

Margarita Bauza: Worklife

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MARGARITA BAUZA: You are cordially invited... to advance my career

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FREE PRESS COLUMNIST

Ahh... wedding season, a time for emotional meltdowns sparked by tricky undertakings that require a master's in diplomacy.

Topping the list of bridal minefields is the politics of THE LIST... where the pocketbook, friends and family hardly coexist in peace. Trickiest of all -- who gets the nod from work?

"It's one of the top questions on our Web site ... the office invite," says Kathleen Murray, senior editor at the New York-based theknot.com, the most visited online wedding site.

With the approach of Labor Day -- the busiest wedding weekend -- and fall brides fine-tuning their guest lists, advice on how to handle the work invitation abounds from wedding planners, workplace experts, family and friends.

At issue is whether couples should consider how a wedding invite -- or the lack of one -- could impact their careers. As the average cost of a wedding reaches all-time highs, couples are questioning whether they should shell out hundreds to include a boss, a supervisor or key coworkers.

"There are so many extenuating circumstances," says Murray.

One of those is the cost of throwing a wedding, particularly when juxtaposed with the average age (27) of a bride, who by the time she makes it to the altar has spent years at work and more than likely spends more time with workmates than with family and friends.

According to the Fairchild Bridal Group, the average price of a wedding is approaching \$30,000, a 73% increase over the last 15 years.

Ultimately it's the couple's decision, says Lisa Mininni, a career coach from Canton.



REGINA H. BOONE/DFP

Bride-to-be Kimberly Garner, right, hugs Angela Rice of Canoga Park, Calif., her cousin and former coworker, at a bridal shower in Garner's honor. They have worked together since 1997 and often do business deals, though they no longer live and work in the same state.

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"It might hurt your relationship, but I don't think it would hurt your career," says Mininni, about inviting a key supervisor or boss. "There's always political risk."

"I think the answer is if you can't invite them, pull them aside and tell them why. You always want to foster your relationship with your boss."

If you can't afford to include a boss or coworkers, it wouldn't hurt to celebrate the occasion another way.

"You could have a special lunch where you explain that you and your spouse agreed to stick to a limit but that you wanted to do something extra and that it's your treat," says Mininni.

If you do decide to invite the big boss, make sure you have a relationship before sending out an invite; otherwise, "it might look a little odd," she says.

In metro Detroit, brides are struggling to find a way to include everyone from the office, despite the increasing costs of weddings.

Kimberly Garner, director of operations at the mortgage company Community Lending Inc., was able to include many coworkers. She and her fiancé met at work, and most of their friends are people they met at work. Garner and her fiancé invited 25 coworkers and their spouses and dates from their 80-person Detroit office. Their wedding is Sunday.

"Fortunately and unfortunately, I like a lot of people from work," says Garner, who didn't want her age mentioned. "When you're well into your career, they all live through your courtship, your engagement -- they see you actually going through all of the process and they're there for you."

"Everyone's excited about the wedding and there are a lot of people who have been supportive," she says. Two coworkers even threw her a bridal shower with 40 guests last weekend.

But even Garner, whose 300-person invite list allowed her to be more liberal than most, felt she had to draw the line somewhere. She invited only those she and her fiancé felt close to, regardless of rank.

"I never felt I had to invite someone because I was supposed to," says Garner.

Keeping the guest list under control was the hardest part of the wedding-planning experience, says Kellie Mox, an Ypsilanti resident who will get married over Labor Day weekend.

"We really struggled with it," says Mox, 28. "It's actually been the most stressful part of the original planning, trying to accommodate so many people."

When it came to deciding which coworkers to invite, she and her fiancé had to make a tough decision.

"My fiancé and I work in small groups, and particularly for him, if he invited one person, he'd have to invite them all," she says. "We ended up not inviting work people in general. However, we did make a couple of exceptions because there are a couple of people who we hang out with a lot outside of work."

In the end, they invited three couples from their jobs and asked them to be discreet.

"You have to draw the line somewhere, because the wedding becomes not your own," says Mox, who had a target of 100 guests but ended up with 168.

Like Garner, Michele Swartz of Southfield had a large work contingent at her wedding last summer. She invited all 50 people in her office and their spouses or dates. About 30 coworkers accepted the invitation.

In the end, she felt good that she didn't have to leave anyone off the list, says Swartz. She is on leave from her job at Trinity Design in Farmington Hills.

"I had talked about wanting to marry my husband -- then boyfriend -- openly in the office, so my wedding was a very anticipated event," she says. "I wanted to share our day with everyone who had to put up with me talking about it for so long."

While well-intended, her blanket invitation produced some discomfort.

"Some people were appalled that I was inviting the whole office," she says. "They said that I was inviting everyone because I wanted a gift. I actually thought I was going the politically correct line rather than picking and choosing."

A coworker said the large office contingent made for a fun party.

"It was just really great," says Katherine Chappelle, an interior designer at Trinity. I walked in there and there were all these people I knew. We really had a lot of fun."

Murray of theknot.com says couples are under no obligation to invite anyone they do not want to invite. Still, you can minimize unease for workers who might feel snubbed by the lack of an invitation.

If you hang out with someone at work, he or she should get an invitation, Murray says.

If you work with a handful of people and don't plan to invite them, let them know it's a small affair and that you're keeping it to just family and very close friends.

"Tell people who were invited that you haven't invited the entire office and to keep it on the D.L. and not to chat about things like what you're wearing to the wedding," she says.

"We tell our couples that they're under no obligation to invite their boss or coworkers and not to be secretive about it, but to let that be known."

Lastly, she advises that you consider inviting your supervisor. "Most likely, they won't come, but it's a nice gesture. However, if you don't do it, don't feel like you're ruining your career."

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Living

What you should know about inviting coworkers to your wedding

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- **Are you obliged to invite coworkers?** You are under no obligation to invite your boss -- or anyone, for that matter, to your wedding. To avoid any false expectations or hurt feelings, make it known to your coworkers and boss that your guest list will be limited to family and close friends. That will help your colleagues -- and especially your boss -- feel less excluded. It's also smart to keep wedding talk in the workplace to a minimum.
- **If someone from work invites you to her wedding, should you invite her to yours?** If you're not inviting coworkers, it might make that person uncomfortable to be at your wedding. On the other hand, since she is inviting you as a courtesy, it might be nice to do the same for her (keep in mind that she may not attend). It depends on your relationship as well. Are you friendly outside work, or is it strictly professional? It's all about not hurting her feelings, and only you know whether she'll be offended if she's not invited.
- **If you work in a small office, how should you handle inviting only a few people?** You don't have to invite every coworker to your wedding, and you certainly don't have to invite anyone you don't want there, coworker or not. Just be very tactful about inviting the colleagues you do want. Send the invites to their homes -- don't bring them to the office -- and let them know that you would rather they didn't talk about it at work out of courtesy to those you didn't invite.
- **What if coworkers throw you a shower?** Office showers are just that -- office showers. It's like office birthday parties; your coworkers don't expect to be invited to your official birthday party. Be sure to thank those who planned the shower with a note of gratitude or a small thank-you gift, but don't feel obligated to invite everyone to the wedding. Just put the close friends you're already planning to invite on your guest list.
- **How do you tell coworkers they're not invited?** Depending on how you think the uninvited coworkers will react, you might want to prepare yourself; if anyone confronts you about not being invited, you can always fall back on "Our guest list was getting out of control" or "We could only afford to invite so many people." Things will be a bit tense around the office for a while. But you shouldn't feel bad or guilty. It's your wedding, and you create your guest list.

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