

# Redwoods

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## The Nine Biggest Mistakes Planning A Catered Event

### 1. Not Sampling The Food Before The Event

You would be surprised how many people call up a caterer and book an event without tasting the food. This is critical. What happens if the food is not what you expect? You leave yourself open to looking bad in front of all your guests and their family. Believe it or not more people will remember the “cold, tasteless food”, rather than the true meaning of this special event, a day of camaraderie and friendship.

### 2. Failing To Have A Budget And “Goal” In Mind

You know the importance of setting goals. Goals are a focal point to rally your family around. The vision of attaining these goals is what keeps everyone motivated and on course. A catered event is no different.

You had better have a vision of the end result. Do you picture a black tie formal event, or would you prefer guests casually enjoying a traditional New England clambake with all the fun?

The second part of the equation is your budget. Knowing in advance how much money you have to spend will save you time in exploring options. There is nothing more frustrating than having a specific meal in mind without the budget to see it through.

### 3. Basing Your Decision Just On Price

The old saying, “*You get what you pay for*” rings truer today than ever. Competition is such that one caterer cannot afford to over-price their service. Most caterers should be within 5% - 10% of each other for similar menus and levels of service. You’ll find someone offering a rock bottom price is cutting corners somewhere.

You need to make sure and compare apples to apples. Is clean up included in the price? Is the food cooked fresh or reheated? What about portion size? What is the quality of the serving ware and utensils? Is desert and beverages included in the price? What is the gratuity or service charge? What happens if the caterer runs out of food?

Lobsters for example are purchased by a graded size and are priced accordingly. “1 pound” lobsters should weigh between 395 and 1.20 lbs. “1 ¼ pound” lobsters should weigh between 1.21 and 1.45 lbs. “1 ½ pound lobsters should weigh between 1.45 and 1.74 lbs. When a caterer tells you their lobsters will be between 1 and ¼ pounds, you can be assured you are purchasing a lobster closer to the lower end of the range.

The list goes on and on. You see all caterers are not created equally. You owe it to yourself to make sure you know what you are paying for. This will help you avoid any unpleasant surprises.

### 4. Choosing more than one entrée

Most group meals consist of a number of guests that have special diet and/or desires. Years ago you could order one entrée and be sure everyone was happy. Today, you need to consider adding a selection of entrées. Perhaps a chicken dish added would accommodate all.

Not every event requires two entrees, but it is advisable to find out on the front end. A professional caterer should have options available to please everyone without breaking your budget.

## **5. Forgetting To Explore All Possible “Options”**

The price of two cars with different options can vary as much as \$5000. Caterings are no different in the fact options can add to the price tag. The opposite can also ring true. If you are willing to forgo certain items or extras, you might be able to negotiate a lower price. Make sure you ask about the “base model” catering if you are on a tight budget. Most caterers will work with you.

If you have a larger budget be sure to ask about the extras. You might have enough to add the full service, hors d'oeuvres, raw bar or liquor service.

## **6. Failing To Find Out What “Service” Is Included**

As mentioned earlier, you get what you pay for. This includes service. Find out exactly what the caterer does as part of his service.

Will they stay till the end and clean the entire area or just through the meal? Who is responsible for the trash? Does the caterer plan on setting up and serving the meal, or will the guest serve themselves. You need to be aware of what you are getting for your money. This allows you to receive the service you expect and prevents any unexpected surprises for you before, during or after your event.

## **7. Thinking The Caterer Won't Run Out Of Food**

Have you even been to a party and they run out of food. How did it make the host look? Running out of food is the **biggest** catastrophe for an event. Make sure your caterer provides you a written guarantee they won't run out of food for the number of people you agree on.

## **8. Not Having A Plan For Extra Guests That May Show Up**

As good a job as you will do in taking reservations and estimating the number of guest, there will always be some people show up unexpectedly. Usually, a caterer will require you pay for the exact number of guest you guarantee. If fewer guests show, you're stuck paying for food you didn't use. If extra guests join in, you are more than likely going to run out of food.

Some caterers use a “flexible guarantee”. You give the caterer a guaranteed number of guests, and the caterer guarantees there will be enough food to feed an extra 10%. If extra people show, you pay for them. If they don't you're not on the line for uneaten meals.

If you are afraid fewer guests will show up than expected, you can guarantee a lower number. The 10% leeway will protect you in the event you guessed wrong. Again, that advantage to this is that you minimize your investment in meals that go uneaten.

Make sure you insist on this kind of guarantee. There are many reputable caterers that offer the “flexible guarantee”.

## **9. Using A Caterer That Doesn't Guarantee Your Experience**

Guarantees are part of doing business for most industries. This protects you, the consumer, from not getting what you expect. You have the right to receive what you expect.

Look for a caterer that guarantees their product. An example would be if the caterer runs out of food or doesn't provide the services that you contracted for, you don't pay. Make sure you go into your event knowing you are covered. Don't place the risk on your shoulder. You're giving up valuable dollars. You have every right to expect a guarantee for your important event.