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When HONESTY Weighs More Than LOVE

No "Sugar-coating"

"I let things come out of my mouth that generally stun everyone around me!" says Donnie Brown.

Photography by Kauwuane Burton

No One Plans a Wedding Like Donnie Brown

Donnie Brown's warm and wacky sense of humor has done more than just smooth over nuptial nerves; it's also made him a reality TV star. Fans of the *Style Network*'s top-rated reality show, *Whose Wedding Is It Anyway?*, tune in regularly to watch Brown and other big-city wedding planners pull out all the stops to give couples the weddings of their dreams. Since the beginning of the eleven-season show, the Texas native quickly became the fan favorite. >>

Brown's career as wedding guru began at age 16 in Lubbock, Texas, when he helped some family friends who owned a floral shop with weekend weddings. In 2003, Brown became a celebrity himself when *Whose Wedding Is It Anyway?* debuted and quickly became a cult hit on the *Style Network*.

I was already a fan of Brown's reality show. My recent chat with Brown was full of valuable lessons. This is how he answered my questions:



LUMBIE: Planning a wedding often stresses brides and their mothers out. What are some tips you have to help keep them calm?

BROWN: It goes without saying that my immediate response is: hire a wedding planner. The latter may sound cliché especially coming from someone within the industry but, the reality is, a wedding planner will help alleviate the stress from the bride and her mother, not to mention everyone else involved in the process. Brides-to-be tend to underestimate the magnitude of tiny details that can truly make or break the production. Within the last fifteen years, the industry has evolved and matured into a multi-billion dollar industry, which in turn means, more options. And we know how options can overpower and confuse even the sharpest tool in the box. In today's world, brides are finding ways to accommodate their guests and allow them to be comfortable too. Can you imagine your grandmother requesting flip-flops to give out to all the other ladies at her wedding so they can kick off their heels and dance the night away? No! Gestures like this need to be taken into account. A well-seasoned wedding planner understands the culture of the industry, which is budgeting, negotiating with vendors, navigating through the various contracts, and scaling back when and where necessary. In writing my book, *Donnie Brown Weddings: From the Couture to the Cake*, I incorporated questions brides should ask each of the vendors in every category primarily to make the most informed decision that will aid their vision. Along with these questions are



insights as to what to expect from the answers, thus allowing the couple to read between the lines.

LUMBIE: Very good advice there, Mr. Brown! On *Whose Wedding Is It Anyway*, you see a lot of brides and their families. What stories stand out to you in particular?

BROWN: The old adage, "unconditional love" has been used and abused over the years. However, I was blessed enough to work with a couple, both in their mid-60s that are the pure definition of the term. Donn and Marlane had both been married before (without kids). After dating for about six months, Marlane, who has the loveliest spirit, found out she had breast cancer. It is at this point the beauty of their story really unfolds. The viciousness of having a mastectomy, undergoing chemotherapy, and the relentless illness that comes after did not deter Donn from passionately loving Marlane. Their subsequent proposal fell on New Year's Eve a year later. Marlane, an amazing author of several books, wore a wig, as she had lost most of her hair. Donn slipped the ring on the finger of a woman that didn't seem sick at all but who was filled with joy! And that was the beginning of the process. Donn stood by his bride through every aspect of their wedding planning. After they hired me to plan the wedding, I quickly fell in love with them and their wedding became as important to me as it was to them. I was concerned about the filming crew on the show stressing the couple out, but they insisted they could deal with it. It was one of the highlights of the show to date. I keep in touch with Donn and Marlane today. That doesn't always happen, but in this case, I can say I am happy it did.



In his office during a conference with his staff

LUMBIE: It's emotional to listen to you tell the Donn and Marlene story and I can see it in you that it means a lot to you. Now, what's the biggest wedding planning problem? How do you propose brides and their planners solve this problem?

BROWN: The biggest problem is the head count versus the budget and how each guest waters down the overall wedding value by costing money. The more guests you can reduce, the higher per-person value you get from your big day, and that is critical in the current economic times. It is not necessary to invite every person the family has ever met when the couple doesn't even know them. As well, the mother of the bride can put a fly in the ointment by not allowing the bride to have her wedding, but the vision of the mother, who often didn't have the one she wanted many years ago. They need to pick their battles and compromise as much as possible. I mean really, *Whose Wedding Is It Anyway?*

LUMBIE: What things should brides be doing as they plan their weddings to avoid drama on the wedding day?

BROWN: Secrets and lies should be abolished by all parties involved with the wedding. Situations whereby the mother of the bride spends a hundred thousand dollars more and withholds such information from the father of the bride could prove to be harmful. Holding off until after the wedding might be the instigating parties' preference as the wiser thing to do. And of course, I don't want an angry father chasing me with a gun on his daughter's most memorable day. Be honest with each other and put it all on the table from the beginning. It is a good rule of thumb. It will make the event go much more smoothly for everyone involved. Things like this create insurmountable drama.

LUMBIE: How can a bride remain balanced when planning her wedding day?

BROWN: If she chooses not to hire a planner then, I suggest she surround herself with a good support system be it girlfriends, aunts and so forth; or perhaps my book. Nerves are at an all-time high closer to the big day, so make sure your village is organized. Keep everything in focus to keep the couple together and their plans on target. >>





Donnie Brown enjoys his office atmosphere

LUMBIE: What's the most important thing for newly engaged couples to do that they might not think of?

BROWN: I have witnessed a couple break-up six weeks before the wedding after having dated for six or seven years before the planning started. To that, I say after getting engaged, communicate honestly and effectively about the wedding because this is usually the time when the bad and ugly walk away from the good (laughs). Stress and drama find their way out and, in this instance, money was invested and the wedding preparations were already in place. It was too late to cancel so the bills had to be paid in full. I felt so sorry for the father who had taken the financial hit for this fiasco. I actually gave him the option (that he never took up) to beautify his gallery with the flowers and décor for any opening he wanted. This unfortunate situation might have been alleviated had the couple communicated better and treated each other with respect.

LUMBIE: Have you accomplished what you set out to do in life? Are there any obstacles in your way?

BROWN: My personal life outshines that of my professional. Individuals reading this article may think, "Gosh, he's achieved everything he could possibly ever think of". Not really! I do know that I have made it this far; and I'd be crazy not to continue and see where I end up. In my estimation, I will never be done moving forward!

LUMBIE: If you were to live your life over again, what would you do differently and why?

BROWN: Tough question. You know, sugarcoating used to be the order of the day for me. I wanted to keep people happy. I've learned that blatant honesty is the best policy even to the detriment of their feelings. If it means telling a bride to change her diet because her face is breaking out or telling her she needs to lose 20 pounds in order to get to her goal, then that's what I now do. No more telling people what they want to hear. My mantra is all about honesty at this stage of the game!



LUMBIE: You've survived more than 2,200 weddings. What's your secret?

BROWN: Passion pushes me forward. Every day is an opportunity to see something new, learn something new, create something new, and meet someone new. You can't be in this business without being passionate about it because, sometimes the people you deal with will drive you crazy. We are not all called on to be planners. It is good old-fashioned hard work and you must be detailed, creative, and driven.

LUMBIE: That's for sure! That's why no one plans a wedding like you. So, what's next? Any shows in development?

BROWN: Without dishing too much, let me just say, my plate is full. Currently, I'm working on my new book. The book will focus on what to do after the nuptials, things like how to decorate your home down to entertaining for adults rather than younger friends. You may like to know that I cook six nights a week, to which I'm also working on an amazing cook book filled with upscale comfort foods! "Donnie Brown" product lines are in the works as well as the

potential for my own show. That should keep me busy until the next presidential election (laughs).

LUMBIE: What advice would you give to someone wanting to start his or her own TV show?

BROWN: When you purposefully and patiently pursue your passion, you will find your place. I never sought television; it sought me. Focus on what it is you were created to do and the rest will follow. Spend every day doing what makes you happy to be alive! Lumbie, you know the cycle, it can be difficult to start something and just because you want a thing, be it TV or otherwise, it doesn't mean you will get it. So, polish your craft and the light will follow.

LUMBIE: Thank you for being honest. Success to you!

BROWN: Thank you for the opportunity to grace the cover of Equanimity Magazine. I hope my story is an inspiration to someone looking to make a positive impact in his or her life and perhaps the lives of others! ☒