not dictatorial in stating how it should be done. The safe way for a venue to manage their functions is to keep their procedures as routine as possible, which may be safe but the function will lack sparkle and spontaneity.

A word on outside co-ordinators. You may have noticed that venues don't treat outside co-ordinators with much enthusiasm. This is sometimes because they don't know that they are doing it but, often, it is because they expect a high standard of service from the venue and also insist that the things be done exactly as the client requires. My answer is simple – if you have no confidence in the venue's ability to run with your procedures, get another coordinator. Check that they have at least four years experience in a leading establishment. Without this experience, a "Wedding Co-ordinator" diploma is inadequate.

Finally, gentlemen – you need to know that your speeches are going to make a huge difference to the day. On 702 Radio recently, Jenny Crwys-Williams told the listeners about the most wonderful wedding she had attended. She was bowled over by the MC who had them in stitches without the slightest trace of smut. The father's speech was warm and entertaining, and the groom, well, she was at a loss for words to describe how wonderful his speech was. No mention was made of the venue, the food, the music, the décor or the dress. I have no doubt that these aspects were great, but for Jenny it was the one item, that cost nothing, that left the lasting impression.

With regards to speaking, there are only two stumbling blocks – believing you can or believing you can't. The solution to both is the same. A good speech will take days of thought, preparation and practice. If you have any doubt, get a friend or professional to listen to your speech until it is fluent. You may be faint with anxiety but, with the right preparation, your speech will be brilliant and remembered for years to come.

