

Perfectly Imperfect

I have often heard my good friend, Mary Dann-McNamee (who also happens to be a wedding coordinator as well as an occasional contributor to this magazine), use the phrase “perfectly imperfect” to describe life. I often think about this concept in my work with clients, and think that this phrase captures the essence of life very poetically. Not surprisingly, weddings and marriage are the perfect venue for embracing this concept.

The more expectations we have about something, the more we set ourselves up for disappointment. But that doesn’t mean that I want you to have no expectations at all; it’s about having realistic expectations. Traditional events like weddings tend to be steeped with lots of “shoulds” (which can be interchanged with “have tos,” “supposed tos,” “musts,” “gottas,” or “ought tos”). These can come from your personal basket of expectations, those of family members and friends, or from society at large. For example, you “must” get married in a church, and you’re “supposed to” get along with your in-laws if you want the perfect wedding. I don’t know how many times I’ve heard people talk about having the “perfect” wedding. Unfortunately it doesn’t exist. Neither does the perfect marriage. But what does exist is a perfectly imperfect life that will bring you joy as well as tears. Contrast is everything, by the way. How would you know happiness if you’d never experienced sadness? You wouldn’t.

Another common expectation is that your friends and family will be excited and loving about your engagement and upcoming wedding. It may be heart-breaking to find out that the friends you thought were supportive are now jealous about your upcoming nuptials, or that your relatives are trying to take over your wedding plans and plan *their* perfect day. What do you do with such disappointment? Get angry and sad? Sure. Stay that way? Hopefully, not. The key is to grieve and then move forward.

Grief is the emotion associated with loss, which doesn’t always come in a tangible package like the loss of a favorite piece of jewelry or the death of a loved one. Often it’s the *loss of an ideal* that we must grieve, such as how you imagined experiencing your engagement, or how you thought your loved ones would respond.

My advice is to walk headfirst into the grieving process so you can get past it and enjoy your special time. The grief process usually starts with a feeling of shock or denial, followed by a mixture of sadness, anger, and bargaining before you reach acceptance. Bargaining means to wish that things were different than what is reality. “I wish my best friend could be supportive of my happiness” or “It would be nice if everyone would respect our wishes for how we want the day to be.” Know that even when you’ve finally reached acceptance you may still have some moments of wishing the situation was different. Hopefully the twinges of sadness and disbelief will be shorter and less severe with time.

So how do you accept what is perfectly imperfect? First of all, focus on what you can control — you. Challenging I know, but it will unburden a lot of anxiety and grief once you embrace it. Trust me. You are the only person who can control your thoughts, and since thoughts create feelings, thinking is everything. Buddhist philosophy talks about how everything is really “neutral,” but that through our perceptions, we label things as “good” or “bad.” If you see an event as bad, then it will translate into bad feelings. Something is only good if you think good thoughts about it. So the choice is yours.

In addition to choosing how you think about an event, remember that everything is temporary. The upsets and disagreements about flower arrangements or bridesmaids’ dresses will fade, but being married to your best friend will transcend the day.

Lastly, what can you learn from the imperfection? Are there some life lessons that are just waiting for your attention — a little more patience, or perhaps

accepting others for their human imperfections?

If you haven’t yet learned that there is no such thing as a perfect relationship with your spouse-to-be, come back and talk to me in a few years. It’s not a bad thing, really. If everything were perfectly predictable and controllable, we would never grow as human beings.

If you embrace the journey and accept the “flaws” in your wedding and in your marriage, you will be in for the ride of your perfectly imperfect life.

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