

The Most Important Dress A Woman Will Ever Wear

Finding the courage, skills, and
confidence to be a bridal alterations
specialist

By Dee Dee Anderson

Index

Introduction

1. *Why a Bridal Alterations Specialist?*
2. *Work Situations*
3. *Pricing*
4. *Skills*
5. *Equipment Needed*
6. *The Fitting Process*
7. *Space for Fittings*
8. *Time Management*
9. *Batching*
10. *Hunker Down*
11. *Burn Out*
12. *The Psychology of Brides*
13. *The Psychology of the Bride's Family*
14. *Myth Busting*
15. *Mentoring*
16. *Conclusion*
17. *About Dee Dee*
18. *A Big Thank You*
19. *Alterations Sheet pdf*
20. *Mending English Netting video*



Hello and Welcome!

Introduction

With this book, I am hoping to share my passion for bridal alterations with my fellow sewing enthusiasts. I think those who love sewing for themselves or sewing for others will enjoy reading this book. Bridal Alterations may not be an interest of yours right now, but it will be fun to dive into my world and be a fly on the wall watching the magic happen.

Bridal Alterations Specialists (BAS) live in a world of contradiction. There are the lovely delicate laces that need to be carefully steamed. And then there's the brutally exhausting workout of putting a heavily boned, high thread count satin wedding dress (I call them white elephants) under the sewing machine to take in the side seams. Some of these dresses are really heavy.

BAS walk confidently into the most elegant bridal shops in their black professional suits to do a fitting, then take the dress home to work on it in their yoga pants, sweatshirt or pajamas late at night or early in the morning.

Some of these dresses take my breath away, the gown and the bride are so beautiful. And some weeks are so long that I need to wear latex gloves so my hands don't bleed on the dress. I never work on Sundays and use it as a day of rest and a day to grow new skin on my fingers.

And lastly, some brides and mothers are so gracious and pleased with your work that they give you giant hugs and a cash tip when they leave with their dress.

And... a...few... don't.

Let us enter the life of a BAS.

P.S. I will be using the abbreviation BAS (Bridal Alterations Specialist) throughout this book to save your sanity and mine.

1. Why Bridal Alterations?

Why would anyone choose bridal alterations as a career? It's some of the hardest sewing there is. Bridal alterations are really the epitome of sewing skills and it's hard work. It's far easier to sew a wedding dress from scratch to the bride's measurements than to alter one. Truly. Once all the boning is stitched in and the lining is closed up, it's difficult to adjust those seams. So why would anyone want to do this for a living?

1. This is a long term career. Your skills won't become outdated in 5 or 10 years. My dad apprenticed as a lithographer in the printing business. He spent 3 years training and then worked his way up to the manager of the entire company. As a worker on a newspaper in college I pasted a paper copy of text or ads that was run through a wax machine. Then the waxed text was placed on a sheet of cardstock and rolled to keep it in place. Five years later neither my job nor my dad's job that he apprenticed for even existed. I have been working in the bridal industry for over 35 years. Nothing has been outdated that I learned earlier. There are a lot of careers that require additional schooling after so many years, otherwise you can lose your license or in general not be employable. This is true for lawyers, doctors, real estate agents, teachers, etc., but not for bridal alterations. Sewing is a talent and skill set that will never be obsolete. We use the same skills and methods that were used over 50 years ago. Your skills just keep building over time. You can also take a break, and jump right back into it.

Why Bridal Alterations?

2. Speaking of outdated, **your equipment will probably never be outdated.** I am using the same machines that I bought 35 years ago. My machines will outlive me. The technology for industrial sewing machines is pretty much the same. If you think about it, how has the hand sewing needle or a sewing machine changed over the past 50 years? In truth not that much. There's fancy computer sewing machines, but full time seamstresses use industrial machines and they are basically the same. A one-time investment into an industrial sewing machine and serger will outlive the vehicle you drive and probably outlive you too. Technology can advance all it wants, this job will not be left in the dust. How many industries can say that about their equipment?
3. **Job security.** My job can't be shipped overseas. I'm not competing with 3rd world labor for what I decide to charge for my time. Almost anything you can buy in a store that involves sewing skills to manufacture, can be done cheaper overseas. Even making a wedding dress can be done significantly less expensively in China. This is a painful reality for anyone trying to make a living with sewing skills. And it's one of the main reasons people who have these skills end up getting a career in something else. Sewing becomes a hobby that they love, but they don't know how to make money doing it for a living. But you have no competition for the alterations of a wedding gown. The fitting has to be in person with the bride and a BAS. Your job can't be outsourced to another country. It just can't. No matter where you live, there is a demand for BAS.

Why Bridal Alterations?

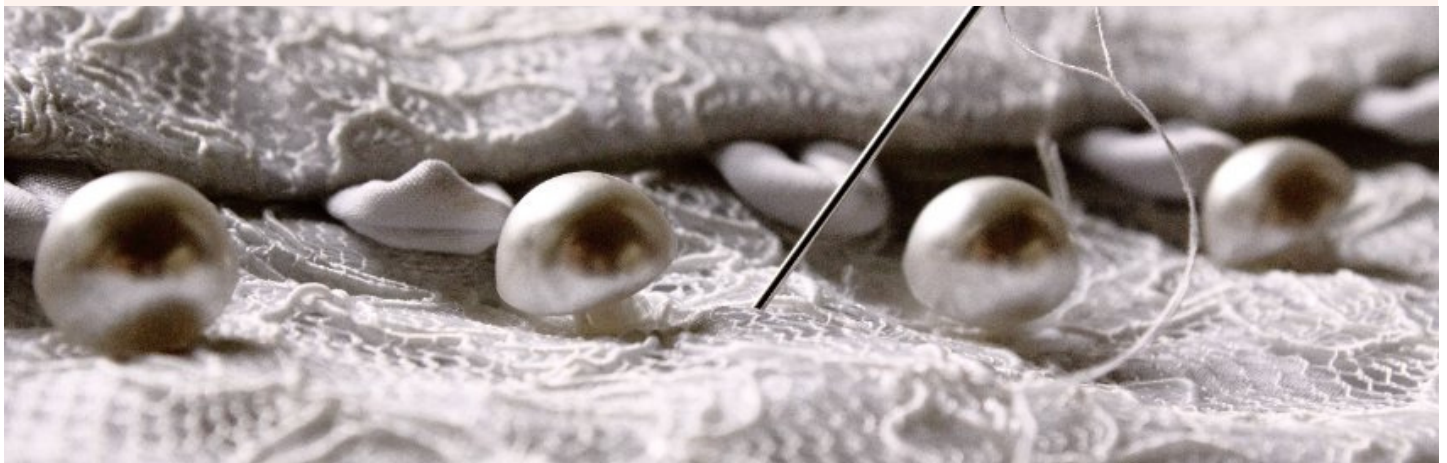
Even if a bride buys her dress online, guess what? She still needs to have it altered locally. I live out in a small town in the country. Most of my brides drive between 30 to 150 miles to get to my home. I have had brides fly in from all over the U.S. and Canada. I actually think some of these brides could probably find someone closer to where they live, but if you have established a great reputation, you can expect clients to drive or fly long distances. They don't mind the travel because they want the peace of mind knowing their dress will be altered by someone with experience and real skills.

4. **Bridal alterations is a dying art.** There is a high demand for this skill. Bridal Shops are having a hard time finding workers to alter for them. One of my dear students enrolled in the academy with a huge urgency. She had decided to open up a general alterations shop in a small strip mall in her town. A local bridal shop heard that her alterations shop was opening up soon and contacted her about doing bridal alterations. She had never done this kind of work before and quickly enrolled in my academy. I reassured her that I would help her with whatever work walked through the door and it would be a learn as you work situation. Her shop officially opened a few days later and in came two brides with alterations. She became very busy with bridal alterations, and here's the kicker. You can charge so much more money for bridal gown work than for alterations on clothes. She soon made the decision to do bridal wear exclusively unless she had a slow time.

Why Bridal Alterations?

Well, she has never had business slow down enough to accommodate street clothes. She struggles with learning how much business she can take before turning work away. Many of my students have similar experiences because there is more work than we can do. If you get the skills, the work will come to you. Other seamstresses become friends. There is no competition. There's plenty of work to go around, and having a friend who can cover for you in an emergency is great.

5. **The pay is wonderful.** Just like how a doctor who has more training than a nurse gets paid better. Bridal alterations are so specialized and require so much skill and training that you can charge a premium price for your alterations. This is one of the few careers in the sewing industry that pays well. There are so many people out there with wonderful sewing skills but they rarely invest in themselves to train for a vocation that will give them a long term sewing career. They stay at the hobby level and that's ok if you already have a career that pays well.



Why Bridal Alterations?

6. Some High School graduates are questioning a four year college degree. The tuition for college is pricey with no guarantee of a return on your investment. Some just don't want to spend that long in school before starting their career. Tech schools are becoming more popular. Being able to start a career with training as you work is ideal for many young people and older people who are ready for a career change. The Anderson Alterations Academy has open enrollment. You can jump in any time. It's self paced so you can train as fast as you want or take your time.
7. Flexability for your life situation. There are so many different options for working in the bridal alterations industry. I have a whole chapter dedicated to this subject. You can determine how many hours you want to work per week. Maybe you only want to work part time, or in the evening after your day job. Or it can be a seasonal job. You get to choose how you want to create your business.
8. My favorite part of my job is being surrounded by beautiful dresses. I love going into my studio and opening up a bag and pulling out an exquisite gown. Inspecting up close all the lace and beadwork is such a joy to my eyes. And frankly, seeing the brides in their dresses when my work is done is very fulfilling. The work is hard, yet you are surrounded by elegant and beautiful gowns. Sometimes when you are working on an especially full skirt, you feel like you are being swallowed by fluffy tulle or ruffles. It's really amazing. I never get tired of seeing the new styles come out and the glow of a bride who knows deep down that she looks gorgeous in her dress.

2. Work Situations



Oh my. Where do I start? I am amazed at the variety of different work situations that BAS (Bridal Alterations Specialists) have available to them. Let's get started.

1. Bridal Shops.

This is the most obvious work situation, and one that most people think of when they ponder a career in bridal alterations. This is called an “in-house” seamstress. Some of the larger bridal shops have large rooms full of sewing machines, irons and steamers. Smaller shops may have an area in the back room for alterations to be done.

Most BAS who work in this environment have their fittings scheduled by the store and the store determines the prices charged for alterations. The store also handles the money and the associated credit card fees. Some of these BAS are paid on an hourly basis, some get to set their own hours and fees and give a flat percentage to the store. Twenty five percent is a reasonable percentage of the fee to give the shop.

This work situation is ideal if you don't have the equipment or a studio at home. Maybe you have roommates or small children or pets and you worry about damage to the wedding dresses.

Work Situations



Or perhaps you like your privacy and don't want anyone in your home. And let's not forget how cool it is to be surrounded by wedding dresses. Being in the back room as they opened boxes was one of my favorite parts of working in a shop. It was like Christmas every time the UPS man came in. One of my sweet students was sponsored by the bridal shop that she worked at as a salesperson. She did the alterations on site as I trained her. She loved it and the shop loved her.

Bridal Shops are feeling the shortage of bridal alterations specialists. A big part of selling a bridal gown is knowing that it can be fit to the bride. Reassuring a bride that potential alterations will be done beautifully is vital to sales.

Bridal Alterations is a dying art. The wonderful, experienced pros are aging out of this career. We need to train new BAS. One of the skills I teach at the academy is how to have a professional and respectful relationship with the management in bridal shops. Another important part of my academy training is teaching students how to treat the brides with a professional and pleasant attitude. They learn how to be calm, confident, kind and how to not let brides or MOB get them frustrated. Mentoring is an important part of the training for this very reason. My students can email or text for help anytime they have questions or frustrations on a dress that is in a bridal shop needing alterations. There are many reasons why working in a bridal shop is a good fit for a BAS.

Work Situations

2. Work at home for a Bridal Shop.

This can be done either exclusively for one store or sewing outside work also. I recommend not signing an exclusivity agreement with a bridal shop. I love the shops I work with, don't get me wrong, but as long as I get their work done, it's really none of their business what other work I take on. This was my work situation for many years. I would set a day of the week that I came into the shop for fittings, booked my own fittings and took the money. I then paid up to 10% fee to store. I would take the dresses home and work on them in my sewing studio. I liked this situation because I could be flexible about when I worked on the sewing. I had great relationships with the owners and sales people. The salespeople were better able to educate the brides on what alterations I could and could not do. They saw me on a regular basis so I could answer questions easily, and they felt comfortable calling me at home if they had questions. It was a good fit for much of my career. I remember a pesky dress that was quite popular for a time. It was a nightmare to alter so I began calling it the haunted dress. I would alter it and it would come back for more adjustments. It haunted me. When halloween came around, I suggested the store put it out in the window display along with halloween decorations. They did it for me. It was our inside joke in the shop and I was quite pleased when the store stopped carrying that dress.

Work Situations

3. Work at home exclusively.

This is my current work situation. My parents moved in with my family so I could help take care of them. It got to the point where I couldn't leave them alone as I traveled to the bridal shop. So I made the decision to work from home and do all my fittings at my house. This is a very common work experience for many people for many reasons. Mothers with small children sometimes like the ease of working from home. My parents have both passed away, and yet, I don't think I'll ever stop doing alterations from home. I am too spoiled with the flexibility it offers me.

Doing fittings at home, you will need to figure out a fitting space. I do fittings on Wednesdays and use my bedroom and master bath for my fittings. Since it's only one day a week, I can set up my "work station" with my price list, pins, measuring tape, etc during fittings, and then tuck it all in a closet after the last fitting of the day. You can have a separate area used exclusively for fittings and sewing, or just set up an area for fittings and then put it away.



Work Situations

I will go into detail on setting up a fitting room and studio later in this book. The main issue is making sure the area is very clean with no pet hairs. Also, it helps to have the area uncluttered. This helps you be able to keep the place clean and tidy. Make sure your sidewalk and entrance is welcoming and clean, please no barking dogs greeting your customers. The brides need to trust that their dress will stay clean and safe in your home. When I first started out, I used my living room and had the bride change in my bedroom. It was all fine. Look around and see what would work or not work in your home.

The best part about working from home is that you set your own schedule, you set your own pricing, and you get to keep all the money. No commissions go to the shops. And no overhead is taken from your profit. More and more shops are evolving to a BAS situation where they simply hand the bride a list of BAS recommendations for alterations. I am on the list of several bridal shops. I keep good relationships with these shops, and I try to be available for them when they have bridal emergencies.

4. Work in an alteration shop.

They are always eager to find a seamstress willing to do bridal alterations. The benefits of this work situation are that you use their equipment in the shop and you don't take any work home. This can be great if you live with roommates or have a chaotic home environment. However you don't get to set the prices and are usually paid an hourly rate. You may have some flexibility with your hours depending on the shop management.

Work Situations

5.

Set up your own Alterations Shop.

Many BAS dream of having their own shop separate from their home. I have a student who has built a beautiful studio on her property. It was so fun seeing it go from framing, sheetrock, paint and then to a beautifully decorated BAS studio. It was so fun to watch her learn the specialty skills of working with wedding dresses as she was building her studio at the same time. I loved my zoom tours of the studio progress. Another friend of mine converted her garage into a studio. It is beautiful. I think my favorite off-site BAS shop is in an indoor mall located next door to a bridal shop. How ideal is that? Another student of mine has set her shop up in a small strip mall. There are so many options for this. The advantages of this is having a separate space dedicated to your work. Customers feel more confident walking into a shop instead of a home. You may feel more official and professional with a dedicated shop. The drawbacks are less flexibility in your work hours. When the shop is open, you are available to customers. This can take time away from your sewing. You can post on a sign “by appointment only”, but they will walk in anyway. Another disadvantage is the overhead. I have seen some really reasonable prices for renting a space. I have also seen BAS sink under their overhead bills. So if you go this route, you need to make the overhead justify the extra work you will have to do just to keep your door open. I personally have had friends want to do a shop with me and I've always felt it was not my style. I would rather not pay overhead. Plus, I really like not being available for brides too much. I can get so much more work done when I am not interrupted. Wednesday is my fitting day by appointment only. The rest of the week my home is for my family and my sewing.

Work Situations

6. Share a space.

I have worked doing custom sewing in a shared space with a fabric shop. It was great being able to get the right color of thread so conveniently. Fabric shops also often have classrooms that you could rent if you wanted to do fittings one day a week. A wedding vendor such as a photographer, floral designer or wedding planner may also be open to sharing a space. Also check out wedding venues. They may have a room they would rent to you. Be creative, but use written contracts always. This might be a way to encourage more business through close proximity to other wedding services. And at the same time lower your overhead.

7. Lastly, you can be a traveling BAS.

How does this work? You travel to a client's home. You do your fitting for the bride right there in her home. You take the work home and do the work at home. Then bring the dress back for delivery or more fittings. Benefits of this unique work situation include not having people come to your home. This is a luxury service and should be charged as such to accommodate your fuel, vehicle wear and tear, and your travel time. The drawbacks of being a traveling BAS are going to unfamiliar homes that may be in unsafe neighborhoods, locating addresses and the fact that time spent in travel is time not spent sewing. Once again, be sure to charge heavily for this luxury service. This also means knowing how to schedule and coordinate the different locations on your route. I recommend one travel day a week or you could spend far too much time on the road.

Work Situations



Now that you have read about the many ways you can work a BAS career into your personal life situation, you need to consider some of the different paths that your own BAS career could take. Also keep in mind that most BAS careers evolve over time. That's another beauty of having a career that doesn't become outdated. You can adapt your work as your life changes over time.

ACTION

*Look into what BAS work situations are already available in your area.

*Ponder how you will create your own BAS career.

*What type of home situation are you living in? How does that play into your work options?

3. Pricing



How do you know what to charge? I do my pricing differently than most and pricing can vary so much from location to location. BAS pricing in the UK is significantly less expensive than in the US. Canada is similar to the US and depends on location. In the US, California and the east coast BAS prices are higher than the rest of the states. And I'm sure that if I put exact pricing numbers down in this book, it would be outdated quickly so I won't go down that road.

You can determine your pricing a few different ways. First, ask around. Get pricing from at least 5 different businesses in your area. By area, I mean within a 300 mile radius. If there are some bridal alterations shops in your area, ask for their pricing list. Ask bridal shops how they determine their pricing. Be sure to ask as many places in your area as possible. Don't bother asking regular alterations businesses. Focus on bridal alterations. The pricing is completely different for bridal wear.

Pricing

Remember, there's more than enough work to go around. Many of these BAS want to network and support each other and being on the same page with your pricing is a way to build trust. You never know when you will need to find someone to cover for you in an emergency.

There will always be a business with low ball pricing. They think they need to be the lowest price in order to have more work. Stay away from their pricing at all costs. They feel competitive. They even call it competitive pricing. Trust me, this is not the route you want to go with your business. You want to be priced a bit on the high end, not the low end. I don't care if you have no experience, you should never build a reputation on being the lowest priced BAS. If you get that reputation, you will have the worst customers coming to you. These are the bargain shoppers.

The clients that want you to lower your prices for them. They are the ones who are insulted that you would charge so much. They nitpick the dress, hoping you will take money off for this flaw or the other and they can be downright dishonest. Do not bring this crowd to your door. Enough of these annoying clients will come to you even when you are the highest BAS in your area. You don't need to intentionally draw them to your business.

Pricing

Your reputation needs to be built on impeccable work and good people skills. The word of mouth that you will receive from a beautifully fitted wedding gown is priceless and it spreads quickly. Word of mouth can bring in business immediately with the bride's friends or relatives and it can bring work to you ten years later. It's free and definitely the best marketing tool in a BAS business. Make sure your pricing is on the high end. Don't go for comparatively priced, or reasonable prices, be the one who charges a bit more than the rest.

Now I'm going to tell you the reality of pricing here. I have found that the quote "You get what you pay for" is not true in bridal alterations. Pricing is all over the place. As you look at pricing you will see this. Some very talented BAS charge very little, some BAS that are terrible charge a lot. I have fixed and repaired the work of many BAS over the years and usually what they charged to ruin the gown was far more than I charged the bride to fix the damage. BAS pricing is a bit crazy but I think you will be amazed at how much you can earn if you are a BAS.

Like I said at the beginning of this chapter, I do my pricing quite differently than most people. So you may or may not want to do your pricing my way but hear me out. I don't price according to how many hours it will take me to do the job.

Pricing

I have over thirty years of experience doing bridal work so I can get my work done much faster than the average BAS. I charge according to how much skill is involved to do a beautiful job and also how time intensive the job is. Let me explain this using hems as an example. A regular hem is done in the standard serge and then folded up and stitched method.

The price for this hem is $_$. If someone needs a horsehair hem raised, this is a high end skill and is also a more time intensive job. So I will be charging significantly more for that job than a regular hem. So I would charge $_ \times 2$. If someone wanted a lace hem I would charge $_ \times 3$ or 4 . Lace hems are very skill intensive. I have been doing them for years, so I can do them rather quickly. But I am in no way shape or form going to charge by the hour for a lace hem. My skill is worth far more than the time it takes to do the hem. There are also times when a dress has an incredibly full skirt and so even if the hem is simple, it is time intensive.

So I would price that at $_ \times 2$. I hope this makes sense. I have a standard price list that leaves a lot of wiggle room. For example, hems are between \$85 and \$500. Remember, this is just an example. Pricing is constantly changing so don't use the above numbers for your pricing. It's just an example. I may make \$200 or \$300 an hour doing lace hems and \$75 doing a simple hem.

Pricing

Since I have the skills and speed from experience, I have no problem charging more per hour for a job that requires more skill. Also, I get more work done in an hour than most BAS so I definitely don't want to work in a shop where the managers determine what I make per hour. There's a point where you have to go independent in order to charge what you are worth.

Action

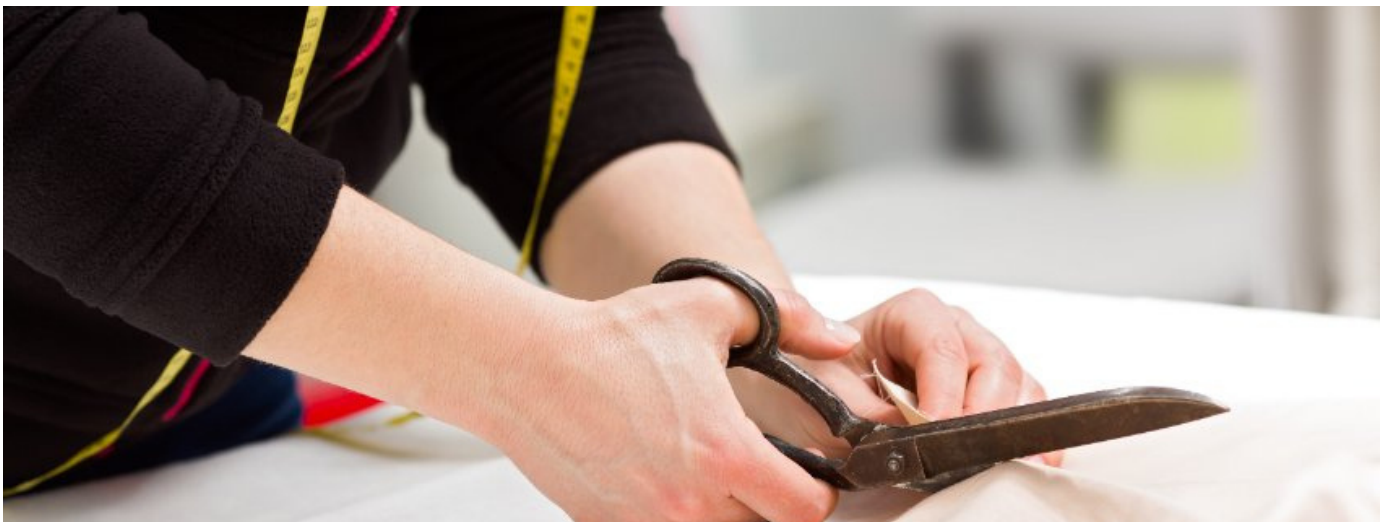
- *Get pricing from 5 different bridal alteration sources.
 - * Make a pricing list for your own business if you are thinking of setting up an independent business.
-

4. Skills

How advanced does your skill set need to be to train for bridal alterations? Here are some of the prerequisites I look for when considering someone for my academy:

You should be able to sew from scratch a princess bodice dress. Most bridal gowns are constructed from a princess bodice. There are a few designers now and then that use darts instead of princess seams, but for the most part, it's princess seams. This means the bodice pattern has a side front, and front pattern piece and a side back and back pattern piece. Understanding darts on a bodice is helpful too.

Constructing a dress with a lining would also be helpful. Making a dress with boning would be ideal, but not necessary to be ready to train. Boning can be learned as you get into alterations. You will see so much boning as you explore the lining of a dress. The inside of dresses will teach you more about boning than any class.



Skills

Are you comfortable with zippers? Both lap and invisible zippers are used extensively. Button loops can be easily learned, but you should already know how to do zippers before you try to become a BAS.

The last major talent you need to have, or are willing to learn, is time management. Brides have serious deadlines, very solid deadlines. **Procrastination is the death of a BAS.** When you put things off to the last minute, the bride gets a dress full of sloppy, rushed work. Bridal alterations require your best, most careful and meticulous work. For that to happen, you need to be ahead of your schedule whenever possible. You will lose the joy of sewing on these beautiful dresses and instead be filled with stress if you try and rush through your work. I can't stress enough how important time management is. I will take a student with less sewing experience over someone with time management issues any day. I can teach sewing skills, and frankly, I can teach time management skills but I can't force you to budget your time wisely. That's on you.

Now, I must be honest here. I am self trained. I have had very little formal training. My best friend's mom taught me how to sew an apron and pants in a junior high sewing class. The rest I learned from my mom with trial and error. My mom was an excellent seamstress. One of the main reasons I created my academy is because I wish I had been trained by someone who really knew bridal alterations.

Skills

I had a student who had really excellent sewing skills and was so intelligent. She had already invested a lot of time and money to learn couture sewing skills in the past. She owned a bridal consignment shop and had just lost her BAS. She decided that she would be the new BAS. She was comfortable with investing in herself, so enrolling in the academy made sense, but she needed to get the alterations in her closet done pronto. We went through her closet and started with the dress that had the closest fitting date. Two days away! We focused on that dress. She had never opened up a dress before. As I talked her through it on a zoom call, she was able to cut the floats and open up to the inside of the dress. We went through step by step and she was able to get the dress ready in time with the help of a friend doing the hand work on the lace. Dress by dress, we went through her closet till she was caught up with the alterations. We didn't follow Level 1,2 or 3. We just focused on getting the work done and passing off homework as she did the alterations. Sometimes that's just how it has to happen. She learned quickly because of her high skill level of sewing, and was soon taking alterations from another bridal shop as well as her own shop. I'm so proud of her work ethic and hustle. That was a hard month for her to get those alterations caught up. I'm such a fan of hers.

Skills

Here are some ways that I have learned to do bridal custom sewing and alterations. If you are not in a position to invest money into a BAS career, you might be able to invest only your time in training yourself for a BAS career. Remember, time is not cheap. But sometimes our lives are in a place where we have more time than money. I get that. That was me. So here are some great ways to build your skills without formal training:

1.

The number one reality of doing bridal alterations is that you spend a lot of your time unpicking. Yes. Let me be clear, you unpick almost everything you adjust. You need to get a good attitude about unpicking. It doesn't mean you have done something bad or made a mistake. People really get hung up on this. They think unpicking is a form of punishment for messing up while sewing. Well, with alterations, unpicking is just part of the job. Nothing bad has happened, it's just how you go about adjusting seams. I consider unpicking, hand work and beading my "quiet" time. I enjoy the quiet moments of my work. I use industrial machines while sewing so quiet time is good. I like to be alone with my thoughts. Unpicking is my friend. Learn to make it your friend too.

Skills

2. Buy a bridal dress pattern with princess seams. Look at the shape of the pieces and how they fit together. Notice on the side front the bust curve. Does it look like a B cup? What size is the pattern? If the pattern has more than one size, notice whether the cup size changes as the sizing gets bigger or smaller. Look at the curve of the armhole on the front of the bodice and the back armhole. They are shaped differently. You need to remember this when you are making adjustments to sleeves and armholes. What happens to the curve of the armhole when you take in the side seams? Look at the skirt pattern. How would you add pockets if a bride requested them, or a pouch for her diabetic equipment? How do the pattern instructions want you to hem the skirt? I spent a lot of time in high school studying patterns. My mom had a ton of them and I would also look in fabric stores at the catalogs. I would study the instructions and also the pattern shapes on the layout guide.
3. Another wonderful thing you can do to train yourself is to buy second hand dresses at thrift shops or yard sales. You can also visit bridal shops and let them know you are trying to learn bridal alterations. Ask them if they have any damaged or stained dresses that they would be willing to sell to you cheap. Let them know that you want to practice your alterations on some real dresses. You might be surprised at the bargains you may be offered at the bridal shop. One thing to know before you go to a bridal shop is to NEVER go on the weekend. They are always very busy on weekends. Visiting on a Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday during the early afternoon is best. Make sure you are dressed professionally and do not bring any children with you into the shop.

Skills

4. After you obtain some dresses, look on the inside. Lift the skirt and see how it is attached to the bodice. How is the lining sewn into the dress? Is it easy to separate the lining from the dress or is it closed at the waist of the bodice? How would you get into the bodice to make adjustments? Is there boning in the seams? If you are having a hard time opening the lining from the dress, it may be necessary to clip floater threads that hold the bodice lining to the outside bodice layer. Or the dress may have a bagged hem so that you can't see inside the layers at all. A bagged or enclosed hem has the lining of the skirt sewn to the skirt at the hemline. If this is the case, find the center back seam of the skirt lining and mark the seam about 12 inches from the hemline. Unpick upwards from the mark on the center back seam of the lining about 18 inches and peek inside. You should be able to see up into the bodice from here. Reach inside this hole and pull the bodice out. Open the hole larger if needed. You will then be able to view the seams in the bodice. Fun! Study these seams and locate the side seams. This is the most common place to alter the bodice. Now practice taking in the side seams.
5. Study the different hems on the dresses. You will probably be able to figure out how to do most of these hems on your own if you look carefully. Practice doing new hems on the dresses. Try to do them exactly like the manufacturers did. Caution! Do not try and do lace hems without expert training. You can ruin a dress if you don't know how to do lace hems properly. It's ok to explore and try the lace hem on these practice dresses, but don't attempt a real bride's lace hem without training. I have had to repair damaged hems and it's a sad thing. It's ok to say you don't do lace hems. Many experienced BAS don't touch lace hems or horsehair hems.

Skills

Hems and side seams are the most common alterations. You can probably figure these two alterations out just by studying the inside of wedding gowns and practicing. This is a good starting point.

6. Now it's time to study the zippers. Is it a lap zipper with buttons? Are there any buttons with just a loop? What about invisible zippers? Sometimes they have buttons on the side of the invisible zipper too. After studying the zippers, practice unpicking and replacing the zippers. Take your time and be patient with yourself. This is a skill that is really worth practicing. I still unpick and adjust my zippers now and then. Getting them to lay perfect and have the waist seam match perfect is more important than doing it fast. This is one of those times when you simply can't be in a rush.
7. Besides sewing skills, I also feel that it's important to keep current with fashion trends. My young students have an advantage on this, it seems to come naturally to them. On the other hand, my students with more time under their belt have also seen styles come and go, and then come back in style. This is an easy self-taught skill that you can build by browsing through the spring and fall bridal designers' shows. And always look carefully at the wedding gowns that the European princesses wear. These princess bridal gowns really reflect current trends for years to come. No outside training is needed. You can easily research this and keep current. It will help you understand what your bride is looking for. Study sleeves, fabrics, and how high or low the skirt sits on the waistline. Styles are always changing.

Skills

By the time you are done with these 7 exercises, you should have an idea of whether this is a career for you or not. And whether you can do this on your own or not. I am very confident that there are readers of this book who have the time and the skills to self-train and become wonderful BAS. I hope this book will really help inspire those readers to do so.



5. Equipment Needed

Let's take a look at what you will need in order to set up your own BAS studio:

1.

Sewing machine. You will need a sturdy workhorse sewing machine. If you do not have an industrial sewing machine, you should start taking out 10% of your BAS income and save up to upgrade your sewing machine in the future. Here's a sweet story about my sewing machine. I received a sewing machine for my 16 birthday. It is what led me down this path. Best birthday gift I have ever received. A few years into my marriage it literally wore out. The repairman said it wasn't worth repairing. I had been working for a custom formalwear shop and had been using their industrial sewing machine in the workroom. Once you have sewn on an industrial sewing machine, it's really hard to go back. So when my home machine wore out I told my husband we needed to look for a used industrial sewing machine. My husband was in college and we were extremely poor. He asked "how long are you planning on sewing?" I answered, "the rest of my life." He replied, "Then let's get a machine that will last you the rest of your life." As poor as we were, he insisted that I get a brand new industrial machine! He really respected my skills and supported my sewing career. I bought a Bernina industrial sewing machine. I don't know if they still make industrial machines. We also bought a serger at the same time. By the way, I made enough money with my sewing to pay off both machines in 3 months.

Equipment Needed

2. **Serger.** Specifically, a serger that does a rolled hem. Many BAS have 2 sergers set up in their studio. One for regular serging, and one set up for rolled hem work.
3. **Ironing board and iron.** Make sure your ironing board cover is clean. White wedding dresses and dirty ironing boards don't mix. There are two different views on irons. One is to get an expensive one with powerful steam. I personally have a different view. I have worked in many studios with many types of irons. I find that steam irons are notorious for spitting steam and leaving water marks and rust stains. Acetate fabrics or silks can be ruined with watermarks. Polyester doesn't seem to mind water splashes. I used to sew wedding dresses from scratch using silk. I would not waste my time sewing on junk. Silk was the only option I gave brides. The same amount of labor goes into custom sewing a wedding dress no matter the fabric. Why waste all that time and labor on cheap fabric? No matter how perfect my sewing is, the dress is still a piece of junk if it's made out of junk fabric. I turned into a fabric and lace snob back in those days. I found that I was much more comfortable ironing with an iron that had never had water put in it. It didn't need to be expensive, just clean and dry. I needed to trust it on silk. I am in the habit of keeping two irons. I use my old one on anything of color, and my new one on whites only. I know this sounds weird to iron everything dry, but I don't have time to steam water marks out of silks or worry about my iron picking up color from a red dress and staining a white wedding dress. I have a spray bottle in case I want to add moisture. This spray bottle gives me total control. I know this goes against all things taught in sewing classes. It's just my opinion and how things get ironed at my studio.

Equipment Needed

4. **Steamer.** If you don't already have a steamer, put it on your bucket list. You can get by without it, but eventually, you should have one.
5. **Sharp scissors and junk scissors.** I need both. Why junk scissors? There are a lot of times that you will be cutting into beadwork, boning and horsehair braid. All of these things can ruin your sharp scissors. Keep your junk scissors handy. You will use them more than you ever imagined. You will also need a rotary cutter and board. Tulle and netting hems need a smooth rotary cutter edging. Veils also need to be cut with a rotary cutter.
6. **Clean table or cutting surface.** I have a student that likes to cut things out on the floor with a large cutting mat. I have a daughter that prefers to sew sitting on the floor with her sewing machine on the coffee table. She likes to sit on the floor with her back against the couch between the couch and the coffee table. She cracks me up. IKEA has work tables that have adjustable heights. (That's on my bucket list.) I like a dark gray cutting mat on my table. It contrasts with the white fabrics and helps me see my work better. My mom loved her white cutting mat that she would lay out on her bed. There are so many options and preferences. You have had enough experience sewing that you will know what feels right for you.

Equipment Needed

7. **Dress form.** If you don't have one, put it on your bucket list. It is very helpful, but you can get by without it for a while. I like the adjustable ones. Dress forms are vital for doing build ups, but that is a very advanced skill.
8. **Unpicker and razor.** Because I unpick so much beadwork, I get lots of cheap unpickers. They get dull easily on the beads or boning. I think most alterations people use a razor, but I use an Olfa cutter. Bad memories here. I fished a razor out of my toddler's mouth one day. I still get the creeps when I think about it. That was the last day I had any razors around. After that, I discovered these Olfa cutters. They fit in my hand nicely, and work the same as a razor. They also get dull unpicking beads and boning, so I buy them in bulk.



Equipment Needed

9. Sturdy clothes rack or strong hooks on the wall. Wedding dresses are heavy. Storing them requires heavy duty hardware that is anchored to studs in the wall. The hooks will break sheetrock. Be sure to find studs to support the weight on the hooks.
10. Good lighting is also needed. Preferably a window too. This is a job that requires close up lighting as well as ceiling lights. The older I get, the more I need good lighting. I can only sew on black and dark colors during the midday sun. I can't see the stitching if it's night time. It's a good thing I work on whites for the most part.

One more thing that I want to stress. Your studio needs to be impeccably clean. I shouldn't need to say this. It should be obvious, but please be hyper aware of your surroundings. So much time can be spent trying to clean a stain out of a wedding dress. You can prevent a lot of grief by keeping your sewing space clean. It shows respect for the dresses, the brides and your profession.

Action

*Is your sewing machine adequate?

*Are there any items you would put on a wish list to buy in your future?

6. The Fitting Process



Welcome your client with a smile and make sure you introduce yourself. Welcome all her guests and ask each their name too.

I suggest that you wear black clothing. There are a few reasons for this suggestion. First, it makes you look professional. Second, in black clothing you become a dark backdrop to the bride as she is looking in the mirror at herself. It's much easier to see the dress' silhouette when it is in front of a black background as you are pinning and fitting. And bright colors and prints can be distracting as a bride tries to focus on her gown.

The first fitting is where you will find out everything you need to know about the bride and her expectations for her dress.. After she arrives make sure to explain the fitting process to her so she knows what to expect.

Making your bride feel as confident in you as possible right from the beginning helps ensure they feel comfortable leaving their dress with you. It's important to make sure you are being completely upfront and honest with them.

The Fitting Process

For example, if you have to take in a dress significantly, explain that there may be underlying adjustments that are not visible right now and refinement may be needed once the initial alterations have been done. *That way the bride has no expectations for a perfectly fitting dress for the next scheduled fitting and she is not disappointed when more adjustments may be needed.*

Compliment Your Bride – No Negative Comments!

Do your best to make her feel special and excited about wearing her dress. It's not going to look perfect when they come in for their first fitting. For some brides it's hard for them to visualize how the dress will look once the alterations are done. Please don't make any comments that are going to make her feel discouraged or disheartened about her dress or her body. Avoid negative comments such as how many times that week you've seen that dress or "everyone is wearing this dress right now." Point out special details on her dress, the fabric or lace that you find appealing or that add value to the dress. Also comment on how the dress style is flattering to her specific figure or the coloring of the dress works well with her skin tones and hair. If she is worried about gaining weight and the dress needing to be let out, say "It's my job to make the dress fit you, not your job to fit the dress. Just let me do my job, relax and enjoy being in love."

The Fitting Process

Don't make Assumptions!

Every bride is different and has their own special vision of what they think beauty is. You can avoid so many mistakes and misunderstandings just by asking questions and not assuming you know what the bride wants. It's important to always remind yourself that it's not your dress, it's hers. Ask the right questions and really understand how the bride wants her dress to fit:

"I love this dress, what is your favorite part of the dress?"

"Take a deep breath. Is that too tight to breathe?"

"The hinge on your shoulder is here. This is where I usually mark for the sleeve to attach to the shoulder. Would you like the sleeve attached at the hinge or out further onto your shoulder?"

"Point to where you want the sleeve to end on your arm."

"Do you have any pictures of that neckline you could text me?"

These questions asked right at the beginning will help avoid extra stress, build her confidence in you and avoid misunderstandings throughout the process. Pictures are vital to dress change outs. Brides are not experts on sewing and fashion terminology, and so they often describe change outs strangely. And then they show you a picture, and you realize that they were wanting a completely different style. They just used the wrong word. Save those pictures for reference as you work on the dress.

The Fitting Process

You need to completely understand each alteration. For example, if you are altering a size 8 dress down to a 2, don't just assume she wants her shoulders to fit like a size 2. Maybe she liked the way the shoulders fit her on the size 8 dress. Double check with the bride if you have questions while pinning the alterations. Write things down, ask questions and don't assume! Never dismiss the comments of the bride if she feels that things aren't fitting right. They may never bring it up with you again. But that doesn't mean they won't bring it up with their friends and relatives. Never send a wedding dress out the door until the bride absolutely loves it.

Immediately resolve any negative issues kindly!

It's difficult for a business to overcome a bad reputation and it should be avoided at all costs. Good word of mouth from happy clients is vital to any business's success. The bride already has a million different things she needs to worry about. Don't make her time with you one of them. Knowing how to do a proper fitting will not only bring a pleasant experience to your bride, but will also help spread word that you are a reliable, trustworthy seamstress.

Action

- *Print off the alterations pdf
- *Personalize the pdf with your name and adjust any categories to suit your vision of your business.
- *Ask a friend what she likes best about her favorite dress or an especially nice outfit she is wearing.

7. Space for fittings



If you decide to do your bridal fittings in your home, there are a few things you should consider.

1. How close to an outside entrance is it?

Ok, I want you to imagine the tour of your home that clients will have to walk through in order to get to the dressing room. My setup right now is probably one of the worst-case scenarios for my clients. They go in my front door. Take off their shoes and then climb up my stairs, go down the hallway to my bedroom, not a good layout. But it works because I only have my hubby and I home these days. It's easy to keep the house tidy. I have had other options with a separate entrance. That was divine, but no one seems to mind walking through my house. I keep a clean house so that helps.

2. Is it clean?

Please, please, please, keep the area where you do fittings and your studio very clean. It shows respect for the client and their dress. Back in the olden days, there was a famous wedding dress maker in my area who sold and rented gowns and made them all from scratch. She was a bit of a legend in many ways. One of her quirks was that she owned many cats.

Space for Fittings

She was sometimes called “the cat lady”. They would walk all over the dresses and were quite at home in her fitting room and studio. She was also known for putting things off till the last minute and was at least once in the back seat of the car sewing buttons on the bride’s gown as she drove to her wedding. For some reason, she was very busy and it seemed to be part of the adventure of getting married in my area. I once went and bought some lace I needed last minute for a dress I was working on. The place smelled like cats in a strong and really bad way.

3. Is it large enough to spread out the train?

This is good to keep in mind. It doesn’t need to be a huge area, but you do need to be able to spread out the train. My master bathroom actually has more room to spread out the train than my bedroom. So I do the fittings in my bathroom.

4. The most important thing in a fitting room is the mirror,

the bigger the better. It needs to be at least full length. For my birthday one year my mom bought me a custom mirror for my bathroom. I measured the door it would hang on and wanted it as large as possible. Right? So I order the mirror exactly to my measurements of the door. We excitedly carried it home. My husband took the door off the hinges and laid it on the floor to glue the mirror to the door. Guess what I forgot? My door, strangely enough, had a door...knob...sigh... My sweet husband finagled the mirror a bit and got it installed, but I am so embarrassed that I didn’t consider the door knob for my measurement.

Space for Fittings

5. **Do you have enough seating for a few guests to come with the bride?**
Make sure to bring in some seating to your fitting area. During my March madness month of crazy busy fittings I will often have large groups of prom friends all coming together to get their dresses done. They end up sitting on my bed while they wait for their turn. They look through the bride magazines together and easily entertain themselves. Sometimes large groups of bridesmaids come together also. Again, I have a few chairs in my room, but they also usually end up all sitting together on the end of my bed for some reason.

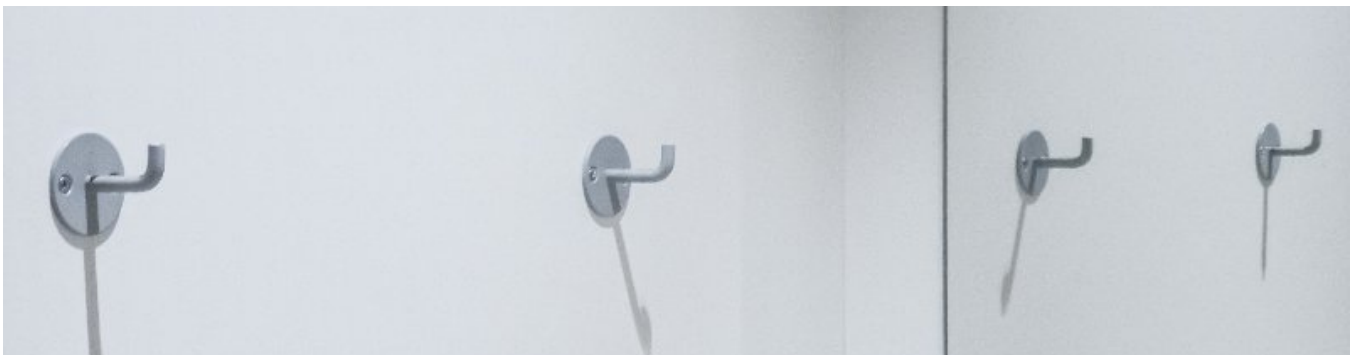
6. **Is the changing room big enough for the dress?**
What? Some of these dresses are huge and don't fit behind a tiny screen in the corner of the room. Be sure to give the bride enough space to maneuver around while getting into her dress. Some dresses are hard to even get through the doorways. Keep this in mind when setting up a fitting room and changing area. You may want to just leave the room while the bride changes in the fitting room and have her open the door when she is ready for you to come back in.

7. **Price lists are important.** They need to know what to expect. I keep a framed pricing list in the changing room and the fitting room. I also keep a copy taped inside my fitting binder for me to refer to if needed. These are also great to give out to the bridal shops that you work for. It helps the salespeople be able to give an estimate to the shopper for alterations that can be expected. Use a pretty frame and be proud and confident with your prices.

Space for Fittings

8. One of the most important things to remember when doing fittings at home is hooks. Strong, sturdy hooks that are anchored to a stud in the wall. You need one right by your front door so that your client can hang up her dress as she takes her shoes off by the front door. I always have my clients take off their shoes at the front door. It keeps all the dirt at the front door instead of tracking it into the fitting area. Some seating by the front door is helpful for them as they are taking off or putting back on their shoes. Another important place to have a hook is in the changing room. The bride needs to hang up the gown as she changes in it. Also, having a hook in the fitting room is convenient. Be sure the hook is anchored behind the sheetrock to a wooden stud in the framework of the room. The sheetrock will not hold the weight of the dress. The hook must be anchored behind the sheetrock with a stud. These dresses are super heavy sometimes. Make sure the hooks are high enough on the wall so the bag doesn't drag. But not so high that a short bride can't reach it. These hooks are the workhorses of the fitting room.

I also keep on a small table in the fitting room a small pair of scissors for loose threads, a crochet hook for doing up button loops, a tape measure, safety pins and lots of pins. I use the long yellow headed pins for most of my fittings. I use safety pins on spaghetti straps and under arms.



Space for Fittings

9. Try to keep the space clutter free with relaxing decor. I usually keep a few bridal magazines in a magazine rack too. Some BAS like soft relaxing music playing. Use whatever you feel will set a calm and relaxing mood for your bride. Some offer water bottles. Don't offer food as that could stain the bridal gown.
10. Try to limit children. I don't mind kids myself, but it can be a concern if they or their parents are not respectful of the dress. Ok, here is my rant. I was working in a bridal shop. In through the front doors came a young mother with two very young boys. Each boy was holding a chocolate pudding cup and a plastic spoon. My heart dropped as I watched them follow their mom the whole length of the shop and walk up to the owner's desk in the back of the store. The boys are eating their pudding quietly. The mother then asks the owner if she is hiring. She is not. Then the mother with boys in tow walks back out the front door. I was watching those boys like a hawk. I don't think the mother looked at them even once while she was in the store. They quietly followed her and did not spill a drop of the pudding. The boys were great. But the mother, really? How disrespectful of the merchandise in that store. What was she thinking? If the kids are being rowdy and running all over, I judge the mom who decided it was ok to bring them. Kids are kids, but mom should know better. Ok, I will get off my soapbox and sit back down. Nuff said.

Space for Fittings

Here are some items that are not necessary but might bring in extra income if you stock them with samples in the fitting room.

Veils, bra cups, adhesive bras, long line bras and corsets, spanx, double sided body tape, slips and petticoats, crochet hooks, small sewing kits, emergency bridal kits, and garters.

The list could go on and on. It may not fit your vision to stock any of these items, or you may see them as a good thing. Make sure they aren't displayed in a way that makes your fitting area feel cluttered. If you have a small space, you may need to simply have a picture with a price and make your own "catalog" using clear sleeves in a binder for accessories.

Action

- * Sketch a plan for an imaginary fitting room
- *Ponder and figure out one or two different areas in your home that would work for fittings.
- *Does the information in this chapter make you lean towards working in a bridal shop instead of in your home?

8. Time Management



As the CEO of my own business, I am so aware of time management. I have the sole responsibility to get my sewing done.

Many people struggle with being their own boss because they don't manage their time wisely. And frankly, I don't think everyone is cut out for being a one man show. A lot of talented people have great careers with someone else giving them deadlines and keeping track of their progress. There's nothing wrong with that.

Part of the appeal of running my own home business is making my own schedule. This flexibility is always in tension with my work. Time can be a tug of war between work and family, or work and sanity. It's way too easy to let the flexible ease of being your own boss hijack your day and you end up not getting any work done.

Here are some realities I have learned over the years. I am not perfect at any of these, but they do help. To any of you out there with young children, I know that it's really hard to make any of this happen and I don't want you to feel guilty about any of this. I am just giving hugs out to you. I know how hard and wonderful your life is right now.

Time Management

1.

Routines are your friends. Set up some work routines that are consistent every day that you work. Here are some of my routines: Monday mornings I do bookkeeping and CEO work. Other weekday mornings I work on my online academy. Weekdays, except Wednesdays from 1pm to 6pm I sew. Wednesdays I do fittings. I also have the expectation of a 2 week turnaround on most dresses. Some need more fittings. Saturdays are a catch up on work, fit a persnickety bride, or relax and enjoy the sunshine day. Sunday I rest and grow skin on my fingertips.

2.

Procrastination is your enemy. When you put off your work, you end up rushing through it. Your clients don't get your best work and you feel stressed. Bridal deadlines are solid. You have to finish on time. Often when I get brides who come to me to fix other BAS's work, I wonder if the seamstress is actually this bad, or if they were just rushing through the work. My first question is: "How much time did you give them to do the work?" I feel that's a fair question. Maybe they were not given enough time to do the work carefully. But usually, they had plenty of time. So I wonder, hmmm, time management or no skills?

Time Management

3. **Momentum.** A big part of the reason I do a 2 week turnaround is to keep my energy up. It gives me momentum knowing that this dress and usually 3 to 10 more dresses need to be done in two weeks. (I do many more dresses than that during March Madness.) Having a quick turn around also helps me to remember what the bride looked like in the dress. I don't worry about when the wedding is. If they have fitting issues right before the wedding, they can come back for adjustments. This rarely happens by the way. It also gives the bride peace of mind knowing her dress is done. Of course, if the wedding is right away, I will do a rush 1 week fitting.
4. **Don't get distracted.** This tip does not apply to people with small children at home. But for the rest of us, it's so easy to get distracted with phones, household chores, etc. It's basically a form of procrastination.
5. **Get your calendar set up so you can easily schedule your work.** There are so many electronic ways to calendar these days. Try a few and see which one works best for you. Even paper can work if you can keep it with you. I use a google calendar. I also keep a running list of dresses with when their next fitting is and what needs to be done before that fitting. (I love deleting the dress when I have it finished.) I schedule "one on one" zoom meetings on google calendar with my academy students too.

Time Management

Make a daily work list and schedule it into your calendar. If you don't make a plan and allot the time needed to get it done, you are only hoping you get it done. You need to make it happen by scheduling the time for it to happen. This is the biggest key. Schedule your work.

6. Set up and prepare for your work the evening before. I put my dresses in order on hooks so that I always know which dress I'm doing next. I tend to get overwhelmed if I see too many dresses, so I only put the next 5 to 10 dresses out on my hooks and put the rest away in a closet where I don't see them. Gather any threads and notions you will need. This really helps mentally. For some reason it motivates a person to get in their studio and get to work because the work is all planned out and set up ready to go.

I hope you find these tips helpful and that you try a few. I am not perfect at time management, but I find more peace when I keep on top of my sewing. It is so important to your success as a seamstress.

Action

- *Make a list of tasks that you procrastinate doing. Calendar 2 tasks onto your calendar for the next 2 days.
- *Set things up the night before for a task that needs to be done tomorrow.

9. Batching



As a professional business owner, I am in charge of managing my own work time. Time management can make or break a sole proprietorship business. In this chapter I want to focus on batching. First, let's define batching: to arrange (things) in sets or groups.

Ok, how does this apply to your everyday work in bridal alterations? Let me describe the things I do in batches and the things I don't do in batches.

Fittings

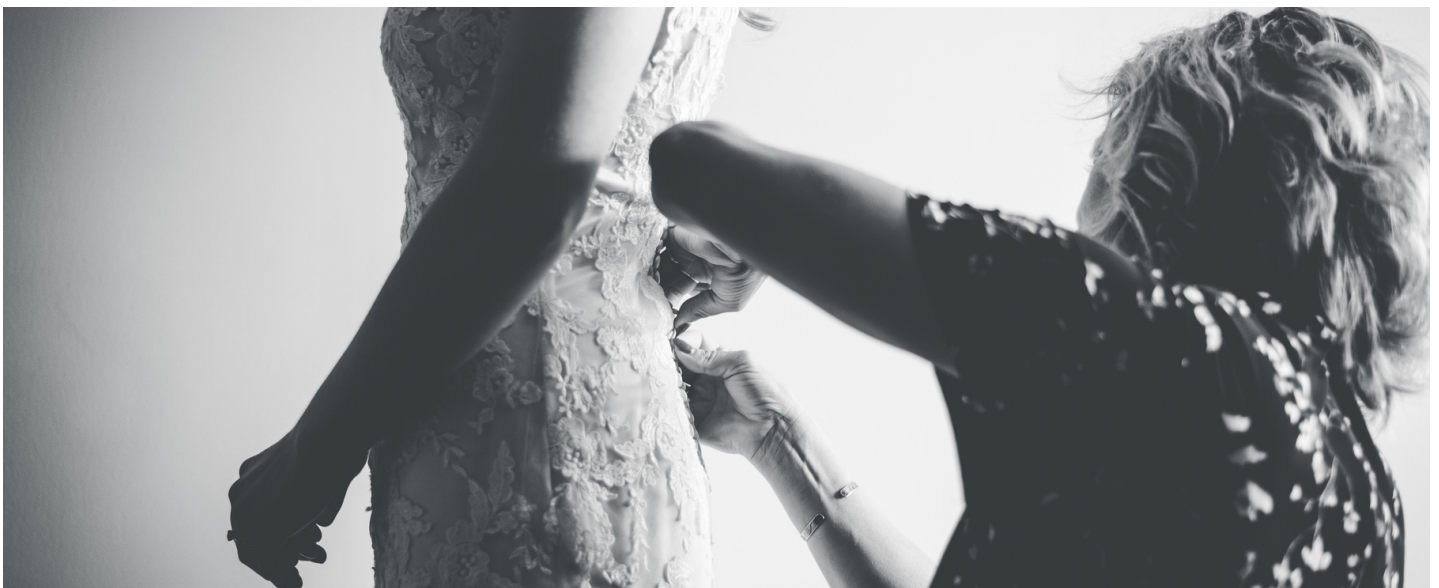
My number one batch work is Fittings. I do all my fittings on Wednesday. Why? I work from home and so I want my home to look great inside and out for my customers. It's impossible to have that type of tidy happening every day when I am busy sewing.

Also, I enjoy having my home to myself and hubby the rest of the week instead of constant intrusions on our home. I set up my signage and supplies in the bathroom where I do the fittings and take it all down after my last fitting of the day. Then, the master bathroom belongs to me again for the rest of the week.

Batching

Now of course, I make exceptions to this rule. If I have a bride flying in, I block off 2 or 3 days. The first day she flies in I do the initial fitting. Day two, I work like mad to get the alterations done. Often the bride is coming in for a build up which entails a ton of work. At the end of day two I set up my second fitting. Then I pin any adjustments. Day three the final fitting is usually at 11am. If everything looks good, then she's done, if there are any last minute changes, I send the bride to lunch and text her when the alterations are done. Then out the door she goes. Whew!

I also do this lunch or dinner fitting arrangement for brides who are driving long distances. I schedule their second fitting at 11am or 4pm. Then if there are any final adjustments, I send them out to eat and text them when it's all done. I am careful not to schedule another fitting during the time I may be required to fix these dresses. For example, if I have a travel bride scheduled for 11am, I will leave my schedule open until 2pm. Or if she has a 4pm fitting, I will schedule that for my last fitting of the day.



Batching



Dress Color

Another thing I do in batches is dress color. I line my work up in a certain order for the week, whites, then ivories, then all the colored dresses. When I finish the last colored dress, I vacuum all the colored threads up and clean my machines to get all the colored lint and threads out of my studio. Then I'm ready for next week. This lets me do all the whites without changing threads on my machines. Then, ivories, nudes, and colors. It helps you keep the momentum going when you can quickly move on to the next white dress with your thread ready to go.

Along with the thread color, I keep in mind the rolled hem work. On my serger, I have to change the foot and throat plate for the rolled hem. So if I have other dresses that need a rolled hem, and if they are in the same color of thread, I will do all the rolled hem serging at once for matching colored dresses. I know that some shops have a separate serger that is set up exclusively for rolled hem work. That is a luxury that I hope to incorporate in my future. I love this idea. I know some people like to batch their handwork. I like to see a dress done and back in the bag, so I don't go that far with my batching.

Batching



Office Work

I batch my office work too. Monday morning my calendar is set up with bookkeeping and CEO time. This is when I make my agenda for my Tuesday team meeting for the academy and check my numbers. Every morning I check my emails and then I am done for the day.

I also consider facebook part of my work because of my academy. This is done randomly throughout the day and I really need to get control of my brain and do it in the morning with my emails and then put it aside.

There are countless ways that batching can be applied to bridal alterations. Think through your own personal work load, even if you aren't doing BAS work, and see if some of it can be streamlined with batching. This concept can be used in many different areas of our lives. Meal prep, laundry, running errands, etc.

10. Hunker Down



This is a tough love kind of topic. I try to be a compassionate person, but sometimes the consequences of giving up and dropping the ball has a high price to pay, especially in the bridal alterations business. I would rather push you to the finish with some serious work than have you face the aftermath of not seeing your work through to the end. Truly, life is easier to deal with by hunkering down and getting it done.

First off, hunkering down is only for emergencies, when there just doesn't seem to be enough time to get something done that you have already committed to do. Some of the time, we get too tight on our sewing schedule because of poor time management. But I'd say more often than not, the time crunch was caused by things outside of our control: family emergencies, sickness, dress construction, bride drama, etc. I get it. It happens to me too. I once was riding in an ambulance with my mother who had just broken her hip, and had two separate brides driving long distances on their way to my home for fittings. My daughter went to my house and did the fittings. It went fine, other than trying to drive home and do my sewing only when my mom would go to sleep at night at the hospital. That was a tough year. I've had my share of hunkering down.

Hunker Down

Now to the nitty gritty. Hunker down. What exactly does that mean? To settle yourself down and work in a completely focused mode. All energy is focused on getting your work done. Pretend you are a cell phone. If you want to conserve your power, you only do short texts and stay off all the bells and whistles. Your body only has so much energy to give you. If you spend that energy on emotional drama, your ranting to friends and family will drain your energy. You can literally run out of energy before you get started on your sewing. Have you ever had a child complain about their homework or chores for so long that you tell them they could have had it done in the amount of time they spent complaining? Well... adults do that too.

Plan your work down to the half hour time allotment. Literally sit down with a piece of paper and write down the process step by step. Then write down how much time each step will take. Then write in food breaks. Completely fill in the steps until that eye twitching dress is completely planned.

If you have young children, your next step is to figure out child care. Do these arrangements with as little energy and drama as possible. After the job is done, you can go into detail with much gratitude for their help.

If you are planning tomorrow's work before you sleep, run over in your mind the best strategy for getting the work done efficiently. Then do what it takes to get some deep sleep. Speaking of sleep, I find that if I get up early, like 4:30am or 5am, and start working then, I am amazed at how much I can have done before 8am. We all have different sleep and work cycles, but you may want to give this a try if you are trying hunker down mode.

Hunker Down

Talk as little as possible and with a soft voice to any family members who need to know that you don't want to be disturbed. Use as little energy as possible to get yourself isolated in your sewing room. Now, silence your phone, bring in some water, close the door and take that paper and completely focus on the first step. Don't worry about the rest of the steps. That can make you panic and take away your focus and energy. Apply all your focus to the step you are on. Then, of course, the next step, etc. Take the paper with you as you eat and review the next few steps in your mind as you eat your food. Check phone messages and text short replies if needed while you eat too. Don't call anyone if at all possible. Use only short texts, and only during food breaks. Be sure to stay hydrated. Keep moving along, no breaks today, just forward progress, moving on to the next step.

Try to stay as unemotional as humanly possible. Stress takes away energy fast. Sometimes we just have to cry, yes, I know that it happens. But get your focus back as quickly as possible.

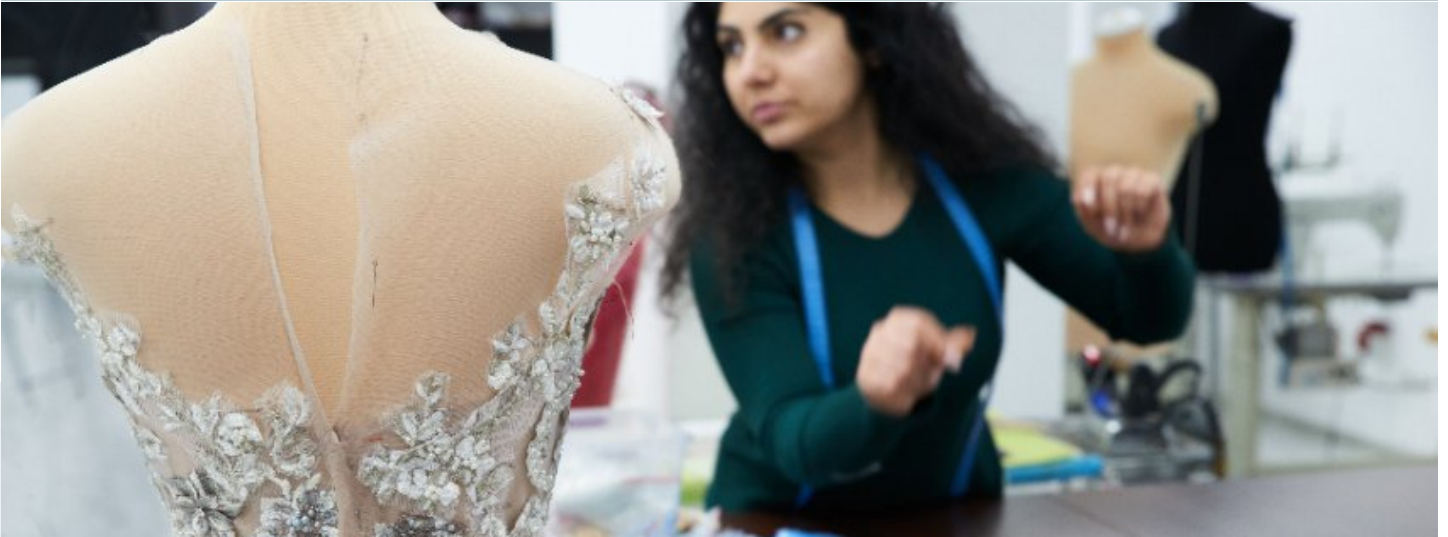
Hunkering down means you turn your complete attention to the task at hand. You zone out everything else. It's actually quite amazing how much you can get done when you get into this "zone". Remember that hydration is part of your work focus. But don't let it distract you. Stay off your phone.

Hunker Down

It's more important to work carefully than to just frantically throw the dress under the machine. Unpicking mistakes will take away from your time and energy when in the "zone". Do your best work. It really doesn't take that much more time to do an impeccable job. *The important thing is to keep moving forward without stopping.* As soon as one step is done, move smoothly on to the next. Just keep moving. That's part of being in the zone.

I hope this helps. I really do feel love and kindness for you all, but like I said, getting the work done can be far easier emotionally than the messy consequences of falling apart and not getting the work done.

11. Burnout



Every year in March, April and May I have the same conversation with my girlfriends at early morning exercise. "I've been up early sewing before heading over for exercise. I will be working long hours getting my work done. I am turning work away, but there's still so much to do. Sigh..." Every year they give me the same advice. Raise your prices so the only ones who call are the ones who can afford you. I do raise my prices every year. It makes no difference. There is always more work than I can possibly do, I'm turning away business, and I'm trying to find a balance between my sanity and the income potential of adding one more dress to the calendar.

It's hard to find that balance.

Sometimes, all the planning in the world doesn't solve the situation when you get held hostage in a "black hole of time" dress that never seems to go out the door.

Burnout

How do I survive burnout year after year?

I have a few pointers that may help rookies who are being taken by surprise by the burn out. Those, like me, who have been in the bridal alterations business for a while know it's coming every year. We have survived this busy season and have our own personal strategies. Let me share a few of my own. See if any of these suggestions might work for you:

Burnout Survival Tips:

1. Expect alterations to take longer than you think, and build that into your schedule.
2. Exercise. It gives you energy. I know you don't think that makes sense, since it takes energy to exercise, but it really works. It is time well spent.
3. Make a "Fun Fund" with a certain amount of the extra \$\$\$ coming in during the busy season. Somehow the work seems less demanding when you can look forward to a vacation after the busy season. The extra work seems more like a reward.

Burnout

4. **Black hole dresses happen.** Here is a good strategy to keep them from hijacking your schedule. When you can see the dress is throwing you off schedule, stop. Put it back in its bag and get working on the other dresses that are due. If you finish the other work and have time to go back to that dress before the fitting, great. If not, reschedule the fitting, or have the fitting with the dress less completed than you were hoping for. Honestly let the bride know that the dress is taking more time than expected, apologize and move forward. It's better to let the "problem child dress" take the hit, than have all the rest of your work be thrown off schedule.
5. **Get your sleep.** Mistakes happen when we are sleep deprived. As a boss, we would never expect an employee to work 24 -7, yet we do it to ourselves sometimes. Treat yourself with the respect that you deserve.
6. **Most importantly, learn to say no.** You are one person who is capable of doing x amount of work. That's it. At some point you have to face reality. It's not ethically honest to take on more work than you can handle. Your work suffers and is of a lower quality. Think about that..

Burnout

7.

What if you are in a time crunch and it's making you panic? I will give you some advice: **Hunker Down**. What that means is that you completely focus your energy on the task. Spend your energy on getting your alterations done. If you have not read the previous chapter devoted to hunkering down, please read it. It can save you in an emergency.

I'm sending out 100 hugs to all of you suffering from burnout. I know it's a real thing, I've been there many times myself.

Action

*Try a few of these ideas and see if they help.

12. The Psychology of Brides



The majority of brides are happy, sweet, in love with their dress, and appreciative of the BAS work. There are a few brides that can give you stress, but they are really few and far between. A huge part of dealing with these few, fretful brides is to be confident that your work is impeccable. You are less likely to take their drama personally if you know your work is spot on. Frankly, it's not about you, it's about them. Let me put these brides into a few categories. Granted, each bride is a unique individual, but I've seen the same behavior over and over. Understanding the bride helps you be the calm in the storm.

The Psychology of Brides

1. **“Decision Challenged Brides”** These brides are simply overwhelmed by the many decisions that need to be made for a wedding. Psychologists call it decision fatigue. Besides that, they have tried on so many dresses that it all has become a blur. They have sort of forgotten how the dress they’ve chosen looked on them. Really, I hear this often. They just have so much going on. For most brides, getting married is the first event they have had to plan. And they get so much input from family and friends that it can be hard for them to find their own voice. Or, they don’t want to take responsibility for their decision, so they want you to decide for them. You can make suggestions, but leave the final decision to the bride. If they can’t decide, say “Let me work on your hem and side seams. Think over the neckline change out and have a solid decision by our next fitting.”

Other brides reevaluate every decision, sort of second guessing themselves. They change their minds a day after the fitting and text their new idea about how they want this or that done. Some brides have a hard time visualizing change outs. And after the work is done, they realize it doesn’t look like they thought it would.

All of these situations can lead a bride to frustration and stress. It only becomes your stress when they direct their frustration at you as though it is your fault. You should always carefully go through your work order at the original fitting and have them sign it. That helps keep the blame off of you, but don’t count on it keeping you out of the line of fire.

The Psychology of Brides

Your best option when this happens is to sympathize with the bride and ask how you can best help. Kindly direct them back to making a solid decision and then write it down. Make sure they know how much more this will cost. Definitely charge them for any extra work when they change their minds, and make sure they are aware of that extra charge before they make a solid decision. Have the bride initial the changes and extra cost on your work order and for crying out loud, don't start working on that dress for a few days. They may call again. Sigh...

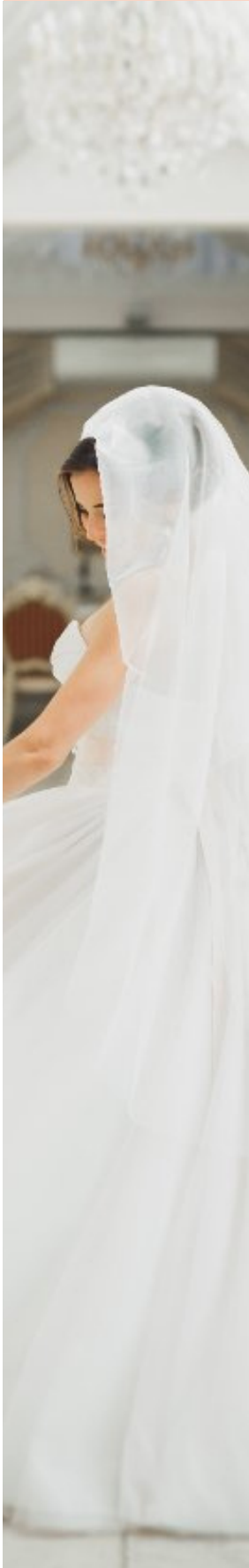
As far as your own personal sanity, realize that this is nothing personal about you or your work. You are just doing more work. As long as they are extremely aware that they are paying more, it's just another work order, as you say something like "I am happy to do this extra work, as long as you are happy to pay me for the extra work. I want this dress to be exactly how you want it. The added cost is (blank). Do you agree with the additional cost? Please initial here on my work order. Thanks so much."

2. "The Sly Ones" The most dangerous bride to work with is the bride who keeps shopping after she has bought her dress. She has found a new dress she wants to buy and is trying to convince her mother that the dress she has already bought is all wrong. Sometimes it starts out feeling like a hunch as you hear her talking with her mother in the dressing room. Sometimes it's easy to tell. The mother tries to convince her how lovely she looks in this dress. The bride picks and criticizes all sorts of things.

The Psychology of Brides

The mother reassures her daughter that the BAS can fix all those things and make her happy. I've been around too long to play this game. If I get the feeling that things are going down this road, I will flat out ask "Have you found another dress you like better?" If the answer is yes, then I say, "I don't want to get involved with this decision, but I will not touch this dress until you are very sure that this is the dress you are wearing to your wedding. Let's reschedule your fitting for next week and let you two figure this out." I have bent over backwards trying to restyle a dress to look like the bride's new favorite dress. And then, she still picks it to pieces and is in tears because her mom wants her to wear this horrible dress and she still wants to wear the other dress. Then it gets really ugly. Mother doesn't want to pay for a new dress, nor does she want to pay for the alterations on a dress her daughter refuses to wear. So she can be mature and pay me, or she can go after me and the shop where she bought the rejected dress. Mother starts criticizing all the work done to the dress, even though it was what they asked for and has been done beautifully. Then they go after the store saying that I damaged the dress and want a refund. It's so messy and dishonest. The bridal shop sees right through it. They have had to deal with these brides too. I had a bride who loved 2 dresses. She bought the one that I altered extensively for her. She hugged me and thanked me for doing such a beautiful job. Two days later, she showed up at the bridal shop. Asked if the other dress was still available. When they brought it out, she said that I ruined her dress and wanted the other one. The store knew me well and began questioning her about what exactly I ruined. She tried to wiggle out of the lie. Then she finally admitted that the dress was lovely, but she really wanted the other dress instead. She ended up buying the other dress, which fit perfectly.

The Psychology of Brides



She could have ruined my reputation just because she didn't want to admit that she had changed her mind. That definitely got under my skin for a few days.

One more story, this experience was crazy sauce. **Bride A** buys a beautiful dress from the shop I worked at. A few weeks later, she comes back with a friend (**Bride B**) who just got engaged and tells her this is the best place to shop. **Bride B** begins trying on dresses. We have her try on a new gown that has just arrived in the shop. **Bride A's** eyes pop out when she sees how lovely **Bride B** looks in this new dress. **Bride B** absolutely loves this dress. She thinks this is the one. **Bride A** loves the dress and asks **Bride B** if she can try it on. **Bride B** reluctantly lets **Bride A** try on the dress. **Bride B** is not happy with **Bride A** trying on dresses. Especially this dress. **Bride B** wants to think it over and shop at some more stores before deciding. Out they go to continue shopping. A half hour later, **Bride A** rushes into the store and wants to buy that dress quickly before **Bride B** comes back for it. The shop owner says no. **Bride A** complains that the dress is for sale, so she should be allowed to buy it. The shop owner says absolutely no. **Bride A** walks out in a huff. A few days later, **Bride B** comes back to the shop and buys the dress she loved so much. We are all so happy for her and of course say nothing about her "friend".

The Psychology of Brides

3. "Body Insecure" This next type of bride makes my heart sad. The bride has many insecurities, and is very aware that the attention will be on her for the whole day. This is terrifying to her and she begins to hyper focus on any body parts that she feels insecure about. Somehow, as a BAS, I am supposed to fix the dress in a way that will help her not feel insecure. There are a few things I can do, such as make a flattering sleeve for a bride who thinks she has heavy arms, or adding shapewear to smooth out lumps and bumps. But there's a limit to my magic. And these brides are so beautiful. I wish I could convince them that people are coming to the wedding to celebrate their love and happiness, not to judge them. This is not a pageant competition, it is a room full of people that love you and are supporting you as you marry your partner who also loves you so much. I say this to brides a lot, but I can feel that deep down, they are still being really hard on themselves. It breaks my heart.
4. "Unrealistic Expectations" Ok, here we go. Sometimes a bride is clueless about clothing construction and has some very unrealistic expectations for how her dress should look. You have to keep a straight face and be respectful as you educate these brides. I think as BAS we assume that brides understand how clothing is put together. And some of them do. But some of them have never even tried on a dress before. And some have looked through some photo shopped pics in bride magazines or pinterest and assumed that's how a real live dress looks on a body. These girls aren't trying to drive you mad. They just don't know how clothes construction or alterations work. I always want to know a bride's vision of how she wants her dress to look.

The Psychology of Brides

Sometimes there are easy adjustments I can do to refine a neckline or make lace hug your back. So I never want to discourage a bride from pointing things out that bug her. Sometimes I see things that hurt my eyes and I will ask the bride if she is ok with me adjusting this or the other just a bit. They are sometimes surprised at what can be done. I never point out refinements to a bride on a budget. I just do what she requests. You can break their budget if you insist on having the fit perfect when they just want a hem. Use good judgment on whether to make suggestions or not.

But...there are some brides who demand unrealistic fits. There's the bride in tears because her sleeves wrinkle when she bends her arms. Queen Ann necklines will be the death of me. I settle them down onto the bride's neck. But then she turns her head and wonders why the neckline doesn't turn with her neck. Or she extends her neck forward and back, freaking out because the neckline is gaping when she does that. Sigh...

I had one bride who after her final fitting was standing in the mirror doing the different poses she imagined would happen at her bridals. She turns her back to the mirror. Puts both hands on one hip and looks over her shoulder into the mirror. Horror! She sees wrinkles in the bodice side and back. Oh, that won't do! I had to kindly and respectfully explain that the dress isn't spray painted onto her skin. It's fabric. Fabric with much boning and structure. It's not skin and making the dress fit tighter won't make it stop wrinkling when you move. If the dress is tighter, you just won't be able to move and risk tearing your dress.

The Psychology of Brides

5.

“Body Fluctuation” Our last common bridal drama comes from the bride that keeps expanding or shrinking. It happens often. Busty brides tend to fluctuate in size more than brides with small busts. It doesn’t mean the bride is intentionally trying to make your life miserable. She is far more miserable than you, trust me. BAS had a deluge of tight fitting dresses after the covid lockdowns ended. Brides became pregnant and/or gained weight from being home in lockdown. Frankly, the female body doesn’t stop developing until late 20s or early 30s. The bust and hips on any female in that age group can expect to have expansion over time. A high school graduate usually has less defined curves than she will as a college graduate. Putting off a wedding for a year realistically means your dress won’t fit the same. This expansion crisis caused a shortage of corset kits available to BAS. We all had to dust off our skills and make them from scratch. There was also a shortage of bust cups for some reason.

When a bride is in the process of losing a significant amount of weight, you need to measure carefully. The body doesn’t lose weight symmetrically. The dominant arm and that side of the body will be smaller than the other side. After the body weight stabilizes, everything eventually evens out. But during the weight loss process, be aware that the fit can be irregular. You don’t need to mention it to the bride, just make sure you make your adjustments in a way that helps her look more symmetrical. For instance, adjust the sleeves so they are both the same size as the larger arm.

The Psychology of Brides

The brides' pictures will look much better if the sleeves are the same size. These bridal pictures at her new weight are very important to the bride. At some point things naturally balance back out. Maybe that will happen before the wedding, or maybe you will be making adjustments up until the wedding day. Last minute adjustments are part of the BAS journey with this type of bride.

Brides are more upfront these days than they used to be about being pregnant. In the olden days, they would try and keep it secret. Of course I was aware, and was making adjustments up until the wedding, with them acting like they had no idea why their dress was so tight. I appreciate the brides' relaxed attitude towards their pregnancies now. I can make the dress comfortable because they don't worry about "showing". They can look so beautiful while pregnant. When pregnant brides call asking for suggestions before they shop, this is what I tell them: Find the dress that makes you feel beautiful. Buy it in the size that fits your bust. Don't worry about the belly, I can work that part out. I feel weary when salespeople sell these girls huge dresses that I have to cut down to fit around their shoulders and bust. I would rather expand the belly on a dress that fits the rest of the bride. Usually, I am not part of the dress buying process, and just work with what comes in through my door. Such is the reality of the BAS.

The Psychology of Brides

In conclusion, remember that this bride as a person is still a work in progress. Young brides may not have the maturity you would expect of an adult. Brides are not an expert at the whole fitting a dress process. Your best tool to de-escalate a situation is to listen intently to the bride if she is upset. Ask questions that help you completely understand what the bride is feeling and seeing. “Am I understanding you correctly, that this and this doesn’t look right?” Take notes and at the end of the fitting refer back to those notes. Read them out loud and ask if you have resolved that specific issue. Go through each one individually. Be specific with solutions. Sometimes there are no solutions. There is just reality. Educate them with kindness and respect. Then ask if there are any other issues that the bride wants addressed. Truly, listening carefully is what is needed most. The bride wants to feel like she has been heard.

Action

- *Consider a few different scenarios that might pop up. Think through some conversations you could have with a bride who is upset.
- *Practice listening skills with your family.
- * Learn how to de-escalate tense situations.

13. The psychology of bride's family



Mother of the Bride, (MOB), gets a bad rap sometimes. It's rare to get a bad MOB. They are usually very appreciative of your work, and if you behave in a professional and calm manner, they are all the more grateful. Some of them have sewing experience, and this usually makes them admire your work more. It's rare to have one act out, but when they do, it's hard to forget.

A common problem that has popped up lately is brides choosing simple dresses with no lace or beadwork on them. They look absolutely beautiful, sophisticated and elegant. But it breaks their mothers' hearts to see their daughters choose such a "plain" dress. When they come to the fittings, mom is armed with beadwork and lace. She is quite certain that her daughter just needs to see how pretty the dress looks with a little bling. I watch brides carefully and respectfully refuse the bling. Sometimes the bride's patience wears thin. The moms are never successful. And I support the bride's decision every time.

The psychology of the bride's family

I once had a mother bring bags of different laces and beaded trims she had bought online for this fitting. She was sure that she could sway her daughter into having bling. When the daughter began to have tears in her eyes, I put a stop to the mother's persistence and emphasized how beautiful her daughter looked in her dress. Then the mother turned on me and started trying to convince me to buy the beadwork from her. Surely I would need these beautiful laces and beaded appliques. It was a big no for me too. Then the mother kept going on about how beautiful her own wedding dress had been when she was married. It, of course, had lots of beadwork. It was hard for the bride to deal with her mom.

Another problem that comes up with mothers is their lack of knowledge when they think they are a sewing expert. This happens mostly with alterations that they think are impossible. I remember one very tall and elegant bride who came with her tall and elegant mother. She had a beautiful strapless dress. They had bought fabric and lace that matched the dress and wanted me to make a bolero jacket to go with the dress. As I'm taking measurements, the bride requests that I put buttons down the back of the jacket so it looks like the dress. She wants the jacket to look like it's part of the dress. I ask her if she wants a build up instead of a jacket. What's a build up? It's where you make a strapless dress into a dress with shoulders, sleeves and a back. Her mom insisted that it was impossible. I asked the bride if that's what she wanted. Her mom got right in my face and said there was no way I could do that.

The psychology of the bride's family

It was impossible. I stayed professional and calm, and kindly requested that she let me determine what I could and could not do. (I have done so many build ups in my career. I teach an in person 3 day workshop training seamstresses on this skill.) She stepped back and let me proceed to take measurements and pin a pre-made mock-up on the bride. I keep these mock-ups in my fitting room for just such an occasion. As the mother saw that I had done this a time or two and had pre-made mock-ups in different sizes at hand, she calmed down and was so impressed with the build up when it was done.

Grandmas can be a wonderful addition to a bridal fitting or quinceanera fitting. Many of these sweet ladies are quite talented at sewing. They are usually one extreme or the other. The fact that "they could do it themselves" either makes them very appreciative of my talents or they want to micromanage my pinning. They can say "Whatever it costs, is ok with me. This is my granddaughter's special day." Or they flip at how much I am charging to do "such a simple thing." They truly want to dote on their granddaughter. So you need to not take it personally when they tut-tut around the dress making sure everything is perfect. You can join in the tut-tut dance and snip tiny threads and join in this form of endearment. It's all about showing love and support for their granddaughter. It's not about you or your work.

The psychology of the bride's family

Speaking of "not about you", this brings me to the last relative who often comes to the fittings. The older, already married sister and her children. Sometimes they forget that it's not about them. I call this Older Sister Syndrome. They can be such a loving support to their little sister, or they can take on the "expert in all things bridal" role. They often bring their children, assuming that their mother will take care of the children while they guide their little sister. I have seen this often at bridal shops too. They are very dismissive of their mother and give a lot of advice that is unwanted. It can be a tough situation to handle.

Be sure to focus on the bride and direct all questions to the bride. Use the bride's first name as you begin your questions. Look the bride straight in the eye and talk to her. She will be wearing this dress, and you need to see her vision. Say "I'm having a hard time hearing what the bride is trying to tell me please." This will usually quiet the other voices down if opinions are getting out of hand. Sometimes, if the bride's opinion is contrary to the sister's opinion, the sister will dramatically say, "It's your decision. You will have to live with it. I only want you to be happy." If you are lucky, she will sit down and be quiet after this. This usually only lasts a few minutes. And you can bet that the drive home will be full of opinions. Once again, most of this is done out of love for the bride. Do your best to support the bride with her decisions. And remember, this is fairly rare. Most fittings are a place of support from the other people that come. Don't take any of this personally.

The psychology of the bride's family



My final thoughts on these relatives is this. Give them the benefit of the doubt. These mothers are making a lot of decisions and compromises with their daughters. The expense of paying for the wedding can frazzle their spirits too. Most of the drama is out of a true love for the bride and wanting her to feel loved and supported. Please don't take it personal, set boundaries if someone gets abusive towards the bride or you. Be professional and calm if some boundaries need to be put in place. Try your best to not let it get under your skin. Focus on doing your best work and let the drama roll off your back.

14. Myth Busting for Bridal Alterations



Many brides have some misconceptions about alterations. Getting married and all the details that go with it are new to them.

Most brides are not experts on having bridal alterations done. For the most part, this is a new experience for them. Here are some common myths that brides bring to our BAS fittings:

1. When it comes to alteration costs for bridal gowns, the higher the cost, the better the quality...

WRONG!!!

Some of the worst repairs of bad alterations I have ever fixed have come from outrageously expensive seamstresses. Some of the best work sometimes comes from modestly priced alteration specialists. High price, low price, it makes no difference. It's all over the place when it comes to prices. This is where having a mentor going through your price list with you can be helpful. I am aware of pricing in different regions of the US. One of the worst mistakes you can make as a BAS is to lowball your pricing. This brings the most awful clients to your door. Be the high priced BAS. Build your reputation on exquisite work and good people skills. Trust me, you don't want to overcome a reputation that is built on having the lowest prices. Word of mouth from brides is your best friend.

Myth Busting for Bridal Alterations

2. If a bride tries on a sample dress in a store and the store orders the same size of dress, when the dress comes in, it will fit exactly like the sample dress did...

WRONG!!!

Sample dresses have a hard life. They have brides in a variety of sizes try them on and rarely is the fit perfect. Too tight and it gets stretched out. Too big and the salespeople clamp the bride into the dress so they can see how it would fit if it was their size. The dress gets stretched out over time and is usually a bit bigger than the dress your client will have ordered. If the bride's dress fits just a bit snug when you have her try it on, suggest that she wears it for 3 days, 30 minutes. Her body heat will warm the fibers of the dress and they will relax and conform to her body, giving a custom fit. Let her know that this is common and reassure her that she has not changed size.

3. Ordering a bridal gown with custom measurements means the dress will fit perfectly when it comes in. No alterations will be needed...

WRONG!!!

I can have 5 brides with the exact same measurements. They will all fit the custom measured dress differently. A bust measurement on the dress may be for a bride with a C cup bra and narrow shoulders. Another bride may have a broad back and A cup bra but have the same measurement.

Myth Busting for Bridal Alterations

Every person has a unique body shape and custom measurements should be saved for someone with extreme body issues. Find the size that comes closest to the bride's measurements and order that size. The salespeople should educate the bride so she assumes that there will be some alterations to settle the dress onto her unique body. Custom measurements can bring disappointment and unrealistic expectations for the fit of a bridal gown. This is a real nightmare and one of the reasons that many stores won't do custom measurements. I always encourage brides to get a made to measure hem on their dress if at all possible. I am like a dentist who would love to be put out of work because of no cavities. I also would love to be put out of work because every dress fits perfectly. It hasn't happened yet, but maybe in the future. For now, I encourage custom hems whenever possible.

4. Alterations on a wedding dress can be done the same day, as a bride waits...

WRONG!!! I DOUBT THAT'S EVEN REALLY POSSIBLE!!!

I have had brides come with alterations and are surprised when I pin and then walk them to the door after the fitting. They think they will sit on my couch and wait while I rush into my studio and do all their alterations on the spot. Some people have no experience with alterations, so they have strange or unrealistic expectations. Remember, most brides have never been married before, so this is all new to them. Six weeks to three months is normal or expect a very hefty rush fee for under 2 weeks. We are all overworked and often booked out for months.

Myth Busting for Bridal Alterations

No one is waiting around for more work. There is a shortage of qualified seamstresses that alter bridal gowns. It's a dying art and highly technical work. Frankly, there are just not enough of us to go around and bridal work is time consuming, it must be carefully done.

5. Brides think if their wedding dress is inexpensive, their alterations will also be inexpensive....

WRONG!!!

The price of alterations has nothing to do with the price of the dress. It's the same amount of labor, time, and skill to alter a cheap dress as it is for a \$10,000 dress. Also, that \$99 sample sale dress that is nowhere close to fitting may end up costing between \$500 to \$1000 to reconstruct to the right size. Even a free borrowed dress can be extremely expensive to alter if the bride is nowhere close to the right size. I see this a lot. It's not a smart choice for a bride to borrow a free dress that doesn't fit if the alterations are going to cost more than it would cost to just go out and buy a dress that fits. Please encourage your budget minded clients to think this through carefully. I sometimes give them the total price to have the dress altered and then suggest they go shopping and see if they can find a dress that fits in that price range. They can call me later and let me know whether to go ahead with the alterations or not

Myth Busting for Bridal Alterations

Change outs can also really add up. If a bride likes a dress, except for this, that, and the other, changed out to make it perfect, then she probably hasn't really found the right dress and should keep shopping. Sometimes they really do love the dress, and need just one or two adjustments. That's okay. If they want a completely different style of skirt, they definitely need to keep shopping. The one exception is for sleeves. Changing out sleeves makes good sense. Find the dress a bride loves that has a good fit. Then order from the store laces and fabrics for the sleeves she dreams of. A bride's choices are limited way too much if she is trying to find a dress with a specific sleeve. That's my one exception to the rule.

Unfortunately, I am usually not part of the shopping experience, and sales people can talk a bride into some poor choices. I had a bride call who was in love with a certain style of dress, but the store only had it in a size 22. She was a size 12. She asked if I could fix it. I told her to find it somewhere else or keep shopping. The bust cups would have been under her armpits. Yes, it can be fixed, but no, the bride should not buy it. The cost of completely re-making that size 22 down to a 12 is not cost effective or wise. She actually found the same dress in another store in her size. Yup, be careful about this kind of stuff. A shop of course wants the sale and they may not like the bride walking out the door, but a size 22 was pretty unrealistic. Or, they buy something on the internet. You'd be surprised how many bridal alterations have to be done simply because of poor shopping choices.

If you are already a BAS I'm sure you have seen most, if not all, of these situations in your work.

Myth Busting for Bridal Alterations

I wish I could go shopping for dresses with my future clients. They sometimes text pictures while they shop and ask questions about alterations. I appreciate giving my input for sizing too. When I worked in bridal shops, it was so convenient for me to answer questions. But for the most part now, all decisions are made before I see the dress. I get to make it work. Sigh...

I hope this helps you be more aware of the interesting ideas that a bride will have about alterations. The more you educate them at their first fitting, or even when they book their first appointment, the better life will go for both of you. I know some BAS who have auto online booking. They have text explaining the fittings and what the bride can expect. This can be so helpful to you and the client so there are fewer strange expectations.

15. Mentoring



Working on an expensive wedding gown can be intimidating. Most BAS are a bit terrified digging into their first few dresses. These are very exquisite dresses, mistakes can ruin the dress, and there usually isn't time or money to replace the dress. You really need to know what you are doing before attempting to work on a bride's dress.

This feeling of hesitancy and downright fear is not a bad thing. It means you have respect for the time and labor already put into manufacturing the dress. It means you admire the laces and fabrics in the dress. This is a sign of understanding the importance of this dress to the bride.

This intimidation is also a big mental hurdle to go over. It really is. Knowing the proper techniques for altering a bridal gown are vital and having someone watching over your shoulder and validating that you are doing it right is huge when you are a beginner. This is especially true when you are working on a client's wedding dress.

Mentoring

I have had two sewing mentors in my life. My first and last mentor was my mother. I have warm memories of sitting on the floor in her sewing area as a young girl. I would have her thread me a needle and knot it for me. Then I would sew scraps of her fabrics onto my dolls and make clothes for them. When I would come to the end of my thread, mom would knot off my thread and get me a new thread knotted onto my needle to sew some more. I remember being reminded to leave enough thread for her to knot it off when I was finished. As a teen, she taught me a clever way to do zippers. She was very calm and not too fussy about me needing to unpick or have perfect seams. She had a laissez-faire sort of attitude towards sewing. It didn't need to be done according to the pattern directions. It was a relaxing journey. I don't remember her asking to inspect my work. If I felt my sewing was pretty good, I would show it to her so she could see my progress. But I never felt like I needed to pass off my work before I could go on to the next step. She was available to help if I was stuck or didn't understand how to do something, but she never hovered over my shoulder. It was my hobby for me to learn, however I saw fit. I think her easy going attitude is why I became a talented seamstress. Her attitude of there being more than one way to sew things together and that I was capable of figuring things out on my own helped me feel confident with bridal alterations. As I began sewing wedding dresses in my early 20's, she set up a photo shoot for me with an especially beautiful dress that I had entirely hand beaded. I am not sure whether it was her idea or my oldest sisters' idea. I am so grateful for that picture of me, and for her confidence in me as a professional seamstress. Whenever I look at it, I think of what a cheerleader she was for me.

Mentoring

The last 12 years of my mom's life were spent living in my home with me. I cherish that time, and yes, she was still a mentor for me. She encouraged me so much with my efforts and loved seeing all the gorgeous dresses. I really miss her enthusiasm. Life in general is quite mellow without her. Sigh...

My best friend Peggy's mom was my first official sewing teacher. She was the secretary at the small junior high I attended. The school gathered up some old sewing machines and set up a sewing room for a few weeks. We made aprons and a pair of pants. We were so proud of our pants that we chose a day and we all wore our pants to school that day. This class was scheduled for the same time that we usually did gym. So our gym teacher learned to sew with us. I still remember her saying "I'm going to build me a dress!" We had so much fun in this sewing class and I learned so much. Peggy's mom was so patient with us and our gym teacher kept us laughing through the whole class.

Speaking of sewing classes, in my opinion, part of the reason we are struggling to find seamstresses currently, is because those with desire or potential have had a bad experience with sewing when they first learned. If there was more focus on enjoyment as a hobby and less focus on perfection with a school grade depending on our efforts, there would be more people who stick with sewing long enough to get some real skills.

Mentoring

Building a great reputation is so vital at the beginning and throughout your BAS career. Ruining a wedding dress because you are not sure of what you are doing can be a hard hit to your reputation. It's hard to overcome bad word of mouth. The beauty and skill of your work from day one is so important. It takes a bit of humility to reach out and find a mentor.

Incorrect information is as bad as no information. Be careful about youtube how-to videos. I recommend [Brenda LaBolt Bridal Alterations Techniques](#) or of course my youtube channel [The Anderson Alterations Academy](#).

When you have a certain dress with a certain fitting problem, a video may not give enough information to move forward on the alteration.

Usually if you are working in a bridal shop that has a backroom alteration area, you will have someone to mentor you. An alterations business with many workers will also mentor you as you build skills while working with the business. You will be trained on site with supervision and mentoring in these situations.



Mentoring

If you are going solo with your alterations business, enlisting a mentor as you start working on brides' dresses can make all the difference and save you so much time. I love my Academy mentoring program. The one on one zooms are so important when my students are doing their first lace hem, or if they have never opened up a dress to see the inside. I truly enjoy supporting and guiding them on a zoom as they work on real brides' dresses, to help dissipate the fear and hesitancy my students feel.

I have noticed that online coaching, mentoring and apprenticeship have become quite popular and almost trendy. I appreciate that people are humble and willing to learn skills in this way. Online one on one communication has improved leaps and bounds. We can learn new skills from people who live anywhere in the world. What an amazing time to be alive. For the longest time I envisioned myself teaching bridal alterations at my town hall. In just a few short years my vision of teaching has been expanded beyond belief. My vision of mentoring has become so much more than I imagined. I love being part of this new online learning culture. I hope you will consider joining me at the academy.

Action

*If you have considered a career in BAS, take a look at The Anderson Alterations Academy and see if it is a good fit for you.

*If you consider working in a large alterations shop or a large bridal shop with an inhouse alterations department, you may be able to receive mentoring on the job. Would this be a good fit for you as you learn BAS skills?

16. Conclusion



I hope you have enjoyed reading this book. I know it just skims the surface of the skills needed to be a successful BAS. But teaching alterations using text exclusively is very difficult. My youtube videos will give you a taste of what is available in the academy.

Perhaps you have finished reading this and are saying “No way!” to being a BAS. I bet the book was entertaining, nonetheless. Perhaps it was entertaining like a horror film. I think all BAS have days of tears now and then. I also feel that almost any job has bad days. Even if you don’t work with the public, machinery, co-workers and bosses can cause stress. That’s just part of life.

If nothing else, this book is filled with pretty pictures of brides and gowns. It feels a bit like browsing through a bridal magazine. There may be a few of you who are intrigued by the idea of starting a BAS career. You can start small with a very part-time job of only a few hours a week to begin with. Try it out and see how it feels. You may really enjoy it. I have a free class on mending English netting that comes as a bonus with/ the book. This mending class will give you a taste of what BAS do.

Conclusion

You may want to consider going full time right from the start. In that case, I strongly recommend getting training. Most of my students are committed to BAS as their lifetime career and have no problem investing in themselves to get their career started. The return on investment is much quicker than you would imagine. You can launch your business as you work through the courses. You don't have to graduate before you begin working on wedding dresses for clients. Most of my students are earning as they are learning. Getting started right away is encouraged.

BAS is a career that I am passionate about. I love the beauty and elegance of the dresses and brides. I love the challenge. Each dress is different. No assembly line work in BAS. I have different work to do every day. On Wednesdays I have new brides to meet and I have finished work to send out the door with a warm farewell. Sometimes I do a little dance when an especially difficult dress or bride is done and gone. The variety of work and fitting issues is infinite.

I love my job. It's not for everyone. I know that. I hope that this book will somehow seek out and find new BAS. The bridal industry desperately needs more BAS.

Action

*Write down your overall feelings about a career in BAS.

*Is a BAS career a good fit in your life now, or would it be a better fit later in your life?

*Ask yourself whether your living situation would work for a BAS home business.

17. About Dee Dee

I have been in the bridal industry for over 35 years. I was sewing custom wedding dresses in my early 20's. I worked for many brides who were older than me back in those dinosaur days. I also did custom rodeo competition clothes and even doll clothes but my joy and love was bridal gowns. Eventually my work evolved into bridal alterations. It has been the most lucrative sewing work I have done by far. I loved working with bridal shops and the money was so much better than making a wedding dress from scratch.



At one bridal shop I worked at, we used to joke that we should do a TV series about the bridal shop. We would be the main characters and we had one mother of the bride who was constantly having me adjust and change her dress. So she would be a regular on the series too. Just when we thought we were finished with her, she would come back with a new adjustment or need a shorter hem. We decided that she would get the laughs whenever she would walk back in the store. We would share new bridal adventures every week. We had a lot of fun. After that store closed, I had some loyal customers that would drive long distances to have me do their alterations.

About Dee Dee

I found that trust brings brides. Brides will come if they know it's going to be done right. This is a woman's most important dress of her life. Brides will come wherever you live if they know their bridal dress alterations are going to be done right. Some brides fly in for their fittings because they know I will do an impeccable job. I have a reputation for doing the "hard stuff" and being honest.

As time went by, I wanted to teach these skills. I had begun narrating in my head as I sewed, imagining that I was teaching the different techniques because there is such a shortage of bridal alterations specialists. I scoped out my town hall thinking that I could teach bridal alterations there sometime in the future. My kids were taking online college classes at that time, so I wondered about going that route. I felt that online teaching would be a great fit for my academy. I wouldn't have to worry about equipment or scheduling the town hall for classes and with online classes, I could teach students from all over the world.

So I just went for it.

I spent a summer at my cabin writing my class outlines and reading business books. I had no computer skills so I hired a tech and marketing team, and began filming. Standing in front of the camera and introducing the different class modules was very hard at first. I couldn't even pronounce my own name. It was very awkward. But as soon as I sat down at my sewing machine, I could narrate smoothly and effortlessly as I stitched away. We soon learned that I can't memorize even a full sentence. My brain won't do it in front of a camera. (Maybe it can't do it off camera either. Wink.) They also tried cue cards, but my eyesight is poor, (I'm legally blind in one eye) and so I couldn't read the cards. (I use a big screen TV for my zooms so I can see my student's homework). Finally, the cameraman told me to just "have a conversation with the camera." It worked. Kinda.

About Dee Dee

Well, it was better than all the other attempts. And so we said, “Good enough.” and moved on. All those years narrating in my head made the filming when I was sewing or at the cutting table go quite smoothly. It’s when I have to present something like a webinar or announce my yearly symposium that I fumble around. We usually just use pictures, text and pretty music because I just really struggle with that kind of filming but I am getting more comfortable with it.

I created the academy with 3 levels of classes. Students pay tuition and have homework, testing, and mentoring with me. The one on one zoom time with them is my favorite part. I didn’t even know that was possible. As I was working with my webmaster, I mentioned that I wished I could talk to my students face to face. He clicked a few keys on his computer and suddenly I was on a zoom call with his partner. I was dumbfounded. I had no idea zoom existed. He had already integrated it into the academy and had assumed I would be using it. Well, yes, I absolutely wanted it. Zoom was, and is, a big learning curve for me, but it is so vital to the academy.

The academy doesn't just teach sewing skills. The homework and mentoring includes visiting local bridal shops and students presenting their own business philosophy. My main goal with each student is to help them set up their own business and see it succeed. This is also my greatest joy in operating the academy.

Whenever I get off a zoom meeting with one of my students, I am in the best mood for the rest of the day. To see them having success in their own bridal alterations business just makes my heart burst. I am so proud of the hard work they put into their own businesses.

About Dee Dee

Bridal alterations are very lucrative but this is not a get rich quick scheme. They don't have to compete with third world prices or worry about their jobs being shipped overseas. This skill will not be outdated in 20 years. The basic machinery needed hasn't changed that much in the last 100 years. That's a great investment. Industrial sewing machines last a long time. I am quite sure that my machines will outlive me.

There is a need for this skill wherever my students live. Bridal alterations are a dying art and need to be passed down to the next generation. Bridal Shops are desperate to find people with these skills. This is one of the main reasons why I started the academy. We need the next generation of BAS.

Not only do I teach the skills to be a fantastic bridal alterations specialist, but I also teach them how to make a business career out of alterations. The facetime and homework includes career counseling and how to behave professionally with your clients and bridal shops.

My bridal alterations sewing business is still a major part of my life. I love being a BAS. It's good to be down in the trenches with my students. We can discuss our current dress with each other and I am more aware of manufacturing trends with the dresses.

My future dreams are to travel more and spend my summers at my family cabin. This was also part of the reason an online academy made sense for me. I can do my work and zooms from wherever I am. I am able to do my zooms from my cabin, and as long as I can find WIFI, I will be able to travel and work at the same time. I'm still dreaming.

A Big Thank You!

I'm so grateful for my husband Doug. He has always been my greatest supporter and fan club. He teases me about all the paparazzi hiding in the bushes. Ha! We are a great team and his love gives me the courage to get in front of a camera, figure out how to do a zoom, and even write a book. I love that guy so much. Sigh...

A big thank you needs to go out to my media team, Matt Veil and Michelle Einzinger. They put this book together for me. I think it turned out more beautiful than I could have imagined. They also are the people who make my web site happen. I know how to sew, but they are true media magicians. The Anderson Alterations Academy would simply not exist without their hard work and constant monitoring. Their skills are genius and beyond comparison!

Learn more at AtlasInternetMarketing.com

Another huge thank you goes out to Teri Rhodes, my editor. The book is so much better than it was before she dug into it. I'm so grateful for her honesty and intellect. She's been a dear friend for a long time. 100 thank yous to Teri.

Name _____ Phone # _____
 Item _____ Wear Date _____
 Next Appointment _____ Store _____

_____ Hem	Front only	Layers	12345+	Horsehair braid	Lace	Beadwork
_____ Shoulders up		Beadwork		Lace		
_____ Add Sleeves or straps		Beadwork		Lace		
_____ Build up for a strapless		Lace	Beadwork	Zipper	Buttons	Loop
_____ Sleeves	In		Out	Up	Down	Off
_____ Sides	In		Out	Through Zipper	Lace	Beadwork
_____ Bust	In		Out	Lace	Beadwork	
_____ Neckline	Fill		Hug	Change Out	Front	Back
_____ Back Panel	Loops and Tie					
_____ Bustle	French		Outside	1 loop	3 loop	2 separate bustles
Measurements	Bust	_____	Waist	_____	Hips	_____
	Sleeve length	_____	Upper Arm	_____	Lower edge of sleeve	_____
_____ Other Work						
_____ Extra Materials	fabric	lining	lace	buttons and loop	zipper	beads
_____ Beadwork	\$30 per hour plus beads					
_____ Rush Charge	under 1 week					
_____ Total						

Prices quoted for alterations are estimates and may be adjusted based on time required to perform work. I am an independent business and bear sole liability for all services performed.

Signature _____ Date _____

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Dee Dee Anderson

deedee@theandersonacademy.com
