

Mistakes When Changing Your Name

By [Francesca Di Meglio](#)

Most people have no idea just how many ways you can screw up when [changing your name after marriage](#)¹. The process is already a daunting one. Just think about all the companies and bureaus and friends and family you have to inform about the decision. That alone can raise [the stress levels](#)² to code red. But there are numerous errors that people just don't know about that can throw off the whole process and put you back at square one. It's enough to make you scream to be honest. Here, experts on [name changing](#)³ and relationships weigh in about mistakes you need to avoid when changing your name to his (or hers):



Changing your name can be hassle if you make common errors. © Photo by Francesca Di Meglio

1. You put off the decision.

Couples seem to think that name changes are an [after-the-wedding chore](#)⁴. To some degree, they are right. Most women don't actually do the paperwork to change their name until after the big day. But they should decide before the wedding if this is the route they want to take. In many states, you need to use the name you want after the wedding on your marriage license.

"A bride who wants to change her name after the marriage license is obtained will then need to make a motion before the state court and obtain an order allowing for the name change after the fact," writes David Reischer, CEO and founder of [LegalAdvice.com](#)⁵ in New York, in an e-mail. "This mistake will not only cost extra legal fees, but obtaining a court order on top of the name change process will be a giant and unnecessary headache."

2. You plan the honeymoon with your new name.

Lots of newlyweds are excited at the prospect of being the new Mrs. So and So. They get carried away and use their new name on their airline tickets for [the honeymoon](#)⁶. But it usually takes a lot longer to actually get your new name legally established in the eyes of the government, including those I.D. issuers. We're talking about the ones who give you your license and passport, which you'll be showing security before boarding your flight to romance. If the name on your ticket doesn't match the one on your ID, then you'll have to purchase an entirely new ticket and lose all the money on the original.

"You don't want to be the bride weeping at the airport," says Danielle Tate, co-founder and CEO of [MissNowMrs.com](#)⁷, a site dedicated to helping people with the name change process, "because you can't go on your honeymoon."

3. You fail to realize who needs to be informed of your name change.

Once you've legally changed your name - on your Social Security card, passport, and license, for instance - your new name is not going to magically appear everywhere else. "You need to contact each and every biller or company individually," warns David Bakke, marriage expert for [Money Crashers.com](#)⁸ in Atlanta, Ga., in an e-mail. Using an online service is tempting, but Bakke adds that some of these sites are not secure and many are fraudulent. As a result, he writes, "identity theft might be just around the corner." In other words, you're better off calling folks yourself, the old-fashioned way.

4. You think, "Now's my chance to go from being Tellulah James to Farrah Fawcett James."

Not so fast, missy. Apparently, you can not change your first name as easily as your last. When you file the paper work to change both first and last name, it will all come back to you, warns Tate. If you want to change your first name, too, then you'll have to go through motioning the court and the rest of the hoopla (including those extra legal fees - cha ching) you'd have to go through if you failed to change your last name on your marriage license.

5. You decide to keep your maiden name without considering the consequences.

Let's begin by saying there's nothing wrong with keeping your maiden name. It's your choice, and [you should not feel forced by anyone](#)⁹ - including your beloved - to change it. But some people don't realize exactly what this means. For starters, some husbands are disappointed. "Many women don't understand how deeply hurt not taking a husband's name, goes," writes April Masini of [AskApril.com](#)¹⁰ in an e-mail. "This is a rejection for the guy."

Still, he will live and most couples can work through this if they [communicate well](#)¹¹. The other more pressing consequence is having a different last name than your children should you decide to have them. Of course, this can have emotional ramifications because the last name unites American families. But it's more than that.

Take it from me, the Newlyweds Expert. I never changed my last name because my husband is a native of Italy, where the women have always kept their maiden names. People might refer to me by Mrs. Gerenini to be cute or recognize my husband, but it's of no legal consequence. When I first traveled back from Europe with our then 9-month-old son without my husband, the German authorities in Munich were threatening to take my baby away to make sure I wasn't kidnapping him because our passports showed different last names. Needless to say, I now travel with my son's birth certificate in hand, even to go to the supermarket in Italy, so I always have proof of being his mom. Rumor has it that health care, if you're on your husband's plan, can be a hassle, too, if you have different last names. And the two names require additional explanation. Always.

6. You just assume you can take your maiden name as your middle name.

Wrong! Tate set me straight about this one, too. Apparently, some states - California, Washington, New Jersey, Ohio, New York and Pennsylvania - do not allow women to take their maiden name as their middle name. If you file for your marriage license with the maiden name as the middle name in California you can get around this. In New York and Pennsylvania, you can do it only if you file name change forms in a very specific order, says Tate.

7. You want hubby to change his name and think it's the same process for him.

Most states require men to go through the legal name change by petitioning the courts and all the rest, regardless of what they put on the marriage license form, says Tate. While [men hyphenating or changing their last name](#)¹² is still rather rare, it is getting some attention. So, if you'd really like that prospect, you should move to California, Georgia, Hawaii, Iowa, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, New York, or North Dakota, where brides and grooms change their last names in the same way when marrying. Get packing now.

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