AN EMBRACING EXCELLENCE FIELD GUIDE

The Three Levels of Wedding Officiant

EMERGING · EXPERIENCED · ELITE

The path every officiant walks — and how to move up it.

WAYNE & ROSANNE PREVETT
Executive Life Celebration Coaches
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, establishing life-celebration businesses and ministries, and leading a team that officiated thousands more.

In an earlier book, I wrote about the four types of officiant I've watched stand at the front of the room — the Amateur, the Arrogant, the Apathetic, and the Accomplished. Those are character patterns, and any officiant can slip into one on a given day. This book is about something different: not who you are, but where you are. Every officiant I have ever trained, myself included, has walked the same three-stage path, whether they noticed it or not.

We call these stages Emerging, Experienced, and Elite. They are not judgments — every Elite officiant I know spent years as an Emerging one, fumbling microphones and over-rehearsing in front of a mirror. The mistake I see most often isn't that officiants start Emerging. It's that too many stop climbing once they reach Experienced, mistake competence for mastery, and never make the final, deliberate push toward Elite.

I wrote this book to give officiants at every stage a map: what defines the level you're at, what it will cost you if you stay there too long, and what it actually takes to climb. If you're a couple reading this instead, these pages will help you understand why two officiants with the same years of experience can deliver wildly different ceremonies — and how to spot the difference before you book.

Thank you for spending this time with us. It's a subject we care about deeply, and we're glad to share it with you. Where a personal story appears in these pages, it is Wayne's unless we say otherwise.

— Wayne & Rosanne

Founders, Life Celebrations Academy

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INTRODUCTION

Not Who You Are — Where You Are

Every officiant starts somewhere, and no one starts at the top. The tempting story is that some people are naturally gifted at this and some aren't. After thirty years of training officiants, I can tell you that isn't what separates them. What separates them is which stage of the climb they're willing to keep climbing through, and which stage they quietly decide is good enough.

There are three stages. Emerging officiants are new — full of heart, short on reps, still finding their footing in front of a room. Experienced officiants have logged the hours; they're competent, reliable, and often quite good — and that competence is exactly what tempts them to stop growing. Elite officiants are rare: they've kept refining the craft long after most people would have called themselves finished, and it shows in every ceremony they deliver.

This isn't a book about talent. It's a book about a path — the same one every serious officiant walks, whether they can name it or not. Naming it matters, because you cannot climb a ladder you don't know you're standing on.

> Experience will make you competent. Only deliberate practice will make you elite.

Three levels. One question running underneath all of them: not how long have you been doing this, but how deliberately are you still trying to get better at it?

CHAPTER ONE

Emerging

Eager, but unproven. Full of heart, still building the reps.

Every officiant is Emerging once. Freshly ordained or certified, a handful of ceremonies in, still rehearsing the pronouncement in front of a mirror the night before. There is nothing wrong with being here — it is the only honest place to start. The risk isn't that an officiant is Emerging. The risk is treating this stage as a formality to rush through rather than a foundation worth building properly.

How to Spot the Emerging Officiant

- Leans heavily on templates and scripts, with limited personalization yet.
- Is still working out logistics — timing, microphone handling, where to stand.
- Prepares hard for every ceremony because nothing yet feels routine.
- Is enthusiastic and often deeply sincere, even when technique is still rough.
- Has done a handful of weddings — not dozens, not hundreds.

What Defines This Stage

Emerging officiants are defined by low repetition, not low potential. They haven't yet built the pattern-recognition that comes from standing in front of a hundred different rooms — the sense for when to slow down, when a couple needs levity, when silence is doing more work than words. That only comes with reps. What Emerging officiants can control, from day one, is how seriously they take the preparation: real rehearsal, a real consultation process, real study of the craft rather than improvisation.

What's at Stake

The couples who hire an Emerging officiant are usually taking a chance on someone — a friend, a low-cost option, a new name they found online. That trust is a gift, and it's fragile. An Emerging officiant who treats every ceremony as practice, without doing the deliberate work to actually improve, can spend years being technically "experienced" while never truly leaving this stage. Volume alone does not graduate you. Only intentional growth does.

> Every Elite officiant I know was once terrified behind a microphone. The difference is what they did about it.

An Example

I remember my own first ceremony vividly — more vividly than I'd like to admit. I had the script memorized, but I hadn't rehearsed for the moment the bride's father choked up walking her down

the aisle and the whole room went quiet, waiting on me. I froze for what felt like a minute but was probably three seconds. What got me through wasn't talent. It was the fact that I'd over-prepared everything else, so I had enough in reserve to recover. That's the whole job at this stage: prepare so thoroughly that you have something left over for the moment nobody can script.

The Way Forward

Moving out of Emerging isn't about waiting for enough ceremonies to pass. It's about treating each one as a deliberate rep: debrief yourself after every wedding, ask what you'd do differently, seek out a mentor who will give you honest feedback instead of polite compliments. Officiants who climb quickly are rarely the most naturally gifted — they're the ones who refuse to let a ceremony pass without learning something from it.

CHAPTER TWO

Experienced

Capable, but comfortable. Skilled enough to coast.

The Experienced officiant has done this dozens, maybe hundreds of times. The nerves are gone. The logistics are second nature. Couples get a confident, competent ceremony, delivered by someone who clearly knows what they're doing. This is also, quietly, the most dangerous stage of the three — because competence feels so much like mastery that most officiants stop climbing right here, without ever noticing they've stopped.

How to Spot the Experienced Officiant

- Delivers a smooth, well-paced ceremony with no visible nerves or missteps.
- Has a reliable system — consultation questions, a ceremony template, a rehearsal routine.
- Rarely encounters a wedding-day situation they haven't seen before.
- May reuse structure and phrasing across ceremonies more than they realize.
- Is well-reviewed and steadily booked, which can quietly discourage further growth.

What Defines This Stage

Experience is a genuine achievement — it takes years to build and it shows. What defines this stage is that the officiant has solved the problems Emerging officiants are still working through: nerves, logistics, pacing. The danger is that solving those problems can feel like arriving. This is exactly the stage where the patterns from my earlier book — the Arrogant's ego, the Apathetic's autopilot — tend to creep in, because both require enough repetition to take root.

What's at Stake

An Experienced officiant who stops deliberately improving doesn't get worse overnight. The decline is slower and harder to notice: the same handful of jokes at every wedding, the same ceremony structure regardless of who's standing in front of them, a consultation process that's really just a form to fill out. Couples rarely complain about an Experienced officiant — the ceremony is perfectly fine. "Perfectly fine" is precisely the ceiling this stage needs to break through.

> Competence is a plateau with a very comfortable view. Elite officiants are the ones who keep climbing past it.

An Example

One of the best officiants on our team came to me a few years into her career and said something I've never forgotten: "I think I've gotten worse, and I don't understand how." What had actually happened was that she'd gotten so comfortable that she'd stopped consulting deeply with couples

— she knew the structure so well she assumed she didn't need to. The ceremonies were smooth. They just weren't personal anymore. The moment she rebuilt her consultation process from scratch, her reviews changed from "great" to "I cried through the whole thing."

The Way Forward

The path out of Experienced requires manufacturing the discomfort that circumstance no longer provides. Seek out feedback that isn't a five-star review. Record yourself and watch it back critically. Rebuild your consultation process as though you were starting over. The officiants who reach Elite are, almost without exception, the ones who got uncomfortable with "good enough" long after everyone around them had stopped asking them to.

CHAPTER THREE

Elite

Rare, and relentless. The standard the other two are measured against.

The Elite officiant has done everything the Experienced officiant has done — and then kept going. They've logged the hundreds of ceremonies, but they never let the hundreds replace the attention each new couple deserves. What sets them apart isn't a higher ceiling on talent. It's a refusal to let repetition become routine, sustained over years rather than months.

How to Spot the Elite Officiant

- Runs a genuine consultation process for every couple, no matter how many ceremonies they've done.
- Delivers a ceremony that could only belong to the couple in front of them.
- Is sought out by referral, often booked far in advance by word of mouth alone.
- Mentors or trains other officiants, because the craft matters to them beyond their own bookings.
- Reads a room in real time and adapts without ever losing the thread of the ceremony.

What It Took to Get Here

Elite status tends to rest on the same four habits, sustained long after most officiants would have called themselves finished learning:

- Connection Still building real rapport with every couple, not leaning on a formula that used to work.
- Consultation Still asking the questions that surface a couple's real story, ceremony five hundred just as much as ceremony five.
- Communication Still reliable, responsive, and clear, even as demand and bookings grow.
- Ceremony Still rehearsing, still refining delivery, still treating the day itself as a performance worth preparing for.

Staying Elite

The hardest part of Elite isn't reaching it — it's that nothing about this stage is self-sustaining. There is no ceremony count that locks it in permanently. Every Elite officiant I know still gets nervous before a big wedding, still debriefs themselves afterward, still treats their thousandth ceremony with something close to the seriousness of their first. The moment that stops, the slide back toward Experienced — comfortable, competent, coasting — begins.

Elite isn't a title you earn once. It's a standard you keep choosing, ceremony after ceremony.

TEN YEARS LATER

I was standing in line at a bank when someone tapped me on the shoulder. I turned around and said hello. They said, "You don't know who I am, but I was at a wedding you did probably over ten years ago. I just wanted to let you know that the words you shared that day have stayed with me, and they have made our marriage the best it possibly could ever have been."

You were given so many compliments throughout the day and night, I just had to let you know. We watched the ceremony back, and honestly you made us laugh, tear up, and actively listen to your words — we were so honoured to have you be such a special part of our wedding. We couldn't have asked for anything better.

You are truly a kind, gentle, warm man. We can tell you find joy and have so much passion for what you do! When my Maid of Honour, my sister-in-law, and I were at the bridal show in September, we met you at your booth — within the first thirty seconds of speaking with you, I knew you were the one I wanted to perform my ceremony. We will definitely be recommending you to others; that's for sure! I was so upset that I didn't get a chance to say bye to you on Saturday. I know that you had to go and marry another Vanessa though.

Thank you.

— A & V

CONCLUSION

Which Level Are You?

Every officiant starts Emerging. Most become Experienced. Very few become Elite — not because it requires a gift the rest don't have, but because it requires staying uncomfortable with "good enough" long after comfort has become available. That's a choice, made over and over, ceremony after ceremony.

For the officiant reading this: wherever you are on the path, the good news is that the next level is available to you. It isn't gated by talent or by years. It's gated by whether you're still willing to treat this craft as something to keep improving at, or whether you've quietly decided you've arrived.

For the couple reading this: ask where an officiant is on this path before you book them. How many ceremonies have they done, and how have they kept growing since the first one? Do they still run a real consultation, or has it become a formality? The answers will tell you more than any five-star review.

> Emerging is where everyone begins. Elite is where almost no one stays long enough to arrive.

> Book Two — The Accomplished Wedding Officiant is how you move up the path.

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.

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