



THE
WEDDING SCHOOL
WORKING WITH AN ASSISTANT



WHEN ARE YOU READY?

- ▶ What do you need an assistant to do for you?
- ▶ What would make your day easier?
- ▶ Can you afford to hire an assistant?
- ▶ Can you afford not to hire an assistant?
- ▶ Are you ready to manage a staff?
- ▶ Are you ready to deal with payroll and taxes?



MY TIMELINE

- ▶ At first, I needed someone to help manage gear
- ▶ Next, they helped organize family formals
- ▶ A year later, I added holding an off-camera flash
- ▶ A few years later, I added some light shooting
- ▶ This is not a second shooter position
- ▶ I only employ one full-time assistant at a time
- ▶ I have 2-5 others that I trust to work with



HIRING YOUR ASSISTANT



QUALIFICATIONS

- ▶ Do you want someone who wants to be a wedding photographer?
- ▶ I will not hire aspiring wedding photographers
- ▶ I want someone who loves photography, but does not want to have their own business
- ▶ They have to understand that it's weekends, it's lots of weekends, and it's a real commitment
- ▶ They have to understand they can't call in sick



WHY THIS IS SO HARD

- ▶ You need someone incredibly reliable...
- ▶ ...but you won't know until they really get started
- ▶ It's a lot to ask of someone. Giving up weekends, week in and week out, is a huge commitment
- ▶ It's hard to convey "you can't call in sick" to someone who doesn't already work in the wedding industry
- ▶ It's not a glamorous job, and it seems like it is...until it isn't



WHERE TO LOOK?

- ▶ Craigslist
- ▶ Ask other wedding photographers if they know someone
- ▶ Ask on Facebook, and in photography groups (if that's what you want)
- ▶ I found Sandra on Twitter!
- ▶ Job postings at colleges
- ▶ Notifications on your site and social media



HOW TO APPLY

- ▶ A simple online form, such as Wufoo
- ▶ I want to see how they answer the questions
- ▶ I'm looking for no grammatical mistakes, a clear way of communicating, and a grasp of the job description
- ▶ I request a cover letter and a resume, and strike anyone who can't respond correctly
- ▶ I follow up via email or phone call



IN-PERSON INTERVIEW

- ▶ Be on time, be dressed neatly, be polite
- ▶ I ask why they want the job
- ▶ Anyone who replies with what they can get out of it is probably not going to work out - what do YOU bring to my business, not what can I do for you!
- ▶ Then we just talk. I want to get a sense of what they think the job will be like
- ▶ At the end of the day, you have to go with your gut

WHAT TO PAY



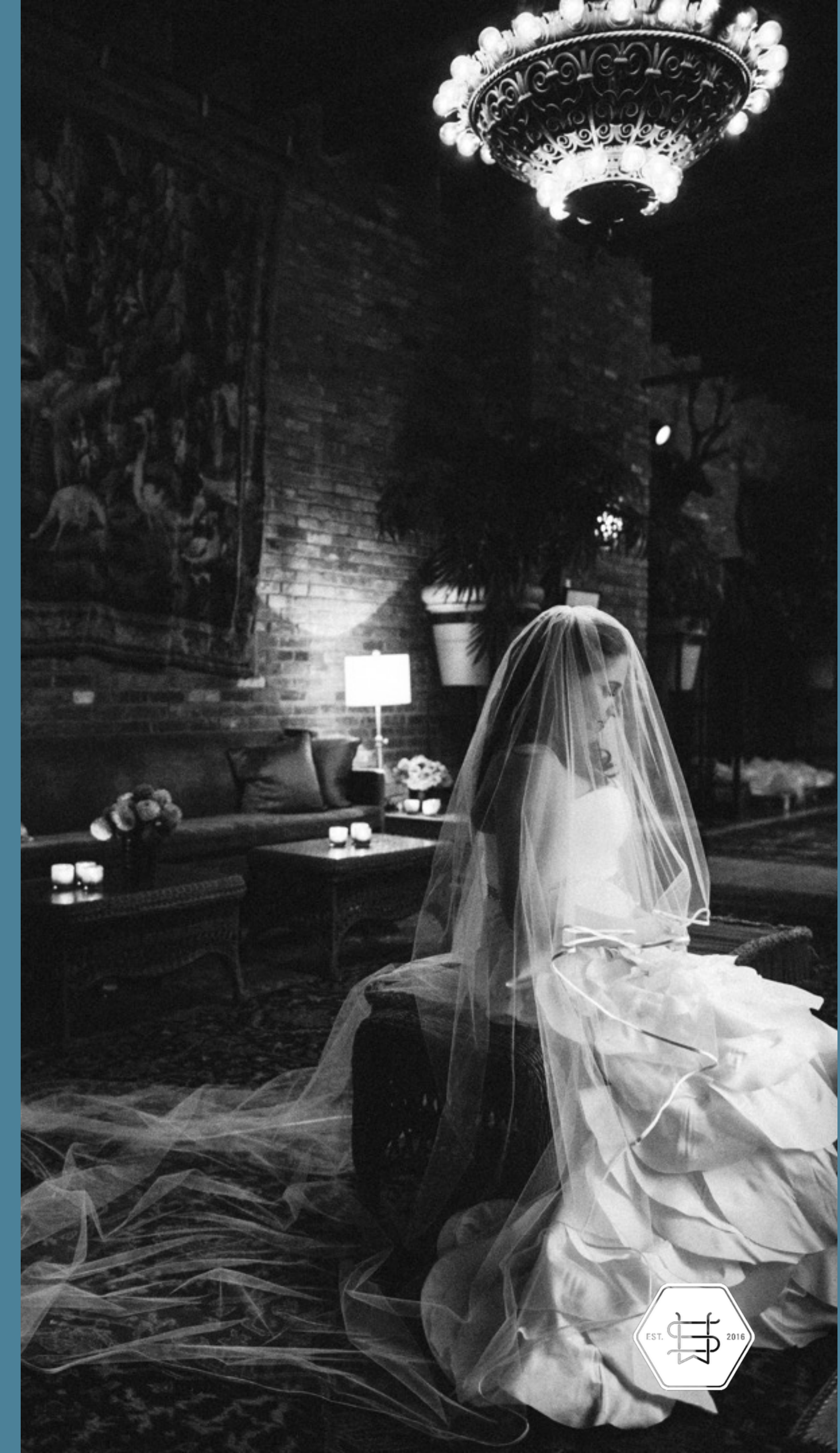
BASICS OF EMPLOYMENT

- ▶ My assistant is not a full-time employee
- ▶ She/he is work for hire
- ▶ They receive a 1099 at the end of the year
- ▶ Talk to your attorney and/or accountant, because at some point the volume of work and responsibility will necessitate making them an employee
- ▶ Test someone out for a few weddings as an independent contractor, then hire them



FROM THE LAW TOG

- ▶ The “control factor test”
- ▶ Do they have control over when and where they do their job?
- ▶ The whole relationship has to be assessed. Who directs and controls? How much independence do they have?
- ▶ You have to talk to your own lawyer about your requirements for an assistant and how many weddings they will work with you



PAYING YOUR ASSISTANT

- ▶ Salary is raised with experience and responsibility
- ▶ I started at \$150 and went up from there yearly
- ▶ What makes sense for you and your market?
- ▶ What works in New York might not be the same in Arizona or Florida or Wisconsin or anywhere else
- ▶ If you're not sure, ask your peers what they pay



HOW TO PAY

- ▶ I pay at the end of each event, or at the end of a double or triple
- ▶ I pay via Venmo, so I don't have to carry checks
- ▶ I never pay in cash
- ▶ If we get tips, we split them 50/50, every time (if I am working with my regular assistant)
- ▶ What about traveling?



A romantic scene of a man and a woman in wedding attire. The man is on the left, wearing a grey suit and a light pink shirt, looking down at the woman. The woman is on the right, wearing a white wedding dress, looking up at the man. They are standing outdoors under a tree with vibrant pink cherry blossoms. The background is softly blurred, showing more greenery and blossoms.

TRAVEL PAY

- ▶ If it's a day drive, and I'm driving, no additional pay
- ▶ If we're overnight somewhere, but it's drivable, I pay around \$50 more
- ▶ If we're overnight somewhere, and it involves a flight, I pay \$150 more and every single expense
- ▶ How much do you need that particular assistant? Will hiring locally make much of a difference?

WHAT IF IT DOESN'T WORK OUT



RED FLAGS

- ▶ Talking too much, texting too much, being unprofessional at weddings
- ▶ Being distracted, not paying attention, wandering off
- ▶ Whining and complaining
- ▶ Calling in sick and canceling too many dates
- ▶ Not being able to pick up things quickly
- ▶ Go with your gut when something doesn't feel right



TRAINING YOUR ASSISTANT



COVERING THE BASICS

- ▶ What should they wear?
- ▶ Meals and food
- ▶ Should they talk to clients or not?
- ▶ Texting, communicating with you, and their phones
- ▶ Behavioral expectations
- ▶ Meet with them and show them your gear
- ▶ Show them what a wedding looks like
- ▶ Make sure they know it's not education!



WHAT DO YOU NEED?

- ▶ What I need an assistant to do might be different from what you need
- ▶ Sometimes you don't know what you need - things Sandra does for me have evolved over time
- ▶ Some of your assistant's job is mental and emotional, not actual physical tasks
- ▶ Assistant = support system in all ways



WHAT I NEED

- ▶ Keep the bag organized
- ▶ Put things back where they belong for quick access
- ▶ Pre-installing batteries and having backups ready to go
- ▶ Having things ready before we need them, ex: light stick, new lenses
- ▶ Running interference with coordinators and family members
- ▶ Managing directions in the car
- ▶ Maintaining a kind approach to stressful situations



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS



Is there a point in the evening
when you put your light on a
stand and let them go home? Or
do they usually stay until the
bitter end?



I use the same assistant for every wedding. I'm concerned that I will freak out a bit if she can't come one day. Ive come to rely on her so much. I would love some ideas on how to find a suitable replacement (for that emergency if it arose)





IN AN EMERGENCY

- ▶ It's always helpful to have a few trained backups
- ▶ What if they're not available?
- ▶ Ask in local wedding photographer groups on Facebook
- ▶ Ask a close friend if all else fails, they might have no idea what to do, but if you know them well it might be easier than a total stranger
- ▶ Ask other photographers if their assistants are available, or if they have recommendations

“Do you provide meals for your assistant? Do you arrange transportation for them? Do you have an employee handbook of any kind?”



THE WEDDING DAY



WHAT YOUR ASSISTANT DOES

- ▶ Before the wedding day
- ▶ Wedding day, before you start shooting
- ▶ Bride/groom prep
- ▶ First look and portraits of the couple
- ▶ Ceremony
- ▶ Portraits of the family and bridal party
- ▶ Reception
- ▶ The end of the night



CHANCES FOR PROMOTION



WHERE TO GO FROM HERE

- ▶ More responsibilities
- ▶ Light “half second” shooting
- ▶ Promoting to second shooter
- ▶ Training new assistants
- ▶ Album design, editing
- ▶ Office manager
- ▶ Let time tell you where the relationship should go
- ▶ Asses quarterly at first, then yearly

