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Toast the bride, groom: Make a memorable wedding salute that is inspiring, entertaining

LOCKIE HUNTER • CITIZEN-TIMES CORRESPONDENT • PUBLISHED JUNE 13, 2008 12:15 AM

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Wedding season is upon us here in the hills of Western North Carolina. As the bride readies her gown, the florist gathers blooms, and the groom practices his vows, so too, are the wedding toasts being composed.

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We've all perhaps been to weddings where the toast was flawed. Possibly the humor was inappropriate, the speaker's voice was too soft, or the toast ran too long to sustain interest. The pressure that is felt when giving a toast is very real, as it is a form of public speaking.

Whether you are the best man (or woman) or the father of the bride, here are some tips from local experts that may help ease some of the pressure of the big moment and aid in composing the ideal toast to the happy couple.

1. Consider your topic

Asheville's Brent Northam is planning his own local wedding and has given some thought to what

he admires in a toast.

"In my mind the ideal toast speaks to both the improbability of and final discovery of true love. I think the best man can offer insight like no other friend, and can share with friends and family another side of you as a couple," Northam said.

Richard Day, of Four Seasons Toastmasters of Hendersonville, offers advice on how to achieve that insight.

"Start off by writing down thoughts freely about the bride and groom and your relationship to them. What was the groom like before he met the bride? How has he changed knowing her? Are there any particularly amusing anecdotes that illustrate who the bride and/or groom is?," Day said.

But be wary here, the tone should match the event. The college dorm party stories are best left on the cutting room floor.

"The toast should be congratulatory in spirit and infused with best wishes for the lucky couple," said Lisa G. McMillan, of Exquisite Events & Consulting. "For those who prefer to recite a passage from a poem, scripture or song lyric there are plenty of choices and easily found on the Internet or other publications."

2. Be sincere

Etiquette expert Sallie Middleton Parker thinks "the most important advice in giving a toast is to be sincere in your compliments. If you can weave in a funny story that uplifts the person showcased, all the better."

3. Engage the audience



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The pressure that is felt when giving a toast is very real, as it is a form of public speaking. - **Special to the Citizen-Times**

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Too often the toast begins while others are still talking. Some of the impact of the toast may be lost as the partygoers are not at full attention.

"The person who is slated to propose the toast attracts the attention of the guests by standing and gently tapping the center of the glass repeatedly," McMillan says. "Be careful, fine crystal has the tendency to break very easily. If a DJ or band leader is present, they will provide the individual with a microphone along with the fanfare of a drum roll as they head to the center of the dance floor."

4. Begin with a self-introduction

"Start off by introducing yourself, as not everyone in the room will know who you are," Day said.

"Unfortunately, many people forget this and miss the first part of your speech because they are elbowing their neighbor, 'Who is that?'"

5. Use humor appropriately

"Humor has a central role, but I hope it will be balanced by genuine endorsement," Northam said

McMillan agrees. "A toast should not last longer than 3-4 minutes and should not be rudely embarrassing to the couple."

A toast can easily dissolve into a roast if the speaker is not careful. "At all costs, avoid ex-girlfriend stories and keep it rated PG for kids and grandmothers in the room," Day said.

6. Practice makes perfect

As with all speeches, practice is required. "Practice reciting your toast in advance of the reception in an effort to feel more comfortable with your delivery," McMillan said.

Day agrees. "I suggest writing your toast down on a note card or two and practicing it a few times so that you're not reading straight from the card. Practicing while in the shower works for many people."

7. Don't drink too much

"Before you give your speech, a drink or two might help loosen you up, but more than that and you'll just look like a fool," Day said.

"You hope to remember the moment the rest of your life, but for the right reasons," Northam said. "You must choose a speaker you trust; you don't want a toast fueled by the refreshments."

8. Wrap it up nicely

"It's often good to wrap up your toast with a wish, a traditional toast, or a blessing for the bride and groom," Day said. "Raise your glass with a resounding congratulations, cheers, l'chaim or salud, and don't forget to drink to your own toast!"

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