

THE GUIDE

A woman with blonde hair styled in a vintage-inspired updo, wearing a black fishnet veil. She is wearing a white, sleeveless wedding dress with a fitted bodice and a full skirt. A large, ornate diamond necklace is draped around her neck. She is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. The background is a dark, solid color.

The Anatomy *of the* Reverse Sell

by Justin & Mary Marantz

J U L Y 2 0 1 2



CONTENTS

Introduction	3
The Job Interview Days	8
Rocks on the Fire	10
The Real Fuel	12
Word of Mouth Marketing	13
Seedless Watermelons	15
Five Ways to Reap a Better Harvest	17
The Triangle Offense of Marketing	18
Connection Marketing	20
10 Ways to Create a Better Connection	23
Cultivating Scarcity	25
The Top 5 Red Flags to Look For	27
The Ideal Client Profile	28
Experiential Marketing	31
The Experience in Action	34
The Five Senses and What We've Done	36
Brand Repetition	37
The Two Minute Drill	38
Five Talking Points	40
The Info Box	41
The Lexus Theory of Pricing	42
Our A La Carte Menu	45
How to Close the Deal	46
Protecting Your Bottom Line	47
Client Gifts	50
Vendors Gifts & Packaging	51
Meetings in a Box	53
Cultivating a Cycle of Bookings	57
The Secondary Circle	60
Final Thoughts	61



INTRO

Welcome to The Guide: The Anatomy of the Reverse Sell. If you are reading this, you are probably someone who is tired of working just to struggle. Or you're brand new and trying to figure out how to get this thing started in the first place. I feel you on that. *I really do*. Seven years ago, Justin & I were brand new in every sense of the word, both as a couple and as a business, and trying as hard as we could to figure out a way to make not just a living but a LIFE doing this thing that we love. I was in law school and he was working for an advertising photographer, but we *dreamed* of starting a business of our own. Something we could build with our own two hands, and look back on and say we did something that *mattered*. We wanted to be able to say that we were brave enough to take the leap, believing that our net would appear. But, our first few years were rough. And the road ahead was long. When we set out to take this path less traveled, we did it because we thought it would lead somewhere *Unordinary*. Instead, we just kept finding ourselves back, knee deep in the struggle. And fighting to keep our heads above water. And if we hadn't figured out a few things right when we did, I think our story would have turned out a whole lot differently. Because as I stand here today I can tell you, if we had continued on the track we were on, we were no more than two years from going completely under. Because simply put, you cannot work that hard, for that long, for that little return, and not burn out. Hold up. Rewind. I think that bears repeating: ***You cannot work that hard, for that long, for that little return... and not burn out.*** But, I'm getting ahead of myself. Because to really understand the whole story, we're going to have to go back to the beginning. And just let me say before we go any further... I'm really glad you're along for the ride.





The Job Interview Days

It was February of 2005, and we were on our way to yet another client meeting.

The sample albums had been packed. The gift had been wrapped, complete with a brand new box that we had just spray painted earlier that day in our drive way. So it was now a rich shade of chocolate brown...or, y'know, whatever Krylon's™ version of chocolate brown was that year. And the ribbon was tied in our signature teal grosgrain ribbon. Bought for \$5 a roll earlier that day at our local craft store.

I mustered up every ounce of courage & faith I could find. And we walked out the door. Together. When we got to the couple's house, we passed another photographer on his way out of just finishing up a meeting. We danced a sideways shuffle down the narrow walkway, as all three of us did everything we could to not make eye contact. And as we rang the door bell holding our bags of sample albums, all I could think was that I felt like a vacuum salesman readying myself to dump dirt on their floor. And instantly, my only very recently mustered courage & faith deflated. Like a Thanksgiving float, speared by a stray dart gun. They deflated. And right then I knew: this meeting was over before it had even begun.

We sat at their dining room table over stacks of wedding magazines and one "my dream day" binder, and made awkward chit chat. As my mouth grew dryer I silently prayed for a glass of water, but none was ever offered. And when we tried to find out something, *anything*, that we might have in common they just asked for our price list. Or more to the point of what it felt like at the time....our resume.

They were in the driver's seat. The interviewer. The judge and jury of our fate. And we, well we....were in the hot seat. As we sat there waiting for our verdict, I couldn't help but thinking: *I'm really not that excited about this couple. I'm really not that excited about what they're planning for their wedding. Oh man, this couple is NEVER going to book with us.* Right? Who among us hasn't spent two hours getting ready for a meeting, only to be two minutes in and realize that this couple is *never*

going to book with us? Or worse yet, you find yourself thinking *Please God don't let them WANT to book with us....*because you just know they are going to be one pain in the neck after another. And yet, you still find yourself hoping that they will. Because you just need to make rent that month. Your dog (or even better yet, your children!) have gotten accustomed to having food. And as you watch them scan the right column of numbers, adding and comparing you, apples to apples, with every other photographer they've met with that week, you silently ask yourself if this....*THIS*....is what it is to be living the dream.

The first two years of our business are what we refer to as the **job interview days of our business**. These were the days of feeling like the vacuum salesmen, of driving out to meet at the couples' houses only to come back home empty-hearted, and of finding ourselves sinking further and further from the dream.

During this time with the job interview days of our business, we were booking maybe 1 in 5, or on a really good streak maybe 1 in 3, of the couples we were meeting with. And that's a really *terrible* booking rate. Because it meant for the 4 out of 5 couples we were meeting with- or 80% of our resources, our time, our money, our energy- 80% of that was being wasted. More than that, we just started to feel really bad about ourselves.

This wasn't life unordinary. The road less traveled. This was every cheesy wedding photographer in every movie ever made. And we started to ask ourselves, is this working anymore. Is it *worth* it any more?

But if you really stop and think about it, when we take a look at how these couples were finding us it makes a lot of sense that they would be treating us this way because....



“The way your clients find you,
trains them on how to think about you.”

(So how were these couples finding us?)

The Rocks on the Fire

If you think about it, building up a business is a lot like firing up a freight train (can I get an AMEN for that??). In the beginning, someone just tosses you the conductor's hat and says *go drive the train*. Only you have no idea how to go about driving a train, or what any of the dials and levers do, and you don't have the slightest idea how to even get it out of the station. But suddenly, there are all of these people watching you. Judging you. Waiting to see if you'll be able to figure it out. Or if it will all just stall out before it even gets started.

So... you go to work.

Frantically throwing any and everything you can on the fire, just trying to build up enough steam to get those wheels to turn over once. To make something happen. You're looking for things that will act like coal to your engine, things that are pure fuel and will burn hot. The kinds of things that will build up speed quickly. But in that frenzy to just make something-*anything*-happen, it can be very easy to be fooled into throwing what we call "rocks" on the fire. These are things that look and feel a lot like coal, but in reality don't move you forward at all. And actually have the real possibility of weighing you down instead.

When Justin & I were first getting started in this business, we looked around and we said "*Great! We're wedding photographers.....now, what are we supposed to do? What's everyone else doing?*" Here's a really great tip for your business and your life: if ever you find yourself saying "What am I *supposed* to do? What's everyone else doing?" you're probably already on the wrong track. We definitely were.

We looked around in our market and asked what are we supposed to do, what's everyone else doing, and came up with the following four-prong "rocks on the fire" approach that we used to start our business: print ads, bridal shows, cold calls, and email blasts.

First, we spent \$10,000 in taking out print ads. Money that we did not have. So we did it on credit. Which in effect, proved to be like taking this brand new baby of a business that we had and tying a 10,000 pound lead weight to the back of it. And then wondering why we weren't picking up any speed. Since we were spending all of this money we didn't have, we went ahead and spent \$3,000 more signing up for bridal shows. All two

of them. And then from those mailing lists we got after the shows, we would spend days trying to reach out one on one doing cold calls and emails blasts.

Not surprisingly, most people never wrote back. Let alone hired us.

And the few people who did want to meet with us, were the very same ones who were keeping us in those "job interview days" of our business. The ones who wanted to find the biggest bang for the least amount of buck. But looking back now, we know it's not surprising at all that they would act this way. Because remember, the way your clients find you, trains them on how to think about you. So when these couples were finding us as one of 25 photographers in the back of a magazine or one of 30 photographers at a bridal show, they were already being trained right off the bat to think of us as just one of many, lined up one after another.

*And that all they
had to do was
compare us apples
to apples, a
photographer is
just a
photographer.*



"If you ever find yourself asking, what am I supposed to do, what's everyone else doing, you're probably already on the wrong track."

The Real Fuel is Word of Mouth Marketing

During these job interview days of our business, it wasn't all bad news however. Although most of the couples we were meeting with were finding us from one of our rocks on the fire marketing techniques (and thereby keeping us in that "one of many" cycle), there were a few bright, shining exceptions.

These were the couples who had found us because *someone else had said our name*; and they were the couples who came in already pretty sure that they wanted us *in particular* to shoot their weddings. And I'll be honest, they were like a light in the darkness for me. Because they gave me something to hold on to. In short, they gave me **hope**.

When these couples came in for a meeting, they actually wanted to connect with us. They wanted to know what we had in common, and they were looking to build a relationship with us. They weren't just looking for the most bang for their buck, and it did not matter to them what Photographer B down the street was offering in his packages. They wanted *us*. Because these were the couples who *got* us. And there is no better feeling in the world, than the feeling of "they got us." We started to realize that the couples who were finding us because someone else had said our name, were the couples that a) we most connected with and would have wanted to be friends with anyway and b) were the couples most likely to later go out and say our name to someone else.

Enter a giant over-sized light bulb going off over our heads and the proverbial a-ha moment: The real fuel for the kind of fire we were trying to build is ***word of mouth marketing***.



Word of Mouth Marketing is Where It's At!

(and other blah blah blahs)

Now, wait. Let's hold up there for just one minute.

Because I know what you're thinking. And I love when I know what you're thinking. *Yea, yea, yea. Word of mouth, I get it. Everybody knows about word of mouth marketing by now. Why don't you tell me something I don't know.*

And that is exactly why we wanted to break this part down. Because it seems like these days *everybody* is talking about "word of mouth marketing," as if it's something you can just pick up at the grocery store. *Go grab yourself some word of mouth marketing- it's right between the tooth paste and the tropical scented detergent- and you'll be all set!* And the fact is, so many people are talking about word of mouth marketing right now that it seems to have lost all of its real meaning- like one of those words you say over and over again until it doesn't make sense anymore- and along with it, its real power. In other words, word of mouth marketing has become something people are just paying lip service to.

So before we go even one step further, let me break it down for you. Ready? Here we go. **Just because they're talking about you, it doesn't mean they're saying the *right* things.** And just because you're booking, it doesn't mean you are using word of mouth marketing to your full "fuel on the fire" advantage.

We do workshops and mentoring sessions all the time, where the attendees will say to us “Yea my word of mouth marketing is great. I mean, I’m getting bookings...so I MUST have good word of mouth marketing, right??” But here’s the thing: If you’re getting those bookings because someone is out there saying things like “*Oh you should check out my photographer...he’s really, REALLY cheap!*” or “*Oh my photographer was so patient with us when we did our 457 family combinations*” then word of mouth marketing is not working for you. Instead, it’s keeping you in the spin cycle of exactly where you don’t want to be: shooting weddings in the price range you don’t want to stay in and with the couples who don’t value what you can really do. But we can change all of that just by acknowledging the following 3 things:

1. Getting the booking is not the win. Getting the booking that will turn into 10 more *ideal* bookings just like it is the win.
2. It’s not THAT they’re talking, but WHAT they’re saying.
3. It can be cultivated.



Seedless Watermelons

By the summer of 2006, we were really starting to understand that first point: the booking is not the win; getting the booking that will bring you 10 more ideal bookings just like them is the win. One of the hardest lessons that we were learning out of the job interview days of our business, besides just how bad it was making us feel, was that if we continued to keep on this track then building our business was *never* going to get any easier. And that we would always have to struggle as much as we were struggling right then. Here's why.

Out of all of the couples that we booked during our job interview days, not a single one of them was responsible for referring us a future booking.

They would hire us. Be friendly enough with us through the wedding. And then as soon as those images were delivered, we would never hear from them again. It was nothing personal. And that in itself was the heart of the problem. Sure they might have loved their pictures, may have even appreciated us for taking them. But at the end of the day, they saw our connection as *transactional*, not *relational*. And as soon as that transaction was over, they had no more invested in us. Where our business went from there- whether it succeeded or failed- was none of their concern.

They became, in effect, **word of mouth marketing dead ends** for us.

If you think about it, these kinds of clients are a lot like seedless watermelons. Sure when you're getting that booking, it might seem ripe and juicy and sweet. But here's the thing about seedless watermelons: if that's all you ever grow, then what are you left with next year? No new watermelons, right? And each year's harvest becomes as difficult, as uncertain, as the year before. That becomes a very vicious cycle indeed.

We soon realized that if Justin & I are only ever two people with four hands and twenty-four hours in any given day, then we were going to have to figure out a way to work smarter, not harder, for our business if it was ever going to get any easier. (And we knew that it *had* to get easier really soon if we weren't going to burn out.) So the best way we could think to do that, was to align ourselves with the kind of people who would be willing to go to work for our business. The kind of people who saw themselves as honorary PR agents of our business. The kinds of people who cared about us *in particular*.

We knew that if we only ever have space for 30 or 40 weddings in a year, then giving even one of those spots away to a couple who saw us as merely transactional was like trading it for ten future bookings. If, on the other hand, we would just hold out for the couples who are as invested in us as we are in them, then each year we would be raising up an army of evangelists to go out and help do the work for us in making each year's harvest easier and more fruitful than the last.

It was a leap that we were more than ready for.



5 Ways to Reap a Better Harvest

How to spot a Seedless Watermelon

1. They tell you they are interviewing a lot of photographers

I'm a big believer in the idea that business is a lot like dating. If I go on a first date with someone and they tell me they have three more first dates that week, you can bet that they aren't going to get a second date with me. Sure there might not be anything inherently wrong with it, but still you somehow just know this person isn't right for you. The same is true when we're looking for potential clients. We want to hold out for the people who want us in particular, not the ones who are just shopping around.

2. They are comparing photographers apples to apples. They reference another photographer's pricing or what they're offering, and ask you to match it.

For us, anytime a potential client tells us what another photographer is charging or what they include in their packages, that just proves to us that they are missing out on the most crucial element: that it's ANOTHER photographer. For our clients, we want to hold out for the couples who can't even imagine going with anyone else, regardless of what they include.

3. They aren't interested in building a relationship

Anytime a couple tries to rush through that connection and "what do we have in common" part of a meeting to jump right to the bottom line, that's a big red flag for us that they see us merely as a transaction. And that they will most likely become word of mouth marketing dead ends.

4. They don't mention anything they've learned about you in particular

If it becomes clear very quickly that a potential couple hasn't taken the time to get to know *anything* about us from our blog, our about page, or the Stuff We Love page (more on that to come!), then there's a really good chance they aren't the type of couple who is going to go to work for our business. We're looking for those couples who are invested in us as people, the same way that we are in them. Because those are the kinds of couples who will naturally be invested in growing our business as well.

5. They want you for the wrong reasons (i.e. you've shot in their location before, so you're familiar with everything)

We've seen it all: you've shot at our location, you did my friend's wedding, you've shot in the dark church we're getting married in, you've worked with our planner before. All of those are ok to start. They are great ways for them to stumble upon us initially. But for any of them, if they aren't followed up at some point really quickly with a "and I now love you guys & your work," then they are probably trying to hire us for the wrong reasons. They don't want us in particular to shoot their wedding because of who we are as people, they just want someone (anyone!) who they think can do the job.

Triangle Offense of Marketing

Now that we've established that word of mouth marketing (WOM) is where it's at- that an authentic, organic, grass roots, viral word of mouth marketing campaign of the *right* people saying the *right* things is the purest kind of fuel you can throw on the fire of your business- now we have to determine who those right people are and what it is we want them saying. First, let's start with the "who."

For us, when we were first starting to understand that the clients who were finding us from WOM were being trained to think of us differently and primed to want us in *particular*, we said to ourselves: hey, we want more of that! We like these couples. We connect to these couples. We would want to be friends with them anyway. This is the kind of business that we want to run. So we said to ourselves: if having these couples find out about us from someone saying our name (and saying the right things about us) was the key to having the kind of business that we wanted, and those "job interview" clients just made us feel like we were doing everything wrong...then we were going to have to take a stand if anything was ever going to change.

So...we made a choice.

We decided right then and there that we were going to stop taking these job interview clients altogether. That if a couple just saw us as one of many, and all they knew was that they were *supposed* to have a photographer but they didn't care who, we decided to just stop taking those kinds of meetings at all. And I'm going to be honest with you- because I *always* want to be honest with you- we made that decision at a point in our business before we had come anywhere close to building up the kind of momentum that would give us the luxury of doing so. And I'm not for one second going to fake the funk: It was hard. It was a struggle. It was a constant stretching of faith. But six years later, I can tell you that it was a choice that has made all the difference in where our business is today.

We also knew that if we were going to make the decision to cut out the majority of the leads we were getting at that point, then we had darn well better find a way to get more of these ideal clients who were coming to us from Word of Mouth. So we started by asking ourselves, who were the people who were most likely and best situated to go out and say our names. And what we came up with was a three-pronged approach we called our **Triangle Offense of Marketing**.

The Triangle Offense of Marketing was comprised of the three groups that we came in contact with the most, who were in a position of knowing us, knowing our work, and having the opportunity to tell someone else about it. Those three groups were: the ideal clients we had been lucky enough to book already, the vendors in our area that we had either worked with or *wanted* to work with who were getting the kinds of couples & weddings that we wanted, and the other photographers in our area whose work & businesses we respected. These were the three groups we focused all of our efforts on first when we made the switch to a WOM paradigm, and of those three groups we put the ideal clients we had already been lucky enough to book at the very top of the pyramid.

Why would we do that?

Why would we continue to invest energy & resources into couples who had *already pulled the trigger* on booking us? We already had their date locked in, the retainer had been paid. Why wouldn't we take that energy and use it for finding new clients? Here's why:

The ideal clients you already have will go out and do the hard work to bring you more ideal clients just

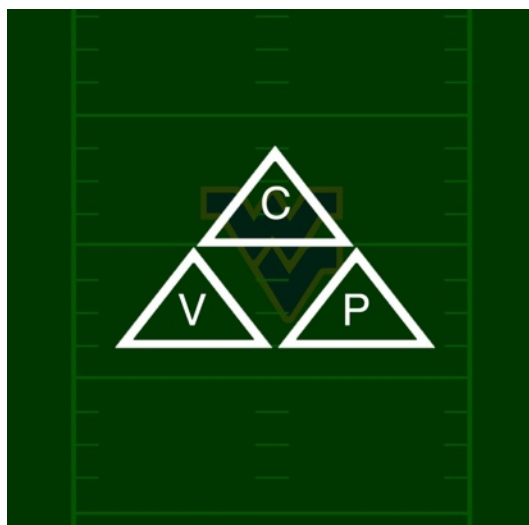
like them.

Here's an example of that in action. This is a post on our facebook page from JC & Esther, two of our most ideal clients-turned-friends of all time.

Esther posted something on your Wall:

"We're at Saltwater Farm now meeting more potential client/friends of yours who love your work! You & Mary are going to be able to set up camp here :) We're referring you to everybody!"

Now here is what's really interesting about this note: JC & Esther don't live anywhere near this venue. They live about three hours away and had just stopped in on their way driving through to say hi. But then they ended up staying for four extra hours *promoting us* to new potential brides & grooms. We did not know they were there. We did not ask them to say anything for us. We didn't pay them or compensate them in any way for working for us. They just did it because *they care about us*.



When Justin & I saw this note, we were blown away. Sure, we had tried to give JC & Esther a great experience, and sure, they had really liked their pictures. But these guys were on to buying houses and having babies. Life was moving on for them. So why on earth would they spend four hours out of their day off telling other people about us? In other words, now that the wedding was over... why would they care whether or not their *wedding* photographer continued to get bookings?

I was asking myself questions just like this when I stumbled upon the book *Lovemarks: The Future Beyond Brands™* by Kevin Roberts, former CEO of Saatchi & Saatchi™. In it, he talks about this idea of “Loyalty Beyond Reason.” He says that Lovemark companies are the type of companies whose customers feel so connected to them, that they will go out of their way to buy from them and to make sure that other people know about them too. He says that these customers feel so invested in the companies they believe in, that they almost appoint themselves as honorary PR agents. And they go out into the world telling everyone they know about this great thing that they’ve discovered.

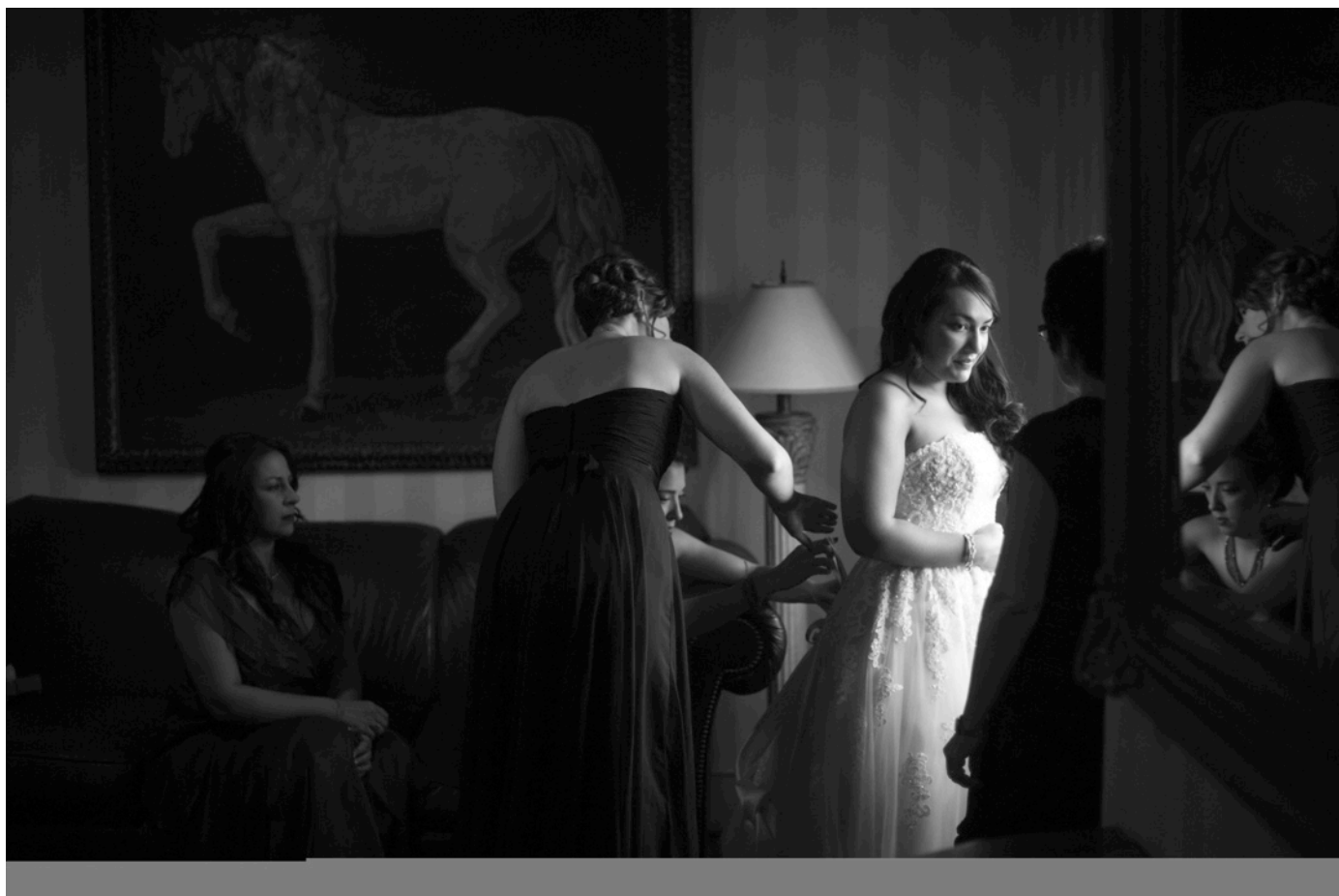
Let’s take a look at another quick example:

Hey Guys!

*Hope you are doing well as your wedding season is wrapping up and hopefully you are able to take some time out for yourselves! I want to thank you guys SO MUCH for our amazing photos....you guys are truly one in a million and Dave & I are absolutely over the moon happy with the way they came out. I will recommend you guys to ANYONE I know who is getting married. **I just can’t help myself**, I just want to share you guys with everyone I know since you are so absolutely talented at what you do.*

*Love,
Melissa*

What really jumped out to me in Melissa’s email is that phrase *I just can’t help myself*. Like she just felt compelled to go out and say our name. It might not be *reasonable* for Melissa to feel that way. Just like it might not be *reasonable* for JC & Esther to stay four hours talking to potential brides & grooms for us. But thank goodness we’re not dealing in reasonable. We’re striving for loyalty *beyond* reason. Because that’s the kind of loyalty that will keep those ideal clients going out and bringing you more ideal clients just like them.



To read more about or purchase *Lovemarks: the Future Beyond Brands* go to <http://www.lovemarks.com>



Connection Marketing

We're going to talk more about those other two groups in our Triangle Offense of Marketing, the vendors and other photographers, as well as how we get all three groups saying the *right* things about us a little later when we dig into a subset of Word of Mouth marketing: Experiential Marketing. For right now though, before we talk about what other people are saying about us, we want to first make sure that *we* are saying the right things about ourselves. That we are putting out the kind of information about who we are and what we love to shoot on our website, blog, and social media to make sure that we are both a) pulling our ideal potential clients-turned-friends closer to us and b) at the same time getting those "job interview" type clients to self-filter out. And we're going to do all of this with what we call Connection Marketing.

The first key to Connection Marketing that we need to establish, is that if you're trying to make it your goal to connect with every single person who comes across your site, *then you're doing it wrong*.

Connection marketing is ***not*** about watering down everything that's interesting or unique about yourself so that you don't turn off any potential clients. Because what we know is, it's not a real connection if you have to hide who you really are. And if that connection is not truly there, then that loyalty will not be there. ***Connection Marketing is about putting out there exactly who you are, unapologetically, and letting the right clients find you and love you for that.*** So the goal of Connection Marketing, then, should never be about making yourself like Julia Roberts in My Best Friend's Wedding: *Love me, pick me, choose me. Let me make you happy.* It's more like Popeye: *I am what I am.* Take me



or leave me, love me or hate me. But the people who love me, will love me without fail. And the people who don't were never going to get it anyway.

The trick to really understanding this is, whether someone comes to your website and absolutely falls in love with your *OR* if they come to your site and say this person definitely isn't for me, either way....***you've won.*** That's because we want the people who were going to connect with us anyway, to connect with us as strongly as possible. And we want the people we're not a good fit for to find that out early before we've had a chance to disappoint them. Because if we're not a good fit, there *will* come a point when we do. And this way we're also avoiding the fall out of bad word of mouth. So really, the only way we lose with Connection Marketing is if someone comes to our site and walks away luke warm.

If being unapologetically You is the first step, the other key component to Connection Marketing is about putting as much of yourself out there as you possibly

can. The more 'You' that's out there, the more "targets of connection" you create with your potential ideal clients. And the more a couple discovers that they have this common ground of connection with you, the more they find themselves not being able to picture anyone else with them on the wedding day. So whether it's your website, your blog, or your social media, our second piece of advice is....***never miss a chance to make it personal.***

For our Connection Marketing strategy, we have both broader landing bases of connection like our website, our about page, and our promo video. And then we also have smaller "mini targets of connection," like our posts on Facebook & Instagram and our "Stuff We Love" page, to help fill in the gaps. Because what we know is, the more complete that picture is we're painting of who we are, the more we are going to find the couples who will love us without fail.



“Take me or leave me, love me or hate me, but the people who love me will love me without fail.”



10 Ways to Create a Better Connection

1. Create a “stuff we love”/life behind the lens page

A “Stuff We Love” or life behind the lens page is a great way to share a composite of the things you love that help make up who you are. And even better than that, it creates a landing pad of mini-targets for potential clients to connect even more with you. On our Stuff We Love page, we have everything from tv shows to wine to this random little cheesy “hearts on the door” type Inn that we stay at in Vermont every year. And just from that one singular page, you would be amazed at how many potential clients have walked away feeling like they already know us before ever meeting us. And even more importantly, like we would get them in a way nobody else ever could because of all we have in common. So it’s not unusual at all for us to get inquiries that say things like, “Omigosh, you like pumpkins? WE like pumpkins!” (I know, what are the odds?? :) Extra bonus points if they also like pumpkin coffee!

2. Create an about page that doesn’t sound like everyone else’s

First of all, can I get an AMEN that writing your own about page may just be one of the hardest things you’ll ever have to do? It’s tough, I get it! And when you’re facing that blinking cursor, it can be really tempting to just do what everyone else is doing or what you think you’re *supposed* to do. When we were trying to write our about page for our site, I started looking around to other photographers’ sites to see what an about page was *supposed* to be. This is what I saw: *I first fell in love with photography when I was 13 years old and someone gave me my first camera. There is nothing more humbling than being with someone on their wedding day. I love, love.* Now, let me be clear here. If you want to shoot weddings, I *hope* those things are true for you. And if you feel that way or have it currently written on your about page, I’m not saying that it’s wrong or I don’t believe you. I’m just saying that when *everyone else* is saying it too...it starts to lose its meaning. So whatever you decide to write to tell these potential clients who you are, just make sure it’s something they’ve never heard before. So that it’s something they won’t forget.

3. Ask yourself: what are the 3 quirkiest things about me? Be specific.

Which brings me to number three: don’t be afraid to show your quirks. Those weird little things about you that make you, YOU, may just be your strongest ammunition. So put it out there. And be specific. A lot of times in workshops or mentoring sessions when I ask people to list out their 3 quirkiest attributes, they’ll tell me things like “I have a strange sense of humor” or “I like weird combinations of food.” Okayyyyyy. But be more specific. Tell me about your sense of humor, give me examples of things you find funny. Don’t just say you like weird foods. Tell me that every single night before bed you eat a peanut butter & pickle sandwich. Now we’re on to something! Don’t believe me? In our about page, I talked about how Justin & I do the dishes together and how that’s turned into a mantra for how we take on life together. And now we have a collection of “You Wash, I’ll Dry” dishtowels from people all across the country. People connect to littlest parts that make up who you are.

4. Don’t be afraid of the mundane minutia

And that brings me to point number four: when you’re writing your about page or blog posts about your life, it can be so tempting to ask yourself, “WHO CARES?” But based on my experience, the more you are asking yourself that, the more you are probably on the right track. When I was writing about us doing a household chore like the dishes, I kept thinking to myself *who on earth is ever going to care about this?* It turns out, a lot of people did. And I think that’s because it connected us to them. It was something they could relate to. And the fact that we saw beauty in something so small, made them feel like we could see that beauty in their story too.

5. Give people a behind the scenes pass into your life with blog posts & social media

Posts about your work or your business are great. But nothing will connect people to you like giving them a backstage pass into your life will. We use our blog & social media updates to open the door on what our lives are really like together. And the more we talk about how our dog chewed up a dollar bill or I burned the first ten batches of pancakes that I made, the more people feel like we’re friends before they have even met us.

6. Don't be afraid to be vulnerable

If you're going to share your life, don't be afraid to share glimpses of all of it: the good, the bad, and the ugly. I'm not saying you have to share things that you feel should be kept truly personal or air your dirty laundry (in fact, I think it's quite the opposite). But nobody has a perfectly *amazing* life all day, every day. And people just won't connect to you, if you try to pretend like you do. So don't be afraid to share some of the struggles, missteps and embarrassing moments along the way. And you never know... you being brave enough to do so, just might give someone else the courage to do the same.

7. Blog, Instagram, Tweet, and Facebook often

Going along with creating a back stage pass into your life with blogs & social media, you're going to want to make sure you are giving those glimpses often. In the same way that very few people would want to tune in to watch a show that only had episodes every once in a while with no idea when the next one was coming, the only way people become really invested in your story is if you are committed to telling it often.

8. Give the backstory

Remember that the "story" you're telling doesn't just have to be limited to the current one. People love to hear the backstory. Talk about how & where you grew up, what you went to school for and how you ended up here, and how your business went from just getting started to where it is today (or if you're just getting started, talk about that too!) For me, that's growing up poor in West Virginia with a dad who is a logger, law school, and a big leap believing that the net would appear. We form so much of who we are based on how we grew up and the path that led us to here. Chances are, there is someone out there (a *lot* of someones probably) who will connect with that story.

9. Have conversations/ ask your audience to weigh in

Let's face it. Writing your story is a lot easier when you know you have someone to talk to. So rather than keeping the conversation going one way, ask people to weigh in. We often run blog contests or just add a question at the end of the post. It gets you a lot of different perspectives and it adds more voices to the conversation than just yours. Plus from a logistical point of view, just seeing comments encourages more people to comment. So it helps to build the audience as well.

10. Show what you want to shoot

Finally when it comes to your work, make sure that *every single image* that you're putting out there on your website, blog or social media (yes *every. single. one.*) represents something that you would like to shoot a lot more of. Because I'm a firm believer that there is a market out there for *everything*. And whatever you put out there will attract the people who want exactly that. So if you don't want to take 457 family combinations, don't include a ton of family pictures in the blog post. If you don't want to do the cheesy bridal party shot over and over again, don't have the *one* image from that time your bride asked you to do something cheesy posted on the front page of your website. Make sure that every single image that you put out there is acting like a mini billboard for your work, saying only the things you would *want* people to see (and seek you out for) in your work.

Cultivating Scarcity

How We Filter

If every other part of our website is about giving potential clients the chance to connect and fall in love with us- *or not*- there is one page, our info for clients page, that is dedicated to making it clear that we are a limited resource. And, as such, that we don't take every wedding that comes to us. In other words, that them being able to hire us is not a guarantee. So if you were to sum up our website strategy in one phrase, it would be *love, love, love, love, LOVE...scarcity*. And for the people who have decided that we are absolutely the only photographers for them, the presence of that scarcity makes getting us all the more urgent and important. The way that we cultivate that scarcity is two fold: 1) the language that we use to explain that we don't take every wedding and 2) the way that we actually go about filtering our clients based on the form we have them fill out. I've included both below.

info for clients

Hey there! And thanks so much for stopping by to hang out with us. Justin & I can't wait to talk to you more and hear all about the wedding! We know this is such an exciting, but crazy overwhelming time in your life. And we TOTALLY get that, because we just went through it ourselves not too long ago.

So, we just want you to know that you can count on us to be there with you every step of the way... to help you think up a cool theme or just grab a cup of coffee when you really need a break from it all. (That, and because I NEVER turn down a good excuse to grab coffee!) Because for us, it always comes back to one simple principle that has become the very foundation of our business: our clients are our friends. Which is why we have the BEST clients in the world!

It's so important to us that we feel like we can really connect with each of our couples, which is why we actually don't take every wedding that comes to us. Only if we really feel like we will be the very best fit for you guys on your wedding day, will we agree to be the ones there with you.

Because, honestly, we don't think you deserve anything less.

Just like your favorite pair of jeans... that old song on the radio... her hand in yours... isn't it great to find the perfect fit?

All of our packages are custom tailored....because one size fits all never seems to look good on anybody. If you'd like to find out more information or set up a time to hang out with us more, then just fill out the form below. We can't wait to hear from you!

Name:

Fiance's Name:

Email:

Phone:

How did you find us:

Where are you getting married:

When are you getting married:

On a scale of 1 to 10, how interested are you in having Justin & Mary shoot your wedding:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (very)

Tell us what you're looking for:

SEND EMAIL

All fields are required

The first part that we'll talk about is that language that we've written at the beginning. In its most relevant part we state, "Just so you know, we actually don't take every wedding that comes to us. Only if we really believe that we will be the absolute best fit for you, will we agree to be the ones there with you on your wedding day. Because honestly, we don't believe you deserve anything less." And that last part is absolutely true. I wholeheartedly believe that every bride should hold off until she finds the photographer that she just can't imagine having her wedding day without them there to document it. But there's a second unspoken truth there as well: we also don't believe *we* deserve anything less. Because what we know is that, like you guys I'm sure, we are going to give 110% for this couple and pour out our hearts & souls into capturing their day. And we just don't want to do that for couples who see us as merely as a transaction anymore.

Putting this language out at the beginning of the page, sets the expectation right from the start that they are not the only ones who will be in the driver's seat. Sure, they will be meeting with us and feeling us out to see if they think we would be a good fit for them. But it's important that they know that we will also be doing an interview of our own. I can't tell you how much this one statement alone has done to get us out of the hot seat of the job interview days, and into a position of having control over the trajectory of where our business is headed. Plus, just the fact that we have turned ourselves into a scarce resource has made us even more in demand. It's basic economics.

The flip side of cultivating this scarcity however, is that you have to be willing to put your money where your mouth is. In other words: **you have to be willing to walk away**. If you say you aren't going to take every wedding that comes to you, then you have to be willing

to pass on the inquiries that aren't a good fit. And that's where filtering comes in.

For our filtering, we are basing most of our decisions on the information that is gathered from that form above, that every couple fills out when inquiring with us. (If they skip that step & email us directly, I will have them go back and fill out the form unless their first email was so amazing that I *know* they are a couple I want to book.) From the form, we are looking for a few key things to see if this might be a wedding we would want. The first level is purely logistical: are we already booked that day, are they getting married at a location we have already said we don't want to shoot at again, do they say in the email they have a specific budget that is much lower than our starting point. If any of these are a yes then it's an automatic bump, and we would just write back letting them know we are unavailable to take the wedding and that we would love to recommend another photographer in our place.

The second tier of filtering includes more surveying the landscape: how did they find us (was it from that one bridezilla five years ago? Then we're probably not going to take that wedding), what type of location are they getting married in (is it a "wedding factory" type venue that churns out seven weddings a weekend? Probably not going to take that one either), how highly do they rank us on that 1 to 10 scale (we're looking for the 9's & 10's, anything 7 or lower usually gets bumped right away unless there's some redeeming factor in the "tell us what you're looking for box").

The final, and most important, tier of filtering comes from what the couple has written in the "tells us what you're looking for box." This is our open comment field that doesn't have any character or length restriction on it. So the couple is free to write as much (*or as little*) as they want. And you will be amazed at how much people will tell you about who they are as a person when you give them the opportunity to write as much (*or as little*) as they want.

Just like everyone else, we get the "Prices and packages. Thanks." type inquiries. I absolutely hate those, and 99 times out of 100 those inquiries get bumped right away. Because what that says to me is that they took no interest in us in particular, and they are just doing research to compare us apples to apples to the twenty-seven other photographers they just emailed as well. Sometimes we get the inquiries that are six paragraphs long telling us everything we have in common and how much they love the work, they've ranked us as a 10, and they're getting married at a venue we love. Those couples can book on the spot if they want to. No further filtering is required.

But just as often, we get inquiries that are somewhere in the middle. They've ranked us at an 8, they've asked for our prices, but then they've said they loved the work and, oh yea, they have a golden retriever too! For those couples, the next tier in the filtering will be to set up a phone meeting. Because once you get someone on the phone and can hear their voice tone or how excited they actually are, you can usually tell pretty quickly if they will be a good fit for you or not. And if they're not, I've gotten really good at talking people out of us.

The hands down most common question we get about filtering is, of course, how do we go about turning down weddings without making the couple mad. The answer is that the earlier in the process you can catch it, the easier it is. So we're looking for our red flag indicators (*see a list of our Top 5 red flags on the next page*) right in that initial email. If we can spot them there, it's really easy to just let them know that we're unavailable so they can move on. If it gets to the phone meeting stage, like I said, I'm *really* good at talking people out of us. I will just take whatever that red flag is that's going off for me, and turn it around as a way to say "No, but let me help you." So, "No we won't take the final payment after the wedding, but I would love to recommend Photographer A who is more flexible on their contracts." Or, "No, there isn't a four-hour coverage package, but I would love to recommend Photographer B who is super talented but is just getting started, so I think she'll be more in the price range you're looking to stay in." Very rarely has a "no, but let me help you" gotten us in trouble, and most people have actually really appreciated our help in finding them someone else.

The hardest step in the process to turn a wedding down is, of course, in or right after the meeting. If a couple that we didn't want to take wanted to book in or very shortly after the meeting, we would just have to ask them to let us talk it over and get back to them. And then we would write to let them know in a very honest, direct, but *kind* way that we just don't think we'll be the best fit for what they're looking for. That we're afraid that we'll ultimately disappoint them, and we would just rather disappoint them now than have them be disappointed with their pictures.

And I think that's the biggest lesson to take away here: sure a couple may not *love* it if you decide not to take their wedding. But that's far less fall out to deal with from a word of mouth stand point, than if you actually took the wedding, shot it, and have them out in the world saying you ruined the pictures on the biggest day of their lives.

It's far better to hold out for the couples who want exactly what you do.



The Top 5 Red Flags We Look For

1. They are looking at a lot of other photographers.

We mentioned this when we were talking about how to spot a Seedless Watermelon, but I think it bears repeating here. We want the couples who want us *in particular*. Those are going to be the clients we have the strongest connection with, and who are going to be the ones most likely to become fiercely loyal to us and go out into the world saying our names. Telling us in the very first inquiry (or the first meeting) that they are looking at a lot of other photographers, to us means that either a) they are trying to create competition among us to get the prices lowered or b) they aren't really bothered as to which photographer they end up with, as long as they are getting a good amount of bang for their buck. For us, we would rather hold off for the couples who care about us in particular.

2. They don't want getting ready pictures.

When a potential client tells me that they just want coverage of the ceremony and a few hours at the reception, but that they don't need any getting ready pictures, that sends up a big red flag that a) they probably don't value photography very much or they would want images of those "anticipation" moments or b) they might not like the way they look in pictures and that is why they are trying to limit them. And if that's the case, we know that we probably won't be able to make them happy with *any* of the pictures that we take.

3. They say their fiance hates having his picture taken/doesn't value photography

We see this in inquiries a lot more than you might expect. The bride will go on and on about how much she loves photography and wants to hire us, but then she'll say that she will have to do a good bit of convincing to her groom because he doesn't understand the point of photography and doesn't like having his picture taken. This is a HUGE deal breaker for us, because we want both members of the couple to be excited to have us there and excited to have their pictures taken together. If one of them is just dragging the other along, it will make the shoot a lot harder and I think that lack of excitement comes across in the pictures.

4. They re-write/mark up the contract

As you can imagine, having gone to law school and written our contract myself, I am very protective of that document. But I think this is a pretty universal red flag whether you have an esquire after your name or not. While we will occasionally entertain minor adjustments to the contract (i.e. increased privacy restrictions for some of our clients who are in the public eye), in general if I get one of our contracts back from a client and they have "red-inked" all over it this is a wedding we are most likely going to pass on. Besides the fact that everything in our contract in there is there for a reason, I think the bigger issue here comes down to trust. If a couple doesn't want to pay until after their pictures are delivered or if they only want to do a \$500 retainer, that says to me that there is something fundamental that is lacking in the trust they put in us. And if that trust is lacking at the contract stage, that will almost certainly translate into a lack of trust throughout the relationship.

5. They are rude in the first inquiry, say they want to have input on your style, or admit to being high maintenance.

It will also occasionally happen that we will get one of these inquiries that starts right off the bat speaking to us as if we are already "the help." They will tell us what they want, what they expect, how things are going to need to be adjusted if we want their wedding, and what they expect included before they will ever consider a package with us. I just have this really good rule in life: if someone is rude to you before they've even hired you, it's only going to go down hill from there.

Our Ideal Client Profile

Now that we've looked at some of the things we *don't* want in our clients, let's take a look at some of the things that we do. What are some of the common characteristics our most ideal clients tend to possess? Here are the top 10.

1. Both of them come to meet with us.

We're looking to see that both members of the couple are equally excited about & involved in the wedding. In other words, that it's not just her day and he couldn't care less. Going along with this, it's also usually *just* the two of them (i.e. no parents, bridesmaids, etc) that come so they can get to know us two on two, because they value that relationship.

2. They are successful in their own right.

Whether they own their own business, are a professional athlete, or are just really good at what they do, our ideal couples tend to be very passionate and successful people.

3. They are planning very personal details

When Justin & I were getting married, we wanted to put together details that gave people an understanding of who we are *together*. So that if they just knew me or just knew Justin prior to the wedding, they could come in and instantly get a feel for "us." Plus, we just really wanted to take care of our guests with all the goodies. We like couples who do the same.

4. They tend to be foodies & wine drinkers

Our couples tend to appreciate things like really good food and good wine. And they'll pay a premium for it. They love the experience, they love savoring life, they love investing in something that is an art in and of itself.

5. They shop at J.Crew™, Restoration Hardware™ & Whole Foods™

Justin & I are pretty preppy people, so J.Crew is kind of a uniform for us. And we spend more money than we should at Restoration Hardware & Whole Foods because we like the textures, the craftsmanship and the thought that goes into it. Our clients tend to shop at similar places for similar reasons.

6. They are thoughtful to each other and everyone around them.

Our most ideal couples just continue to blow us away with how thoughtful they are to us, to everyone around them, and to each other. These are the kind of couples who will come to find us and make sure we've eaten at the wedding. Or the ones who will do super thoughtful gifts for each other, for their wedding party, and for us.

7. They are a happy couple.

I know this one sounds like a given, but it's really not. And it bears mentioning. If they genuinely like each other, if they are affectionate, if they light up when they see each other...let's face it, it makes our job a whole lot easier.

8. They're getting ready & having the wedding at beautiful locations, typically a vineyard or estate.

In the same way, it's just easier to get pretty pictures when you're shooting in a pretty location. Our best couples choose beautiful backdrops for both the wedding & the getting ready.

9. They read the blog.

We like couples who have taken the time to get to know us, *the people*, instead of just us the photographers. We love couples who can tell us our dog's name or my favorite Starbucks drink. And if they start off reading along, chances are they'll keep up with it and they'll get other people reading too.

10. They book on the spot, don't need to meet with other photographers, and place photography as one of their top priorities.

I will actually tell couples that if they're walking out of the meeting and they don't *know* we're the ones they want with them on the wedding day, then my hope is that they will keep looking until they find someone they do feel that way about. Our most ideal couples know they have to have us, and they book right away because they don't want to risk the chance that someone else will book us before they can.



Ideal Client Profile

Now let's work on yours! In a very stream of consciousness way, write out some of the first things that come to mind that your most ideal clients have had in common. For now, don't over-think it. Just write.

Experiential Marketing

Ok, let's just be real for a second. I want you to know that I understand that the "filtering" component to this whole model we've been teaching you, can be something that's really hard to handle. *Really, I do.* You're just getting started or you're in a place where you feel like you're being forced to start over, and here I am telling you to *turn down* work. What am I...CRAZY? I know it can be really tempting to just dismiss this part as "well, it must be nice for them." But what I want you to remember is that, in the beginning, we're filtering by the quality of *people* not the quality of wedding. Later it can be both. But in the beginning, it's ok if you're not yet getting these amazing weddings you've always dreamed of, as long as you're picking & choosing **a m a z i n g c o u p l e s .**

Because *those* couples will go out and do the hard work to help you get more of both, if you will just follow one simple rule: ***treat your \$1000 clients like you would your \$10,000 clients.***

Part of the reason we put so much effort into filtering our clients in the beginning is because we know that as soon as they are one of our J&M brides, no matter what, we are going to do everything in our power to wow them with our experience. That includes everything from that first meeting when they book us to well beyond the wedding. Which brings us into our second phase of WOM marketing: **Experiential Marketing.**

If connection marketing is about pulling the right people to us, experiential marketing is about telling them they made the right choice. Here's why: ***"We fall in love with experience."*** When we go somewhere and have an amazing experience, we feel like we made a smart decision. We feel good about the purchase we made. And we want to tell the world about it.

Before we go any further, I think it's important that we clarify that by "having a good experience," I don't just mean good customer service. It's so much more than that. In Lovemarks: the Future Beyond Brands, Kevin Roberts tells us that the companies that command the

most loyalty and create a culture around themselves, are the ones that jump off the page and wrap their clients in the experience of them. And they do so by appealing to all five senses.

We know that's right.

Let's take the example of a massage. Imagine that we hold everything about the service itself, the actual massage, as a constant in these two scenarios: one with all the extra experience that goes into it and one without. The quality of the massage itself doesn't change, just all of the outside factors. In scenario A, we imagine the massage just as it normally takes place: in a

spa like setting, with fluffy robes and slippers, relaxing music playing in the background, water with

orange slices to sip on and some dried fruit to taste. The lights are low and the treatment room smells like lavender. And when you lie down on the table, the sheets are soft and warm. This is the massage that we are used to.

Now imagine a Scenario B. Where you walk into a bright, florescently- lit waiting room. You are given a paper, hospital-gown type garment and you sit on a cold table filling out forms. There is no food, no drink, no calming music in the background. And the room smells like antiseptic. Then without any warning or ceremony at all, the masseuse just comes up and starts rubbing on you without saying a word.

Is that something we would pay \$150 for? I wouldn't think so.

We fall in love with experience.

It's pretty powerful when you think about it that way, isn't it? So we started thinking: why aren't we putting this to work in our business too? We learned from what Roberts said about the five senses, and we set out to create that kind of experience for our clients as well.



And, for us, the first key to creating that kind of sensory experience is something that we adopted about a year into our business: **meet on your own turf**. If you have access to your own studio space, that's great. If not, a home studio will work just fine. Yes, even if you just live in an apartment. Yes, even if it's not that nice. And yes, even if you have kids. For five years we made it work from our not so nice two-bedroom apartment on the second floor of a three floor building. And while we may not have kids, we do have an 80 lb golden retriever who thinks he's a lap dog and sheds like crazy. So we know where you're coming from.

You can meet at home, you can lease a studio, you can go in on sharing a space with some other creatives. But what I **do not** recommend is either meeting at a coffee shop or going to them. With very rare exceptions, going to them makes you the vacuum salesman. We've talked about this. You're on their turf, they have the upper hand, and you can't even offer them a water because it's not your water to offer. I really don't recommend it. I also don't recommend the coffee shop scenario. Here's why: you have no control over the variables. You have no say in what music is playing, how loud the espresso machine is, the decor, or whether there is a child crying in the background. It's a step up from meeting at their place, but there are much better options.

For the last seven years we have met couples on our own turf, first in our not-so-nice two bedroom apartment and now in our house where the whole first floor is dedicated to the studio. When you meet on your own turf, a couple of things happen: 1) you get to determine all the variables of what music is playing, how the room is set up, what drinks you get to offer and 2) because it's your own space, you can be 100% comfortable in where you sit, whether you put the glass down on the coffee table or not, where everything is, and if you want a drink you can just pour one. You take the lead and set the tone when it's on your own turf. And there is nothing like home field advantage.

When you are working in your own space, now you have the ability to create a custom experience for your couples, and you can do it by thinking about how they will take in the meeting through all five senses. When a couple walks through our door, the first thing we think about is how the room smells. Normally we go with either a lavender vanilla spray- because it is very calming and they will subconsciously feel more relaxed around us- or chocolate caramel because, well, it's just delicious! But either way, it's the same idea as a real estate agent baking cookies or simmering apple cider when they are trying to sell a house: they want the potential buyer to be able to imagine themselves at home in the house. We want this potential couple to be able to envision themselves calm & relaxed hanging out with us.

The next thing we think about is sight. This comes into play not just with how we decorate the room, to look like they're sitting in our website with teal walls and vintage furniture & cameras set out, but also with the lighting. One thing that you will never see us do is have

the overhead lighting on during a meeting. It's always pin lighting, lamps and/or candle light to set the mood. After sight, we also think about sound. For us this comes down to what music is playing in the background, and not just whether it's "wedding appropriate" but whether it actually reflects us. So for us, that's almost always country music (Mary) or singer-songwriter music (Justin).

Once that couple has made their way into the room, the next thing that they will experience will be touch. We intentionally chose our chocolate brown couch not just for the color and appeal to sight, but also because it is made from a soft, velvet fabric. And the teal, ruffled pillows on it are made of an equally soft silk. We had actually originally bought another set of pillows, but returned them when they felt too synthetic. Because we know our clients are going to be interacting with them, and touch matters. Don't believe me? Think about it the next time you walk through a Restoration Hardware™ or Pottery Barn™.

Finally that brings us to taste. Right in front of where we seat our couples, there will be a coffee table absolutely covered in food. Depending on the time of day of the meeting, we might do warm muffins, strawberries and mimosas (brunch meeting) or dark chocolate, blackberries, cheese and a nice red wine (evening meeting). But either way, there is plenty to delight the tastebuds. And everything we choose has the common thread of being rich and decadent because we like those words being associated with our brand.

These are things that feel like they might be a bit of a splurge, but an absolutely necessary one at that.

The Experience in Action

Let's take another look at experiential marketing in action. First, I'm going to take a look at one of the companies I am most loyal to, the green mermaid herself...Starbucks™, in comparison to their competition, Dunkin Donuts™, based solely on the sensory experience I had at each. We're going to take a look at all five senses, paying special attention to what I experienced from each company from the second I walked in the door. And then, on the next page we're going to ask you to think of one of the companies that *you're* most loyal to, the kind of company you tell everyone about, and really break down what kind of experience you get from them.

Starbucks™ v. Dunkin Donuts™

Ok, ok, before we even get started, I'm just going to ask that you forgive me in advance! I know some of you out there are completely loyal to DD over Starbucks, and you have your reasons and I respect that. :) But just indulge me while I make this case in light of everything we've been talking about with wrapping your clients in the whole experience of you. And how big of a part that plays. Not too long ago, on the same day I went into both a Starbucks and a Dunkin Donuts, and I took special note of my experience. These are my findings.

Starbucks

Dunkin Donuts

Pin LED lighting, warm rich tones on the wall, black & white photography, great furniture, funky chalkboard signs, the smiles of happy baristas.

Sight

A bucket with dirty mop water as soon as I walked in, florescent lighting, plastic chairs, the face of an unhappy employee.

The smell of warm roasted coffee hit me as soon as I opened the door.

Smell

Bleach from the bucket. And donuts that I'll be honest, smelled a bit stale.

Milk being steamed, people having relaxed conversations at their tables, baristas happily bantering with customers, singer-songwriter music playing in the background.

Sound

No music playing. No conversations. An unhappy employee sounding annoyed to take my order.

That card board cup with the signature sleeve that makes me feel I'm in a movie with Tom Hanks. The ceramics of the mugs on display.

Touch

Styrofoam cup.

Coffee, free samples of something sweet, a drink made custom for me.

Taste

A drink that was wrong. And no free samples of anything sweet.

What's One of Yours?

*Now, think of one of the companies YOU are most loyal to.
Imagine that you've just walked in the front door.
List out your experience.*

Sight

Smell

Sound

Touch

Taste

The 5 Senses and What We've Done

Sight

Teal walls like our website
Chocolate brown couch w/ teal pillows
Vintage furniture & vintage cameras
J's & M's scattered around the room
Our vintage "One Way" sign from the blog
Low lighting
Candle light

Sound

Country music like Taylor Swift or Keith Urban
Singer Songwriter music like Matt Nathanson, Jason Mraz or Tristan Prettyman
Sound of fire crackling in the winter
Sound of ocean breeze blowing in during the summer

Smell

Candles burning (pumpkin in the Fall, vanilla cupcake in the Summer)
Room spray (lavender vanilla or chocolate caramel)
Warm cookies
Chocolate
Coffee

Taste

Blueberries
Biscotti
Warm Muffins
Chocolate caramels
Dark sea salt chocolate
"Robusto" cheese from Whole Foods™
Wine
Tea
Coffee

Touch

Velvet chocolate brown couch
Silk teal pillows
Good quality wine glasses to hold
Linen boxes & grosgrain ribbon on info boxes
Thick sheets of paper on pricing menu

Brand Repetition

In Connection Marketing, we talked about everything that we do to give people the opportunity to fall in love with the two-dimensional version of us on our blog and through social media. Now on the meeting day, we want to take all of that and bring it into the experience of our three-dimensional world. So we've created the goal for ourselves that our meeting space should kind of feel like this couple is now sitting in the real life version of our website. In addition to everything that we talked about with the experience we're creating with the 5 senses (including the fact that our walls are painted that same teal blue color as our website) we also want to create what we call ***Brand Repetition***.

What we mean by Brand Repetition is that if they have seen it on the website, we want to make sure they can experience it in real life. If they see that we love Starbucks™ coffee on the website, we want to make sure we're serving Starbucks™ coffee in the meetings. If they have seen the vintage "One Way" sign we have in our header pictures on the blog, then we want to make sure the real One Way sign is sitting off in a corner when they walk in. On our site we talk about J.Crew™, Justin's vintage camera collection, and my love of country music. So you can bet when they come in, we'll be dressed in something that either is or feels like J.Crew™, we will have some of Justin's cameras on display, and there will be some country music playing in the background.

The Two Minute Drill

(Ok, we've got them in the door & wowed their 5 senses. Now what??)

The "Two Minute Drill," is something that we came up with that we use to define the whole tone & trajectory of the meeting. It's basically this: for at least the first two minutes starting when the couple walks in door, we will refuse to talk about anything related to photography, business, pricing...or their wedding.

I think the first few make a lot of sense, and hopefully seem pretty intuitive. You don't necessarily want to hit them with your portfolios or pricing sheet before they've even had a chance to settle in. But why not their wedding? I mean, doesn't every bride & groom love to talk about their wedding?

Sure. Eventually.

But not right out of the gate. ***Here's why: it makes them feel like they're being sold.*** Justin & I learned this the hard way when we were engaged, and made the vast mistake of going to exactly *one* bridal show. Going down the aisles between the booths, we felt like we were running the proverbial gauntlet, with vendors half-tackling us as they all jumped out and said the same thing. ***When's the WEDDING?!!***

So that pretty soon, we started to realize that *When's the WEDDING?!!* was just code for "I would like to sell you something now!" And the worst part, was that all of these vendors were using the same line, thinking that they were saying something remarkable. And that we had somehow been fooled into believing that they actually cared what we had planned.

On the other hand, when a couple comes in and sits on our couch and for at least two minutes we talk to them about anything else in the world other than their wedding, it does three things: 1) it gives them a chance for those walls to come down and to feel like they don't have to be on their guard all the time, 2) it's remarkable. If I *don't* start off the meeting saying the same thing everyone else does, it says to them "here's something different." And that's the kind of tone we want to set for the whole meeting. And finally, 3) Because we're not "on" or trying to sell them something right away, we're a lot less nervous in the conversation. We're just two people getting to know two other people. And that

translates into a relaxed confidence that those clients pick up on and think: now this is the kind of person I want with me on the wedding day.

Ok, so if we're not talking about their wedding or our pricing right away, what *are* we talking about?

We've included some ideas for talking points on the next page for the Two Minute Drill that you can use, but in general we want our two minute drill topics to have a few common factors. The first is, we want them to be the kinds of topics that allow them to get to know as much about us as we get to know about them. A lot of people will give the advice to only ask a lot of questions, not talk about yourself, and make it all about them. But we actually believe the meeting should be a very two-way street. Remember that we want couples who want us *in particular*, so we want them to be as interested in getting to know us as we are in them. We want to be able to tell them where we grew up, where we went to school, what we do for fun, what trip we just got back from, what tv shows we're watching right now. We're using that first meeting to start training our clients right away to take an interest in us the people (not just us the photographers). Because the couples who are most interested and invested in us as the people, are the ones most likely to go out there and keep saying our names.



The second common factor we look for in our two minute drill topics is that they give us a way to differentiate ourselves from your stereotypical "Joe Schmo" cheesy wedding photographer. We're looking to show a side of our business and ourselves that is different and above & beyond that "one of many" mentality. Because the more there is to us and our story, the more different that we are...the harder it is to lump us into that group. So we'll talk about how I went to law school before joining the business or how Justin went to one of the top schools for advertising photography. We'll talk about the shoot we just did in California, or our "Walk Through a Wedding" Workshop and that we're teaching other photographers, or the shoot that we just collaborated on with a local planner. We want our couples to know that we're serious about what we do, and that we're excelling at it.

We want them to know that we're out there and we're hustling and working hard and making exciting things happen. That we're passionate about what we do. Because the more exciting our business becomes, the more excited they're going to be to have us as their photographers.

The final component of the two minute drill is just making time for that "reverse sell" aspect. They might be there to see if they think we would be a good fit for them, but we need to make sure we're doing our own interviewing too. Because for this business model we've been talking about to really work, it isn't merely enough that they want to hire us. We have to actually *want* to take the job too. So we're making sure to ask them

questions like "what do they do for fun," and we're paying attention to the answers. We're paying attention to their body language and how they interact. If the groom looks bored, is rude to us, or puts down his fiance in the meeting, that's probably not a wedding we're going to take. If they can't think of a single thing they do for fun together or she makes fun of the proposal (yes, we've had that happen before!), then that's also probably not a wedding we're ever going to take.

Ideally, those "two minutes" will turn into more like twenty minutes, will turn into two hours. And now we know we're on to a real connection.



5 Talking Points for The Two Minute Drill

1. The drive in to meet with you

Because you're meeting on your own turf, you'll know the ride in. You can use conversations about which way they came in or landmarks they would have passed, to easily transition into where they are living, how they ended up there, what restaurants are good near them, etc. Also, because we face the Long Island Sound, we time most of our meetings for sunset and a nice drive in. And that always makes for a great conversation starter right there. Like we always joke, hey, you gotta use your strengths! :)

2. Commentary on where you got something you're serving/ or something in the room.

Also because we are meeting on our own turf, that gives us boundless opportunities for two-minute drill banter. We can talk about the wine that we got in Napa that one time we did a shoot out there, and that leads very organically into bringing up the pictures to show them. Or we can mention how we just had to gut our whole house before we moved in because there had been a flood. We can talk about the fireplace that is original from the 1880s or our golden retriever when they inevitably see some fur laying around on the floor (those of you with goldens will understand!) The point is, you're setting the scene. You have control over the variables, so why not set out some great conversation starters at the same time?

3. Travel

Just like I showed you in the example above, we really like to bring up travel any chance we get. That's because it does a couple of things for us: 1) It's something we can connect on. Maybe they've been to that spot before or have always wanted to go or have friends who just went there. But nine times out of ten, travel creates some sort of connection with the person you're talking to. 2) The success factor. Remember that we like to do everything we can to separate ourselves from the "Joe Schmo" photographer that is just one of many. We want us and our business to stand out in particular. And just the fact that we're traveling for jobs and/or to teach other photographers elevates our credibility, and separates us from the fold.

4. Favorite movies/ TV shows

For us, it's really important that we have a similar sense of humor and like a lot of the same things as our clients. It's another ground of common connection for us and it just makes the likelihood that we'll get along with them that much higher. So we always like to ask them what the last movie they saw in the theater was or what their favorite tv show is. And that then opens up a bevy of conversation starters about similar movies, tv shows, books or actors.

5. Background Information (where they went to school, grew up, met, etc)

If all else fails, we'll just ask them where they grew up or went to school. And for some strange reason, about 9 times out of 10 one of them will have grown up or have family in New Jersey where Justin is from. So that builds another common ground of connection that they can talk about (Oh, which exit? Bruce Springsteen or Bon Jovi? :), and it leads nicely into where they went to school, what they studied, which sports teams they follow, where their family lives now, and how often they get back there. Which of course, in keeping with the heart of the two minute drill, also gives us a chance to answer all of those questions as well.

The Info Box

For most of our meetings, a good two hours will go by just filled with “two minute drill” conversations. The conversation will flow very organically from one topic to another, with Justin casually pulling up pictures that relate to what we’re talking about in the back ground. We just have our laptop plugged in to a 42 inch flat screen tv, and that is how we show all of our pictures. We’re never showing slideshows set to music, and we’re never forcing them to sit down and look at a sample album. **We’re just having a conversation.**

The goal is that at around two hours in, we’ll suddenly realize that we haven’t even talked pricing or packages yet and now it’s time to get down to business. But the last thing we want to do is to waste the past two hours of getting them comfortable with us, just to have those defenses shoot back up again. Enter: **our info box.**

They’re ready for the bad news on a flimsy sheet of paper. And instead, they are met with....a gift. It’s one of our 11x14 chocolate brown boxes with our logo embossed on the front, and it’s tied up with one of our signature teal bows. We go through the process of having them open it up right there with us, and when they lift the lid they see teal tissue sealed with a custom logo with ***their*** names on it. And let me tell you, if the box doesn’t get them, **that label does every time.**



Here are a few other things we include:

A sample contract

Our “build a package”
a la carte menu

Business cards of
other vendors we like
to work with that will
get them discounts in
virtue of being a
“Justin & Mary Bride”

Magazines (hopefully that we’ve been featured in) for planning.

And a gift just for gift’s sake: a J&M press printed card from WHCC that says “Stuff We Love” and contains two gift cards. It has a Starbucks card from me (Mary: Starbucks Junkie) and an iTunes card from Justin (Justin: Apple fanatic)

Our A La Carte Menu & The Lexus Theory of Pricing

There are a lot of different models & ways of doing things out there as far as pricing is concerned. And we don't believe that any one of them is necessarily the absolute *best* way of doing things. I think it depends on the person, their personal style of selling, and how comfortable they are selling themselves. But I will say this, whether it's a la carte or packages or some combination of the two: ***pick a style of selling that is similar to how YOU like to buy.***

When you're trying to decide how to set up what you offer and how to structure your prices, first ask yourself "how do I most like to buy when I'm the customer?", and then model your own pricing after that. Because the fact is, if you sell the way that you like to buy then you're just going to be more comfortable with what you're offering and how you're offering it. If you are not a person who likes to feel like they're being sold more than they bargained for, then the "upsell" strategy for albums and packages probably won't be a good fit for you. But if you really love all-inclusives and not having to think about any extras once you've paid, then unlimited coverage or packages that already include everything a couple would need, might be the way to go for you.

For us, Justin & I took a look at ourselves, and we realized that we are people who like to start with a base model and customize from there. Whether I'm buying a drink from Starbucks™ or he's ordering an iMac™ from Apple™, we like to build exactly what we're getting. And, we'll pay a premium to do so. So an a la carte menu was the perfect fit for us.

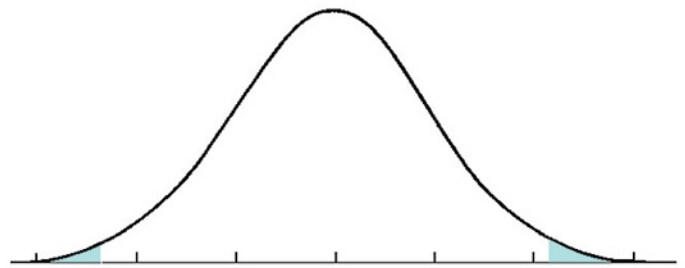
There are a few other things we really like about our a la carte system. The first is that there is no negotiation. Because everyone has to start with the base coverage and it *only* includes our time and the online proofing, we are never having any of those awkward conversations about "what happens if we take x, y or z out." The questions become very simple: *Do you want us to be the ones to shoot your wedding? Ok, awesome! Now, is there anything from this list that you want to include?*

The second thing that we really love about the a la carte system is that it keeps everything very simple. And because the client is the one choosing whether or not to add something in, we have actually found that we end up getting bigger bookings than when we used to have

set packages. It makes sense. There is this great quote that says, "People love to buy, but they hate to be sold." I think that, plus the fact that we feel more confident because we get to be so soft sell, is the heart of why the a la carte pricing strategy has worked so well for us.

The final thing that we love about an a la carte system is that it allows us to capture a larger share of the market than we had been going after with our set packages. To understand that, we're going to have to introduce you to what we call ***The Lexus Theory of Pricing.***

When Justin & I were first getting started, we went to a conference where one of the speakers explained pricing like this. He said that in any given market, there is a bell curve representing the way customers and photographers are distributed. On the far left, the bottom 2.5% fall into the truly "budget" category of couples looking for the absolute best deal they can get and photographers catering to it (packages of \$1500 or less). On the far right of the curve, the top 2.5% fell into the "high end" category of couples looking to spend the most/get the best and the photographers who serve that market (packages of \$10,000 or higher). And that left what he called the "ripe, juicy middle" of that in between 95% (couples looking for packages somewhere in that range in between, but usually around \$2500-\$5000.)



The good thing about the juicy middle was that about 95% of clients fell in that range. But the bad part, he argued, is that this meant so did 95% of photographers. So going after the juicy middle, in effect meant pitting yourself against 95% of the competition. If we ruled that out as an option, he said that left the other two extremes. And, as the argument goes, if you could either shoot 100 weddings at \$1000 or 10 weddings at \$10,000....why would you ever work 10 times as hard for the same amount of money?

“People love to buy,
but they hate to be sold.”

It's a good argument. *In theory.*

But the problem we discovered when we attempted to adopt this model is two-fold: 1) When you're only ever shooting 10 weddings a year, it makes it really *really* hard to ever get any Word of Mouth momentum building, and that 10th booking comes as hard as the first. In other words, the harvest is never getting any easier. And what we found, was that our bank account would do the pendulum swing between TEN THOUSAND DOLLARS.....and *negative fifty seven cents*. We were living in a constant feast or famine lifestyle. And it was taking its toll on everything. 2) The other problem with this theory of pricing is that it ignores a fourth, incredibly powerful cross-section of the market place: the upper-middle class bride.

The original theory of pricing assumed that all photographers would have to fall in and target one of three specific sections of the marketplace, but it never allowed for the possibility of a cross-over. Enter our ***Lexus Theory of Pricing.***



The name “Lexus Theory of Pricing” stems from companies that we looked at like Lexus™, Tiffany’s™ and Louis Vuitton™. These are companies who have done an amazing job of marketing themselves as a high end product, while maintaining base level options that were *attainable* (albeit a splurge maybe, but at least within the realm of possibility) for the upper middle class. If you think about it, driving a Lexus, wearing a Tiffany bracelet or carrying a Louis Vuitton handbag are not activities that are strictly reserved for the richest of the rich in that top 2.5%. In fact, they are the staples of the upper middle class. And yet, by offering the ability to customize, upgrade or add on to, these companies have continued to make themselves attractive to the top of the market as well. And in doing so, they have been able to capture a much larger share of the market.

This is what a la carte pricing has done for us. We market ourselves as a high-end, luxury product for the top of the market, and yet our base coverage made us attainable (yes, albeit maybe a splurge) now for anyone in more like that top 20%. But because we also have the ability to customize and upgrade with add ons, we can remain a luxury product for those truly top 2.5% clients as well. What these means for us, is a larger share of the market. And hitting the real sweet spot of both being able to do a good volume as well as booking at the higher price points.* You can flip to the next page to view our full a la carte menu.

*30 weddings at \$7500 (\$225,000), for example, is looking a lot better than 10 weddings we might have been able to get at \$10,000.



C O V E R A G E

- { } Coverage - 8 hrs Wedding Day coverage w/ Justin & Mary ((5,000))
- { } Coverage - 10 hrs Wedding Day coverage w/ Justin & Mary ((6,000))
- { } Coverage - additional hour of Wedding Day coverage w/ Justin & Mary ((500/hr))
- { } Rehearsal Coverage ((add 1,500))

A D D I T I O N A L S E S S I O N S

- { } One Hour Engagement session ((500))
- { } "Get to Know You" engagement shoot ((add 1,500))
- { } Destination Engagement shoot ((add 2,500))

A L B U M S

- { } Leather Craftsmen: Any size, up to 60 sides, includes High Res Disc of Images ((add 2,500))
- { } Couture Book: Any style up to 300 sides, includes High Res Disc of Images ((add 3,000))
- { } Willowbook Parent Albums: Set of 2 8x8 up to 60 sides each ((add 2,500))

F I N E A R T P R O D U C T S

Artist Signature Prints

- { } Ten 5x7 prints in 11x14 window mats ((add 750))
- { } Ten 8x10 or 8x12 prints in 16x20 window mats ((add 1,350))

Gallery Wraps

- { } 16x24 ((add 350))
- { } 20x30 ((add 500))
- { } 30x40 ((add 800))

- { } High Res Images on PASS ((add 1,000))

- { } "Wii Like to Have Fun" Challenge ((subtract 250))

How To Close the Deal

3 Things We Say That Result in Bigger Packages

(without feeling like a used car salesman)

While we do always remain very soft sell in all of our bookings, there are three things that we have learned to incorporate over time that consistently result in bigger packages. The key to remember here, is that for all of them they only work because they are based in honesty & what we *actually* believe, and because we have already established a foundation of trust by not trying to sell them everything or bully them into the sale.



1. All of our products are 20% off when they are included with your package.

We give a nice hefty discount to anyone who goes ahead and includes their album, parent albums, gallery wraps or the gallery of high res images up front when they are booking their package. Although that means that we will make less over all than if they paid full price, that incentive means that if they were thinking about an album or parent albums but were on the fence, it's usually enough for them to go ahead and make the leap. Which means that we're capturing more of those product sales that we might have missed out on had those incentives not been in place.

2. The full gallery of high res images is included with any of our couple albums.

As you saw on our a la carte pricing menu, the high res images are not included in our base coverage but can be added on for \$1000 (\$800 if they are added on up front). But if the couple decides to purchase any of our albums for themselves, the entire gallery of high res images (not just the ones that make it into album) is included with that purchase. Which means that in effect we've now given them an \$800 credit toward going ahead and including the album instead of just getting the disc. I'm a big believer that every couple should end up with a book anyway (which I'm very comfortable telling them since I've already established that trust), so this is a great way to help them bump up into building a package that includes one.

3. You don't want the first time I point a camera at you to be on your wedding day.

This is about as blunt or hard sell as I ever get in our client meetings. But it's because I really believe it. I think doing an engagement session before the wedding makes all the difference in the world as to how the wedding day goes, how comfortable our couple feels with us, how comfortable we feel being there, and how smooth the portraits go. So, I let them know that. Most couples who think they don't want an engagement shoot are just thinking of it in terms of already having a lot of pictures of the two of them or they aren't sure what they would do with engagement shots. And they're not thinking about it in terms of just practicing and getting comfortable in front of the camera. Usually as soon as I say this one liner, they are thinking about it in a totally different way and more than happy to go ahead and add on at least the basic one-hour shoot.

Protecting Your “Bottom” Line

Three Clauses to Have in Your Contract

Once you have worked so hard to create the momentum and Word of Mouth marketing that is turning into bookings for your business, now you have to make sure that your bottom line is protected. To do so, there are 3 clauses that we always recommend including in your contract:

1. Photography is not an exact science.

Cards go corrupt. Hard drives fail. Gear bags get stolen. In other words, stuff happens. Photography is not an exact science. And while it is our professional duty to do everything in our power to make sure that doesn't happen and to come equipped with multiple backup plans and coverage, it's also important to protect yourself from a catastrophic lawsuit in the instance that even in your best efforts something goes wrong. Here's an example of a “Photography is not an exact science” clause for a contract:

The undersigned Clients are hereby specifically put on notice and agree that photography is not an exact science and that on certain occasions, files or other photographic materials may be proven defective. The undersigned hereby agrees that in the case of defect in materials, equipment, procedures, loss of files, or any other factor that pertains to the production of images, the undersigned Clients specifically waive any claims including, but not limited to, negligence, breach of warranty, mental harm or distress.

2. Liquidated Damages

To go along with the above clause, it is also advisable that, in the event that a court does find against you in a case of negligence or breach, that you already have an agreed upon remedy stated in the contract. In other words, you want to be proactive in limiting the damages to some fair amount (the “liquidated damages”), so that one missed shot doesn't turn into thousands in mental distress penalties for your business. It is important that it be a fair & reasonable amount so that the courts don't throw it out as overreaching or “unconscionable.” For us, the fair amount we have settled on is a return of the amount of the contract price. Here is some sample language:

Client agrees that the liability of Photographer in the event of a finding of any breach of contract by a court of law or other arbitration judgment shall be specifically limited to the liquidated damages herein calculated as a refund of the contract price.

3. Cancellation Policy

And finally it is important to lay out the return policy in advance, in the event that a Client has to cancel. For us, we prefer to follow a timeline that corresponds to our payment schedule (50% retainer at booking, 25% 6 months before the wedding, 25% 1 month before the wedding). Basically, the closer it gets to the wedding when they cancel, the more of their payments that we keep. We've found this to be a fair policy, because the closer it gets to the wedding, the less chance we have of filling that date. Here is some sample language: (note that the word used is *retainer* not deposit, as a deposit by definition is refundable).

The liability of Clients in the event of breach on their part is set forth below:

- a. If breach occurs for any reason at any time after the signing of the Contract, the Clients agree to forfeit initial retainer and reimburse Photographer for any expenses, direct or indirect, incurred as a result of the formation of this agreement, and to incur forfeiture of photographic services.*
- b. If breach occurs within six months prior to the wedding date, Clients will owe damages as listed in (a), in addition to payment of the second installment and forfeiture of photographic services.*
- c. If breach occurs at any time within a month prior to the wedding date, Clients will owe damages in the amount of the full amount of the contract price, expenses of formation of contract, and forfeiture of photographic services. It is understood that no part of any order will be delivered and no service will be performed until any and all outstanding balances are paid in full.*

****Please note that neither Justin nor myself are practicing attorneys, nor do we claim to be or mean this portion in anyway to represent official legal advice or the practice of law. Please consult an attorney in your state for assistance in the formation of your individual contracts.**



“Let’s Give them Something To Talk About”



Our Client Gifts

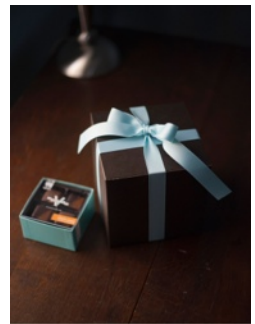
So if we've established that these couples we're now booking are the ones most likely to love us, connect with us, care about us, and go out saying our names for us....now we need to make sure we're actually ***giving them something to talk about.***

Gathering a group of clients like this together and not giving them an experience to rave about, is like raising up an actual army and not giving them any ammunition. They might be loyal to you, committed to you....but they aren't going to be able to fight for you the way you would hope they could.

This section is all about creating an ongoing experience for your clients between that first wow-factor of the meeting, until well after their wedding day. In doing so, you'll create these constant touches with your couples that act to re-arm and re-charge their Word of Mouth marketing for you. Here are the main gifts that we do as part of our client experience:

The Perfect Fit Gift

We know that booking with us is a big decision and a major investment. Making that payment to us for the retainer might be one of the biggest checks they've ever written. And even more than that, we know they are trusting us with one of the most important days of their lives. The "perfect fit" gift is all about saying *we've got this*. We took care of you before you ever signed a thing or paid us a dime, and we're going to keep taking care of you. And we just want you to know that we wouldn't have taken your wedding if we didn't think we were the absolute best fit for you on your day. So we send out a box of those chocolate caramels we serve in the meetings, all packaged up in brown & teal with a card that says: *Just like your favorite song on the radio, those old pair of blue jeans, her hand in yours.....Justin & Mary. Isn't it great to find the perfect fit?*



The Date Night Gift

About a month or two before the wedding, we know things can start getting stressful. So we like to send out a little date night gift, just to get them away from the stress of the wedding for a night and to remind them why they are doing this in the first place: that they love each other. :) Our gift includes some movie tickets, our favorite movie candy (Junior Mints for Mary, Whoppers for Justin) and some popcorn kernels with Justin's super secret recipe for homemade popcorn. In it, we include a card that says *Here's to spending a night in the most comfortable room in your house with the most comfortable person you know. Justin & Mary, we're all about date night.*



Silver Frames at the Wedding

Considering that we think of our clients as friends, that got us thinking: if we were going to a friend's wedding we would bring a gift; so why isn't that true for our clients as well. So, we started bringing one! As soon as we decided, we knew exactly what we wanted to do. I believe that every couple should have that one great shot that they keep in a silver picture frame on their mantle for the next 60 years. So we bring a silver 8x10 frame from Restoration Hardware™ with us to every wedding, as well as our portable printer, and print right on site to give it to them at the end of the night.



Holiday Gifts

At the end of the year, we always remember to thank our clients & our vendors for making it possible to live our dreams. One of our favorite "holiday gifts" that we've sent out in the past is a picture frame ornament with the year on it and one of their wedding pictures in it. We include a card that says *'Tis the season to be Married* (and the 'M' in Married is the M from our logo). We've also sent them out to the year's upcoming couples, and for those they were just blank with a card that said *For the Memories still to be Made.*



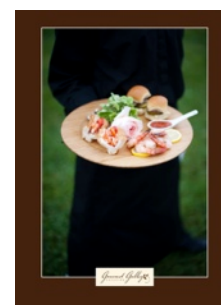
Vendors & Other Photographers

The same holds true for giving those other two branches in our Triangle Offense of Marketing- the vendors & other photographers- something to talk about. We don't want to just leave it to chance that they will have something to say about us, so instead we create those opportunities.

In many ways, we have started to think of the other vendors on the creative team as also being clients of ours in the sense that a) we want to make sure to get them pictures and b) throwing some gifts just for gift's sake into the mix doesn't hurt either! Here are a few things that we do:

Getting them images & our vendor cards

It's sad but true, but even just getting the images to our vendors is something that is remarkable for them. That's because sending out images to vendors is one of those things that is common knowledge but not necessarily common practice among photographers. So they are psyched just to receive the gallery they can download for free from, but we also like to kick it up a notch. We do that with our "vendor cards." These are pearl paper postcards from WHCC that we design with *their* logo, colors, and contact information. Note that we leave all of our information off, except for one small "Photo by Justin & Mary" line at the very bottom. Because it is now truly just a gift for them and doesn't come with any strings attached, and because the pearl paper is really impressive and maybe nicer than what they already had, now they are more than happy to give them out. And as they do, they are *saying* our name every time.....which I can tell you, is worth a million times more than having our logo on there.



Birthdays, Weddings, Babies

Once we have shot a wedding with a vendor and gotten her the images/vendor cards, now we have an in with her to call her up and invite her out to lunch. We'll pay. And we'll use that time to get to know her as a *person* first, not just a vendor who can do something for our business. We'll listen to the life that goes on behind the business. And I can tell you, that has been the best way we have found to build relationships in this industry: by investing in the person first. And real people have milestones that we can celebrate: things like her birthday, if she gets married, if she buys a new house, or when she has her first baby. For each of these things, we'll send out a little gift and a note from us. Never underestimate the power of that kind of investment in other people's lives.

Thank You's to Other Photographers

If another photographer says our name and because of that we book a nice package, you can bet that I have it in the budget to send them out a \$50 gift card to PF Changs™ so they can go get their lettuce wrap on. Or whatever it is we think they would like! In the same way, never underestimate the power of saying thank you!

Bonus: Packaging Resources

(Here are some of our best resources for packaging with impact)

Boxes: DNL Photo

Ribbon in Bulk: Ribbon Retreat

Boutique Gift Bags: Bags & Bows Online

Custom Packaging Tape: Phoenix Tape

White Shipping Boxes: ULine

Stickers & Boutique Cards: WHCC



Meetings in a Box

The Five Senses for Four Different Brands

(Some ideas to get you started!)

Brand 1: Modern & Clean

Sleek elegant furniture made of smooth material, white couches, pops of navy, perhaps a lucite chair or two, something with a mirrored surface like a coffee table... modern vases in all one shade (white perhaps) and grouped together filled with orchids, serve cocktails you have to make to serve like a martini or a mojito, have espresso or cappuccino machine brewing, serve small finger foods like mini quiches and macaroons. Have choice between still or sparkling water served in glass containers like Voss™ or Perrier™. Have Jazz or something soulful like Adele playing in the background

Gifts: silver frame, something monogrammed like really classic stationary, a bottle of champagne

Packaging: Press printed cards and boxes, all white with black imprints, simple satin bow in matching color to box. No wrapping paper... the imprinted boxes are clean and classic.



Meetings in a Box

The Five Senses for Four Different Brands

(Some ideas to get you started!)

Brand 2: Rustic/DIY

Decorate with found details and repurposed furniture, a reupholstered antique chair or couch, maybe a rocking chair or two... some details can include antique crates, bottles, mechanical gears. The color scheme is very natural, like moss green, tan, cream, and have a scented candle burning, an outdoorsy scent like pine in the winter and wildflowers in the summer. Have daisies in mason jars around the room, serve mini pies and other home baked goods, apple cider in mason jars (cold in the summer, warmed in the winter), mulled wine in the winter, DIY a few details for your home, like wall art made of something unexpected such as old palettes or farm windows. Have a really good mix of your favorite singer songwriters playing in the background.

Gifts: Bake your own cookie ingredients in a jar, a make your own s'mores kit,

Packaging: brown paper wrapping, twine, boxes made of a recycled material, bakers twine in green or red.



Meetings in a Box

The Five Senses for Four Different Brands

(Some ideas to get you started!)

Brand 3: Whimsical

Colors can be bright, fun, and contrasting... like lime greens and hot pink or yellow and blue. Have a brightly colored or patterned couch (a la anthropologie), perhaps some damask wallpaper, brightly colored flowers like gerber daisies or sunflowers in unexpected brightly colored containers. Mix something fun in with the flowers like pinwheels. Serve a fun fruity beverage like strawberry lemonade or key lime soda. Serve french fries in cones and have a mini candy bar set up with things like rock candy and lollipops that they can choose from. Have fun bright scents burning like creamsicle, fruit fusion, or passion fruit. Have a very eclectic mix of all your favorite bands from Lady Ga Ga to James Taylor on your playlist (have fun with your mix, and don't be afraid to look musically challenged)

Gifts: a picnic basket, a fun canvas tote filled with things like bubbles, pinwheels, and flower seeds in the spring and summer and pancake mix and maple syrup in the fall/winter.

Packaging: brightly colored boxes/wrapping paper with fun patterned bow (perhaps polka dots) ... attach something cute and unexpected to packages like a butterfly or flower



Meetings in a Box

The Five Senses for Four Different Brands

(Some ideas to get you started!)

Brand 4: Light & Airy

Have soft couches made of velvet, or faux suede in a pretty light colors, decorate with pink peonies & green hydrangeas, serve lemonade or tea with scones and finger sandwiches, decorate with pastel shades, light blue, pinks, creams... have a pretty scented candles like lavender lemonade burning. Have a mix of soft pretty music playing like Regina Spektor and Colbie Caillat.

Gifts: a warm and fuzzy blanket, bath salts and pampering gifts, like a gift certificate for a spa day

Packaging: simple box/wrapping in pastel color with cream satin bow. Pretty monogrammed cards to clients with press printed detail on them like a bird or flower.

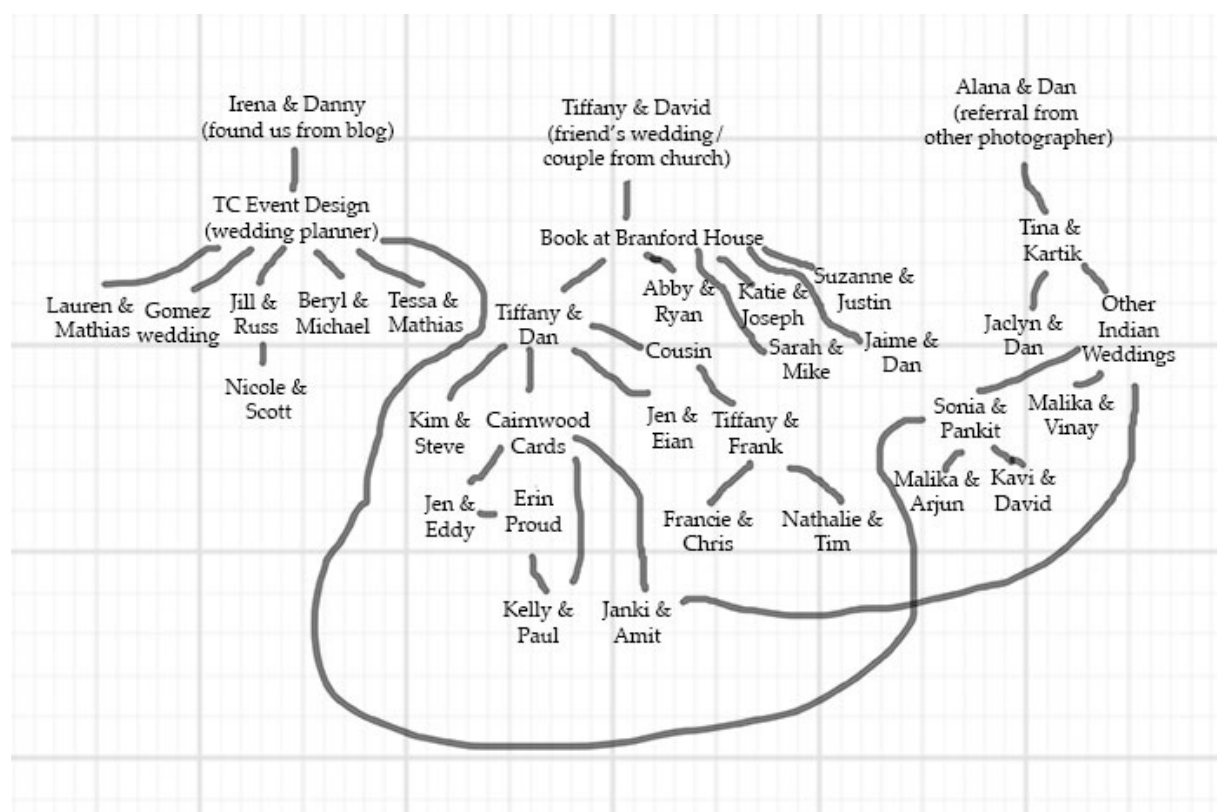


Cultivating a Cycle of Bookings

(Making each year's harvest easier than the last)

So we've now talked about how we put out the right messages to connect with potential couples, how we filter those down to our most ideal clients, how we wrap them in the experience of us in that first meeting and give them something to talk about long after they book us, and finally how we take care of the other vendors on their creative team. Now let's take a birds eye look at how all of that planting grows over time into a fruitful harvest.

We're going to focus in on three of our original couples: Irena & Danny who stumbled upon our blog, Tiffany & David who were a couple we knew from church, and Alana & Dan who were referred to us from another photographer. All three of these are couples from three or more years ago (2009, 2006 and 2007 respectively), and all of them have a direct path leading from them to one of our current 2012/2013 couples. Let's take a look!



Irena & Danny

Irena stumbled upon us when she was doing an internet search for photographers. She had just moved from California to Massachusetts, and was trying to plan her Miami wedding remotely. In one of her searches, our page came up. We did a phone meeting with her while we were out in Vegas for our second WPPI conference & she hired us to come to Florida with her. It was when we were down there, that we were first introduced to event planner Tamara Cohen of TC Event Design. But because it was sort of a fly in, fly out trip we didn't really get to spend a lot of time with her. And to be completely honest, I'm not even sure that we followed up and got her images after the fact. It could have been a totally wasted opportunity for us, but as luck would have it two of our branches were about to overlap (more on that to come) and we got the chance to work with her a second time on Sonia & Pankit's wedding at the Eden Roc Hotel back in Miami the following year. That was the wedding where we really clicked with Tamara & her team, and because they had done so many of the flowers & details we were sure to get them images and a set of our "vendor cards." From that relationship and referrals from the TC Event Design team (Tamara, Robyn & Michelle), we have since booked Lauren & Mathias, Jill & Russ, Beryl & Michael, and the forthcoming 2012 weddings: Tessa & Mathias & Laura & Christopher. As the final piece of this branch (so far!), Nicole was a bridesmaid at Jill & Russ's wedding and got to see us work. And she & her fiancé Scott have now hired us to shoot their 2013 wedding in Key West.

Tiffany & David

Tiffany & David were a new couple at our church when we first really getting started, and someone recommended us to them. These guys didn't have a huge budget for photography, but what they did have going for them was an absolutely beautiful location (the same one where Justin & I would get married the following year), a friend who was an event designer and was doing a lot of stuff for them at cost, and the fact that they were just a happy, beautifully in love couple. After their wedding, we took a big leap of faith and spent the money to have a sample album made that we could leave at the Branford House. It was such a big leap of faith because a) that was a lot of money for us to be spending and b) we weren't even sure if the Branford House people would show it since we weren't on any of their lists. But we made the leap, dropped it off and kept our fingers crossed. It turns out that they did put the book out, and that one act of faith turned into: Abby & Ryan, Katie & Joseph, Suzanne & Justin, Sarah & Mike, and our 2012 wedding: Jaime & Dan.

That book also got us Tiffany & Dan who saw the book at The Branford House, but brought us down for their wedding at Cairnwood Estate outside of Philadelphia. From their wedding, we got four more branches. The first two are that from their referrals, we were able to get Kim & Steve Slaton's wedding and our upcoming 2012 wedding Jen & Eian near Cape Cod. The third is that we sent images & another set of our "vendor cards" to Cairnwood directly. From that & from labeling our blog posts "Cairnwood Weddings: Tiffany & Dan" to get search engine optimization we were able to get Jennifer & Eddy and Janki & Amit. At Jennifer & Eddy's wedding, we were able to meet & work with the fabulous event planner Erin Proud , who got us Kelly & Paul. The final branch from Tiffany & Dan is that one of Dan's cousins who was at the wedding, saw the pictures and started referring us to her friends. She got us Tiffany & Frank last year, who just got us Francie & Chris (June 16th) and Nathalie & Tim (October 6th) of this year.

Alana & Dan

Alana & Dan found us when the advertising photographer Justin worked for back in 2006 told them he didn't do weddings, but that they should really check out Justin. We absolutely adore these guys and are still friends with them today. At their wedding, the best man was Kartik and he had his girlfriend (soon to be fiancé) Tina with him. When it came time for their wedding, these guys really went to bat for us and had to fight to hire us because a) we had never done an Indian wedding before and b) we are not in fact Indian :) so we weren't familiar with any of the cultures or traditions. But like I said, they really fought for us, and as a result we got our very first Indian wedding as a four day jaw-dropping event, concluding at the Boston Intercontinental Hotel. From Tina & Kartik, their friends Jaclyn & Dan also found & hired us and it also opened up a whole new Indian wedding market for us. One of their groomsmen posted some pictures on his Facebook feed, and from that Malika & Vinay found us and brought us to California. Sonia (of Sonia & Pankit) was a friend of a friend of Tina's, saw the pictures and hired us for their Miami wedding (that fateful wedding where we got to work with TC Events again). And similarly from friends of friends seeing pictures, we were able to book Malika & Arjun, Kavi & David, and Janki & Amit (who also had the connection with us that we had shot at Cairnwood before).

What to Take Away

*Start with whatever opportunities & jobs you are given. Don't be too proud to get a wedding because you know the couple from church or another photographer didn't want the job. And then make the ABSOLUTE most out of them you can.

*Follow up with your creative team & get them images and prints and/or cards.

*Invest in sample albums for your favorite weddings and locations

*SEO your posts "Wedding Location: Couple's Names" so that people searching for photographers at their location can stumble upon you from search engine optimization. But then make them fall in love with you from your site.

*Be nice to the wedding party & guests. They can easily become your future clients or even your biggest cheerleaders without you even knowing it.

*Do the hard work & give it time. Some of the seeds that were planted as far back as 2006 are still reaping a harvest for us in 2012.



Secondary Circle

If the first wave of our Word of Mouth marketing was about reaching out to those groups we had a 1 to 1 relationship with (people we had worked with or actually met in person), the second generation of fuel for our business came in what we now call our **“Secondary Circle.”**

The secondary circle is made up of all those people who have a removed connection to us, meaning that they may have never met us in real life, but they are connected to somebody who has. These are the co-workers of the bridesmaid who said our name and got all of them following along too. They are the Facebook friend of the groomsmen, who never actually came to the wedding but saw the pictures in the Facebook newsfeed. And now they are saying our name too. They are the sister of the florist who saw the disc we sent, and recommended us to a cousin who was getting married.

In short, the secondary circle is when Word of Mouth marketing goes viral. If you can start to get friends of friends saying your name, that's not like multiplying your word of mouth by two, or even by ten really. It's more like raising it to the tenth power. Or the **nth power**. It's exponential and unlimited. It's setting a few small brush fires and watching it turn into a blazing wall of an inferno. Because the fires are now setting fires, and those new fires are setting even more still. And that's when you have a marketing system that goes to work for you.

Some of our best inquiries that come in now will say under the 'how did you find us?' field something like the following: “Friend, Planner, Location website, wedding blog....you're everywhere!” And the more times they hear someone say our name, the more convinced they are that we are the **only** photographer for them.

But in order for the secondary circle to really take off, we first have to make sure those friends of friends are finding us in the first place. We have learned to supercharge our secondary circle in two ways: 1) By tagging a few select photos on Facebook with a comment under each one that links back to the full blog post and 2) Our blog comment contest.

The blog comment contest is basically where we send our couple an email as soon as the blog post is live saying a little something like this:

Hey Guys!

Hope all is well and you are loving married life! I just wanted to send you a quick note to let you know that you are being featured on the blog today (YAY!) and to let you know about a little contest that we run. If you want, you can send the link below out to all of your friends & family and have them leave a comment (or they can vote on a favorite!), and if you get:

25 comments you'll get an 8x10 print

50 comments you'll get an 11x14 print

75 comments or more and you'll get a 16x24 gallery wrap!!

That's worth it, right?? :)

*So much love,
J&M*

And as you might have already guessed, *everybody* wants the gallery wrap. So they will Facebook it, put it on their wedding website, and send it out to their entire email database. And now for every couple we post up, we're getting between 100-150 of their friends and family coming over to our site, seeing the pictures we took, reading what we wrote about them, and hopefully spending some time hanging around after that reading our personal posts, watching our promo video, and checking out the Stuff We Love page. And they're doing it all based on the qualified referral of someone they know, love & trust.

It's like Word of Mouth marketing on steroids. Without all the bad side effects. :)

Note that a common thread among our two methods of supercharging the Secondary Circle, is that either way-whether it's from Facebook or the blog comment contest-we want them coming over to our site. We want them to see our branding, look at our video headers with us in them, spend some time reading our words and getting to know us. And the longer we can keep them there & keep them coming back, the more they are going to feel that loyalty for us too.

And the more they'll want to go out and keep saying our names.



FINAL THOUGHTS

And the end, as they say....is the beginning.

We've given you everything we know about building up a business, and now it's up to you to go out there and run with it. To do the hard work. To fall down and try again. To get back up, dust yourself off, and make something happen. If when you go out there and look around, you find that there are no opportunities for you... I want you to roll your sleeves up and create your own. Because those are the sweetest kind of victories anyway, the ones you build with your own two hands.

The path will be hard. No one ever said it wouldn't be hard.

But what I will tell you is that it's *worth it*.

As you go forward, my final piece of advice for you is this: life is far too short to waste even one second of it drowning in ordinary. Demand something higher for your one wild & precious life.

Believe me, you're worth it.

So much love,
J&M





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