

# Forget Glamour, You'll Need To Eat Humble Pie

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**COME RAIN OR SHINE:** Aleit Swanepoel says wedding planners must be prepared to do whatever is necessary to make the day a success.

## Forget glamour, you'll need to eat humble pie

YOU need to be sharp and well-organised to do this job. It's not glamorous – service providers you use must be bulletproof. It's important to ensure that everything is in writing because if things go wrong and you don't have a contract, the service providers and clients could sue you and you could lose everything.

People think you don't have to study to do this job, but a lot of things can go wrong and you have to know how to prepare for all eventualities.

You must want to work hard and serve people – from polishing the groom's shoes to applying plasters when guests fall down stairs.

You need to start as a waiter and work your way up. All our students at the academy work as waiters at

### Real jobs, real people

By Sarah-Jane Bosch

Every Monday Sarah-Jane Bosch interviews real people at work in Cape Town.



- Today: Aleit Swanepoel
- Job: Wedding, party planner
- Qualifications: N Dip Event Co-Ordination, B Com
- Place of work: Aleit Group

the functions we run. If you don't start at the bottom you won't know what your employees are experiencing. You have to remain humble – a cocky attitude is a real turn-off.

**Qualifications needed:** It's best to avoid online courses. Hotel schools are good.

**Where to train:** Aleit Academy

offers a three-year party planning and wedding planners' course.

**Expected earnings:** Starting salary is about R10 000, but you should earn R18 000 to R25 000 on average, and R160 000 a month is not impossible in Dubai.

Contact: Aleit Swanepoel on 021 852 9595.

## Helping hand for wedded joy

**WHAT** does your job entail? My job is to hold the client's hand and make sure the wedding or other function goes off smoothly.

What you do must always be according to the client's style, personality and preferences. I'm at every wedding we plan, with the other four senior members of the company.

Most couples contact three to five planners, so it's a very competitive industry.

Before meeting the couple we send them a mini-questionnaire, designed to gauge whether they are potential clients or just scouting. We ask for contact details, expected number of guests, wedding venue and so on.

Only about 1 in 50 queries can afford the services of a wedding planner. If their budget is less than R3 000 a person we send them a reply saying that unfortunately our services include the venue, photographers, videographers, food, beverages, hiring and list other items justifying the cost. We then refer them to smaller companies.

Corporate events are different – businesses have goals to achieve, and if you do that for them they will keep coming back to you for future events.

We've also been approached to start a party planning academy in Dubai, where we've planned a number of events.

The Aleit Academy has 65 students at Lourensford Wine Estate, doing a three-year course. We've been open for five years, and all our graduates have found employment.

**Describe your average work day:** While we are busy with budget proposals we send clients encouraging messages.

Once the client signs up, we provisionally book service providers such as videographers and photographers. We make recommendations and follow up with food tasting, chairs, cutlery and crockery options, save the date and free photo shoots.

Wedding planners are responsible for the administration. Each wedding requires 1 000 or more e-mails and lots of meetings.

**Best part of the job:** On the day of the wedding, when you see how it all came together due to your hard work over many months.

**Worst part of the job:** Clients' budgets are often unrealistic.

**Why did you choose this career?** I was functions and events manager at a liquor distributor in Stellenbosch for a few years when I started my business as a sideline. Then I resigned from my job and have been doing this full-time for more than 10 years.

**What else would you have liked to do?** I'm satisfied at the moment.

**Are you paid enough?** Yes, now that the firm is a limited company, and we put back as much as possible into the business.

**Rate your work stress on a scale of 1 to 10:** About 7 on the whole – if you appoint competent people.

**Travel opportunities?** Yes, I have been to London many times, Poland, Switzerland, Germany and other European countries, most African countries and Dubai.

