

"Please Do Not Just Hire A DJ"

by

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If you "just hire a DJ" you might get lucky and get your money's worth - and still have an awful event. Or, you might not get your money's worth - and still have an awful event. Please allow me to explain. Hiring a DJ to just stand up there and play songs is an easy goal to achieve. But, that does not make for a successful event. But even this simple goal can be missed by some DJ's that don't even know what to play or when to play it. Whether the event is a wedding reception or a corporate party, the success of the event can only be measured by the guests after the event is over. If they had a great time and enjoyed the time spent at the event then all is well. So, how can so many DJ's get it so wrong so often?

Disc Jockeys are not an endangered species. On the contrary, there are many more today than ever before. Why? Because the amateurs think that equipment prices have dropped, downloaded songs are cheap and too many amateurs assume it is "easy" money. No, no, no, on each front:

Professional equipment is not cheaper than ever.
Music is still expensive if purchased legally.
Doing it right is not quick and it is not easy.

So, how do many well intentioned DJ's get it so wrong? That one is easy: They are clueless as to what it takes to perform a professional event. They see the two little characters, "D J" and stop looking. They assume that a Disc Jockey just jockeys discs and everybody is happy. They believe that loud music is the key and the louder the better. Play loud songs and the dance floor is full and you get paid and go home. It is possible that they get this impression from watching bad DJ's in their local market and assume they are seeing the standard.

Bottom Line:

The Tools of the Trade do not make good DJ's out of the Fools of the Trade.

Bad DJ's are not completely at fault. Somebody hired them! And, if that somebody did not do their homework and "just hired a DJ", then they fell short of the goal. A goal that should have read, "Hire A *Good* DJ". A *good* DJ is someone that has the experience, training, knowledge, and skill to do the job right. If that job is a wedding reception, then they know how to choreograph the best reception possible. And, that requires a partnership with your DJ. You cannot "just hire" a DJ to get the job done. The success of the event requires a close relationship and communication to meet the goal.

The following checklist should help reach the goal.

1. Meet with your DJ entertainment.

The relationship must be comfortable and this cannot be conveyed over the phone or in emails. Do not expect good results unless you have invested the time with the DJ to plan the details. Experienced DJ's can, and do, coordinate successful events over the phone when travel or scheduling does not permit a face-to-face meeting. But, this is not

the best process. Some communication is not accomplished with words alone. A personal meeting is the only sure way to get the best results.

2. Nail down the GOAL.

Do not assume that "success" means the same thing to everybody on the planet. A successful wedding reception only means what the client says it means. Then, if the DJ can make it happen, they should say so. And, if they cannot make it happen, they should say, "No". Of course, many clients only know that they want everyone to have a good time and that is certainly a valid point. But, what is a "good time"? Does that mean everybody is going to dance? Talk this out with your DJ and detail your expectations so that the DJ can have a clear target.

A professional DJ is paid to reach goals. Most often that goal is simply that everyone at the reception has a great time. If the DJ has the experience to know what that means, then all is good. But, if for any reason, the goal is different to the client than the DJ, then the outcome will not reach the target.

3. Expect the DJ to have the answers.

Experience in pulling off successful events only comes with experience and hard work. Do they have the experience? Do they have the references to show that they know how to get it done? Let them guide the planning process. This might be your first wedding reception ever. The DJ can be a valuable tool in planning the perfect event. Feel free to simply ask the entertainer what they would recommend. Let them detail the ultimate reception and then see if it sounds good to you. If so, book it. Here is where the best of the best get abused by the best of the cheapest. You might get great ideas from the best DJ in the area and then decide to go out and hire a cheaper DJ to meet these goals. Good Luck. Knowing what to do and knowing how to do it are two completely different things. Do not be too surprised if the pro DJ restricts his or her full planning meeting until after the contract is signed and the deposit is in the bank. Pro DJ's also know how to avoid wasting their time. It is a business after all. There may be a surplus of "DJ's" in the business, but there are only 52 Saturdays in a year. Pro DJ's fill their prime nights without worrying too much about the competition.

4. Hire the best DJ, trust them, and then let go.

Once the event starts, the DJ is going to be busy and cannot be asking permission at every step of the evening. If the client wants to do it all, they do not need to hire a DJ. Once the music starts, the DJ is busy crafting each song to meet the crowd. Each event and each crowd is different. The pro's know how to start the event based on the information from the client. But, as soon as the dancing starts, the atmosphere takes its first breath and the crowd comes to life. Knowing how to read the crowd, how to react, how to interact, and how to work the crowd is the stuff that sets DJ's apart. Professional DJ's know when to work the microphone and when to shut up. Sometimes it comes down to skill. Some have the talent, and some do not. Entertainment requires a very keen sequence of receptors. Feeling the pulse of the crowd, the exact time for faster and louder, and the exact time to cool it down and quiet it down. The professional DJ can tell at each moment if he or she has the crowd or if the crowd and the DJ are out of sync. And, that is why you do not "just" hire a DJ. If all you want is noise near the dance floor, don't save some money and hire the cheapest DJ, go ahead and save all your money and put a boom box on the floor and kick in your favorite songs. Plus, this approach will get you home earlier. With an empty dance floor you can turn out the lights and go home.

5. Find out the DJ's bag of tricks.

What does the DJ do to get the crowd moving? Crowds are very peculiar. There is no magic formula that works each and every time. Some crowds come fully equipped with

plenty of great and excited dancers that keep the floor alive without a lot of extra work. But, more commonly there are only a few couples that only dance to certain very specific types of music. Every DJ has a different approach to these problems and should feel comfortable explaining their tactics. Dance contests, dance instruction, games, and working the microphone are among the cures for dance floor vacancy.

6. Know the DJ's approach to games and contests.

Nothing is more embarrassing than watching an amateur DJ start a formal wedding reception with an inappropriate game that lowers the bar for the rest of the evening. A professional DJ knows what games to play and when to play them. Certain games are great at certain times. No game is good at all times.

Most professional DJ's are also pretty good on the dance floor. After all, most events that hire a DJ are events that focus on the dance floor. If the DJ cannot lead dance contests or offer dance instruction, then what do those that do not know how to dance do all evening? No question about it: The success of a dance event is measured in large part on the percentage of participation in the event. Part of this is the raw statistic of what percentage of the audience made it to the dance floor. But part of it is also those that really enjoy watching everyone having a good time. Not everybody dances, but that does not mean they cannot really enjoy the event. Pro DJ's never embarrass anyone to get on the dance floor. Tweaking the lights, adjusting the pace, and changing the volume can draw some slow comers to the floor. Watching a master at this craft is incredible because the talent is so rare. All too often the DJ plays what they like, when they like it, and then go home. And, then they wonder why their business is slowing down.

7. Discuss the flow and direction of the event.

Pro DJ's have to be good emcee's for event management. As the M.C. (Master of Ceremony) the DJ should be very capable at working the microphone to announce events and motivate the crowd. Getting this job done right requires the same set of receptors and senses as knowing how to play the right song at the right time. Too often, a DJ will run their mouth to the point of annoyance. When everything is just right, the DJ is an unseen element. The focus of the event is on the wedding party or event crowd. Then, when it is necessary to bump the group one way or the other, the DJ can make it happen with the right words at the right time. Some crowds require more direction than others. Knowing how much and how little is the talent.

8. Make sure that the DJ, and their equipment, will properly attire for the event.

Discuss very openly the plans for the event's atmosphere. Investigate the DJ's equipment to make sure that it will not distract from the event's decorations. Ask to see pictures of the equipment as it will appear at the event. This discussion also includes the attire of the DJ. The client gets to make this choice. DJ's should match, not overwhelm, the commonplace attire at the event. DJ's that insist that they "always wear their tuxedo" are probably going to be on the mic all night long showing off as well. Beware. Again, the best DJ is the one that is not too often the focus of attention. They will appear as needed to get something accomplished and then just as quickly disappear until needed again. And, it is hard to disappear in a crowd of informal wear in a tuxedo.

9. What happens in the event of an equipment failure?

What backup equipment is available on the site in the event of the unexpected. Pro DJ's travel with professional equipment that carries names that most clients have never seen before. If the DJ's setup is junk from the local department store, be concerned. What if it fails? Professional entertainers are always aware of the unexpected and plan accordingly. Keep in mind that having backup equipment is not cheap.

10. What is the backup plan if the DJ is sick on the magic day?

The pro's work together and can usually call on a backup entertainer. Most companies also have backup talent that can run the show on a moment's notice. Is it the ideal? No. But it is far better than, "Sorry, we cannot make it". Ask the DJ how many gigs they missed last year? The pro's know the phrase, "The show must go on".

11. Discuss the DJ's song lists.

Many DJ's brag about having thousands and thousands of songs. Well, that is great if you are going to sit and listen to songs. But, if dancing is the focus of the event, then thousands and thousands of songs are not at all necessary. If the DJ has really studied the vast library of songs within their reach, then the only songs that really matter are those that are great for dancing.

Pro DJ's will maintain a very current list of "Top Dance Hits" from the past 50 years. Most lists would include enough music to fill over 250 hours of non-stop dancing. How much do you need? This does not include their full library of "dinner" music listings. Some will say, "But I need them for Requests." That is only partially true. Most requests are not suitable for the event in progress. The DJ's job is to mix the music to the crowd and stay focused. Playing every request can please the one person making the request but irritate the crowd on the dance floor. Professional DJ's know how to handle requests.

12. Do you really want karaoke?

OK, so everybody likes karaoke. (Really?) If the event is a stationary DJ at a bar, then karaoke can be fun and self-entertaining. However, at more formal events (like wedding receptions) the addition of karaoke can be in very poor taste. And, for many reasons:

First, when the first child is denied use of the karaoke microphone, the parents and their entire party will be upset. Secondly, if a professional DJ has been hired to perform, let them perform. If they rely on the karaoke machine to provide the entertainment, they could have mailed in the entertainment. Adding karaoke to an event must be chosen carefully. Too many times, the karaoke starts and is hard to stop. Think about it carefully before plugging it in. Even with the best intention of only playing two karaoke songs for a friend of the bride to sing, once the unit is on, the DJ will get requests for the karaoke list. And, way too many people think they can sing only after they have been to the well too long. Handing them a microphone can be certain disaster. Don't be surprised again if the entertainment passes on the event if this is a mandatory requirement. After all, the pro's live on great crowd feedback and referrals. Taking an event just for the money can lead down a path with little return.

Finally, without the need to list it on the checklist, is the matter of the entertainer's fee. Match the fee expectation with the event's expectation. It is really that simple.

Find the right DJ entertainment, partner with them, and go enjoy the evening!

Tune Time Entertainment is based in Southern Illinois and serves it's local market. They can be reached at www.dciso.com/dj or email: sales@dcico.com or phone 618-847-8159.