AN EMBRACING EXCELLENCE FIELD GUIDE

Before Your First Ceremony

THE PAPERWORK · THE PRACTICE · THE BOOKING

A field guide for the weeks between ordination and your first wedding.

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7,000+ life celebrations · 2,000+ officiants and celebrants certified · @the3kofficiant

PREFACE

A Note From the Authors

We've spent the better part of the past thirty years training and certifying wedding officiants, first through our own practice and later through Life Celebrations Academy, where we have now worked alongside over 2,000 officiants and celebrants across Canada and the United States. Between us we have had the honour of officiating more than 7,000 ceremonies.

One question comes up more than almost any other, and it usually arrives within a day or two of someone getting ordained: "Okay — now what?" The certificate is real. The excitement is real. And then comes the quiet realization that nobody actually explained what to do next — what paperwork matters, how to build a ceremony that isn't just a downloaded template, or how to get your very first booking.

This guide is the answer we wish someone had handed us when we started. It isn't a philosophy book, and it isn't about archetypes or mastery — it's a straightforward walk through the first ninety days: the paperwork you need to sort out, the practice that turns a certificate into a real ceremony, and the simple steps that lead to your first paid booking.

One important note before we start: the legal requirements for officiating weddings vary by state, province, and country, and sometimes by county or city within them. Nothing in this book substitutes for checking your own local requirements directly. What I can offer is the general shape of what to look for, and thirty years of watching new officiants get this right — and get it wrong.

Thank you for spending this time with me. Congratulations on getting ordained — and welcome to the work.

— Wayne & Rosanne

Founders, Life Celebrations Academy

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INTRODUCTION

The Certificate Is the Easy Part

Getting ordained takes about ten minutes online, and almost no effort at all. Becoming someone a couple actually wants standing at the front of their wedding takes a great deal more — and almost nobody explains the gap between those two things before you're standing in the middle of it.

There are three things every new officiant needs to sort out, roughly in this order. The Paperwork: understanding what your ordination actually authorizes you to do, and what local registration or licensing steps still stand between you and legally marrying someone. The Practice: turning a downloaded template into a real ceremony you can deliver with confidence. The Booking: actually getting a couple to say yes to you.

None of these three things are complicated on their own. What trips people up is skipping the order — trying to book ceremonies before the paperwork is sorted, or building a marketing presence before there's a ceremony worth marketing. This book walks through all three, in the order that actually works.

> Ordination gives you permission to try. It doesn't give you a ceremony, a client, or a plan. That part is still yours to build.

Three stages. One question running underneath all of them: what's the very next thing you actually need to do today?

CHAPTER ONE

The Paperwork

What being ordained actually authorizes you to do — and what still doesn't.

Ordination is the first step, not the whole staircase. Depending on where you live, being ordained may be enough on its own, or it may be just one piece of a short local process — registering with a county clerk, filing paperwork with a court, or meeting a residency or renewal requirement. The rules genuinely differ by state, province, and country, so the very first task is finding out exactly what applies to you.

What to Sort Out Early

- Confirm whether your jurisdiction requires officiants to register locally, in addition to ordination.
- Learn how marriage licenses work in your area — who issues them, and what the couple needs to bring you.
- Understand what you're responsible for signing and returning after the ceremony, and by when.
- Look into liability insurance if you plan to officiate regularly — many venues now require it.
- Keep a copy of your ordination credentials somewhere you can access quickly if a venue asks.

Common Mistakes

The most common mistake is assuming ordination alone is sufficient everywhere, without checking local requirements — and finding out otherwise uncomfortably close to a wedding date. A second mistake is leaving license paperwork until the day of the ceremony, when nerves and logistics are already stacked high enough.

> Nobody remembers a beautiful ceremony that turned out not to be legally valid. Get the paperwork right first.

An Example

A newly ordained officiant I coached was two weeks out from her first wedding when she discovered, almost by accident, that her state required officiants to register with the county before performing a ceremony — something her ordaining organization had never mentioned. She made it in time, but barely, and only because she happened to ask. Now it's the very first thing I tell every new officiant to check, before anything else.

CHAPTER TWO

The Practice

Turning a certificate into a ceremony you can actually deliver.

A downloaded template is a starting point, not a ceremony. The gap between the two is filled by real preparation: getting to know the couple, building a structure that fits their story, and rehearsing enough that the words feel like yours by the time you're standing in front of a room.

Building Your First Ceremony

- Run a real consultation — ask how the couple met, what they love about each other, and what tone they want.
- Build a simple structure: welcome, the couple's story, readings or vows, the pronouncement.
- Write in your own natural voice, not a formal register that doesn't sound like you.
- Rehearse out loud, more than once, including the parts that feel awkward to say.
- Plan the logistics — where you'll stand, how you'll cue the rings, what happens if you lose your place.

Common Mistakes

The most common mistake is reading a script for the first time at the rehearsal, or even the ceremony itself. A close second is skipping the consultation and relying entirely on a generic template — couples can feel the difference between words written for them and words written for anyone.

> Your first ceremony doesn't need to be perfect. It needs to be prepared.

An Example

One new officiant told me he planned to "wing it" for his first ceremony because he was "good under pressure." I asked him to rehearse it out loud for me anyway, once, before the wedding. He stumbled over the couple's own vow exchange — a section he hadn't actually read closely until that moment. That one run-through likely saved him from stumbling in front of a hundred guests instead of just me.

CHAPTER THREE

The Booking

Getting your very first couple to say yes.

Your first booking rarely comes from a polished website or a big marketing push — it usually comes from someone who already knows you, or someone one connection away. The goal early on isn't to reach strangers. It's to make sure the people who already trust you know you're available.

Where First Bookings Actually Come From

- Tell your own network directly — friends, family, coworkers — that you're now ordained and taking bookings.
- Offer a modest discount or a free ceremony to a couple you know, in exchange for photos and a review.
- Set up a simple, complete profile on one platform — a Facebook Page is the easiest place to start.
- Join one or two local wedding-vendor groups and introduce yourself honestly as newly starting out.
- Ask every couple you do marry, from the very first one, to leave a review and refer you.

Common Mistakes

The most common mistake is trying to build a following on three platforms before ever officiating a single wedding. Build proof first — even one well-documented ceremony — and let your marketing grow from real material, rather than promises.

> Your first booking doesn't need a marketing plan. It needs you to tell the people who already like you that you're available.

An Example

An officiant I trained spent her first month building an elaborate logo and website before telling a single person she was ordained. Her first actual booking came three weeks later, from her hairdresser, who found out almost by accident during a haircut. The website hadn't even launched yet. The lesson stuck with both of us: tell people first. Polish later.

AT A GLANCE

Your First 90 Days Checklist

A simple, rough timeline if you're not sure where to start.

> Weeks 1–2Weeks 3–6Weeks 7–12

Focus

- The PaperworkThe PracticeThe Booking
- Confirm local registrationBuild and rehearse your firstTell your network and set up

Key Tasks

- and licensing requirementsceremony templateone simple online profile
- You know exactly what'sYou can deliver yourYou've told at least ten

You'll Know You're

- required to legally officiateceremony out loud withoutpeople you're available and

Ready When

- near youreading it coldtaking bookings

> Ninety days from now, you won't be new anymore. You'll be an officiant with a real ceremony and a real first couple behind you.

CONCLUSION

You’re Ready

You don’t need to have this perfectly figured out before you start — almost no one does. You need the paperwork sorted so your first ceremony is legally sound, a rehearsed ceremony you can deliver with confidence, and enough courage to tell the people around you that you’re available. Everything else gets built through doing it.

Every officiant with a full calendar today started exactly where you are: certificate in hand, and a real question of what to do next. The only real difference between them and someone who never got past “now what” is that they took the next small step anyway.

> You don’t need a career yet. You just need one well-prepared ceremony, and the willingness to tell someone about it.

> Before Your First Ceremony named the first ninety days. Book One — I’m Ordained, Now What? walks you through them.

NOW WHAT?

There is a next step.

Over thirty years we have trained and certified more than 2,000 officiants and celebrants. We are more than a ‘get ordained online’ organization — we care deeply about the people we invest in. Wherever you are in your journey, there is a next step, and we would like to walk it with you.

Keep reading, free. The whole Embracing Excellence library, all 365 Pro Tips and every field guide — open to everyone, no membership needed.

Go deeper — the books. This guide named the thing. The books teach it. **Book One — I’m Ordained, Now What?** for your first ninety days. **Book Two — The Accomplished Wedding Officiant** for the craft and the business. **Book Three — Making the Most of the Moment** for the three minutes a couple never forgets.

Ask us something today. Voice Message Coaching is open to everyone, from $27 CAD. Send us a voice message and we reply — no appointment, nothing to book.

Stop doing this alone. The Crossroads is our members’ community — the Officiants Café twice a month with us, the Our Ceremony builder, ready-to-use website templates, ceremony scripts and business tools.

Get certified. Wedding Officiant, Funeral Celebrant and New Life Celebrant certification, live with Wayne and Rosanne. Open to anyone, anywhere. No experience required.

Start anywhere you like — **lifecelebrationsacademy.com**

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