

## Planning for the BIG DAY

*By Michelle LaBrosse, PMP®, Chief Cheetah and Founder of Cheetah Learning, and Kristen LaBrosse, Co-Author, CAPM®*

When a wedding invitation comes in the mail, my gut instinct is to leave it in the mailbox and have the mailman take it away to someone else who might actually want to attend. This is my thought for about two seconds, before logic sets in and I realize that wedding guests are not so replaceable, that I must reply to this RSVP either way, and that I better have a pretty good reason if I plan to reply with “not attending.”

Now don’t misunderstand me, I love my family and friends, and wish nothing more than to spend time with them and celebrate their biggest moments in life. But going on my 30<sup>th</sup> year of attending weddings, quite regularly mind you, I have had quite enough of the chicken dance, bad cake, sloppy best man speeches, and most of all, the poorly planned wedding that causes frustration and boredom for all involved.

That was my view on weddings, up until this last summer. A co-workers daughter invited me to her wedding and I prepared myself for the usual wedding scene, bringing along with me my iphone (for unexpected delays), some mints to share with the other guests as the night and the drinks wore on, and my sense of humor. To my surprise and relief, the wedding was the most smoothly run event I had been to in years! And the biggest shocker of it all is that it went off without a hitch...in the middle of a hurricane! It was so much fun I completely lost track of time and danced the night away.

While I attributed my evening of surprising fun to great companions, a fantastic band, and amazing food, I also think the success of the event relied solely on the expert planning by all involved. The more I thought about it, the more I realized that any big experience that I had that was fun, adventurous, and successful sprouted from detailed and accurate planning.

The concept of “planning fun” can sometimes be hard for those of us out there who like to “live in the moment” and who generally get nervous if too much planning takes place (you know who you are!). But the moment that you invite others to “live in your moment”, as you do while planning any sort of event, is when you need to make sure that good planning takes place to produce an event that is fun for all. Here are a few things to keep in mind when planning your big day, whether that be a wedding, job interview, holiday party, work retreat... or whatever!

**Develop a scope statement.** There is one thing worse than not planning at all, and that is planning for planning’s sake, without an end result or goal in mind. To keep this from happening, at the very beginning of planning your big day, develop a scope statement that focuses your planning efforts on one main goal. For example, let’s say you’re planning a work retreat for your company to improve communication and morale. Your scope statement could read: “Gather all current employees for a one day retreat to be held before the end of the year. Also, create a detailed 8 hour schedule of team building activities with the end goal of increased communication among employees, as measured by project success rates, and improved morale, as measured by employee satisfaction surveys.”

**Select the planning team, and deliverables for each person.** One of the best things about wearing a project manager hat is that once you define your project tasks, you don't have to go at it alone. Master the art of delegating through your PM powers of influence and negotiation, and define a team that will help you with your planning.

**Develop a Schedule.** Decide when your big day will take place, and work backwards from there to see what you will need to make your big day a success. Remember, you are not a machine, so make it easier for yourself to remember due dates of deliverables by creating a calendar and setting reminder alarms to go off on your phone. Also, ensure that everyone on your project team is accountable for their deliverables as well by publicly displaying the schedule (Google calendars, or a company's shared workspace) so that there is no confusion over who is responsible for what.

**Develop a Budget.** Nothing sucks the fun out of planning (yes, planning can be fun!) like running out of money when half the deliverables are accomplished. Develop a budget that prioritizes the activities that "must be done" first, leaving secondary items for money left over. For example, when you are preparing for a job interview, it might be "nice" to get your hair cut and colored before you go to your interview, but it is a "must have" to have appropriate clothing and your resume printed. Save the nice-to-have's for last to make sure you are planning for success.

**Risk Planning.** The last thing that you want when planning for a big day is what could potentially go wrong. But that is exactly what needs to happen before your big day. To do this, use your imagination, your team members, friends, and coworkers to get a good idea of what could happen if things don't go as planned, and then come up with ways to mitigate these risks. For the wedding I attended that took place during a hurricane, the risk plan included getting umbrellas that complimented the wedding party's dresses and to make sure the wedding facilities had back up plans if the electricity went down.

**Have Fun!** All that planning can be stressful and time consuming, but the payoff for your big day makes it all worth it. Do your big day the right way, with good project management planning. Before you know it, even the most klutzy of guests (like me) will be dancing the night away!

**About the Author:**



Michelle LaBrosse, PMP, is an entrepreneurial powerhouse with a penchant for making success easy, fun, and fast. She is the founder of [Cheetah Learning](#), the [author](#) of the [Cheetah Success Series](#), and a prolific [blogger](#) whose mission is to bring Project Management to the masses.

Cheetah Learning is a virtual company with 100 employees, contractors, and licensees worldwide. To date, more than 30,000 people have become “Cheetahs” using Cheetah Learning’s innovative Project Management and accelerated learning techniques.

Recently honored by the Project Management Institute (PMI®), Cheetah Learning was named Professional Development Provider of the Year at the 2008 PMI® Global Congress. A dynamic keynote speaker and industry thought leader, Michelle was previously recognized by PMI as one of the 25 Most Influential Women in Project Management in the world.

Michelle’s articles have appeared in more than 100 publications and Web sites around the world. Her monthly column, the [Know How Network](#) is carried by more than 400 publications, and her monthly newsletter goes out to more than 50,000 people.

She is a graduate of the Harvard Business School’s Owner President Manager’s (OPM) program and also holds engineering degrees from Syracuse University and the University of Dayton.

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