THE SIMPLICITY OF MILITARY CEREMONIES

Between Tradition, Leadership, and Efficiency

Simplicity, often underestimated in the organization of military ceremonies, is one of the most powerful factors in ensuring dignity, clarity, and institutional strength. The Armed Forces - historically associated with formality, rigor, and tradition - have shaped a distinctive ceremonial identity over time. Yet it is precisely sobriety and structural simplicity that allow these elements to emerge with greater authenticity and impact.

Although specific regulations govern each ceremonial act, it is ultimately the responsibility of the commander or director to interpret, adapt, and apply these norms with sound judgment. This responsibility requires balancing tradition, functionality, and historical legacy while preserving the efficiency required by contemporary institutions.

Leadership and Ceremonial: Two Sides of the Same Coin

Military ceremonial is not merely a matter of form; it is also an expression of leadership. Teams participating in ceremonies, whether military or civilian, perform more effectively when roles are clearly defined, procedures are uniform, and the chain of command is unmistakable.





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During the 31 years I served in the Portuguese Army as an Artillery Officer, I have experienced teamwork, command, and decision-making under pressure at the highest level. These years strengthened my understanding that every ceremonial gesture, no matter how simple, conveys values and shapes how an institution is perceived by the public.

Following my retirement I began teaching Protocol at ISMAI University, guiding young students and professionals in this discipline. At the same time, an increasing number of requests for technical support led to the creation of a consultancy company dedicated to protocol and event organization. These three complementary perspectives - military, academic, and corporate – allowed me to understand not only what protocol requires, but why it requires it.

Simplicity provides a decisive advantage: it reduces the margin for error. When participants know exactly what to do, when to do it, and how to do it, an atmosphere of confidence is created. The ceremony then unfolds with naturalness and dignity. Simplifying does not diminish solemnity; rather, it sharpens focus on what truly matters.

The Structure of Military Ceremonial: Order, Predictability, and Respect

All military ceremonies follow these fundamental principles:

- Clear definition of the presiding authority;
- Identification of represented entities;
- A formal guest list;
- Rules for introductions and greetings;
- Inclusion or absence of religious authorities, depending on the nature of the event;
- Predictable symbolic acts such as floral tributes, military honors, speeches, or the exchange of gifts.

Formality exists for a reason: it clarifies roles, reduces uncertainty, and promotes mutual respect. Every ceremonial gesture - from the simplest introduction to the most elaborate tribute - communicates discipline, hierarchy, and tradition.





When Protocol is Tested: Two Real Situations

1. An unexpected gift during a farewell ceremony

During an official event, a local mayor offers a symbolic gift to a high-ranking dignitary at the moment of departure, despite it not being included in the protocol. It could have caused embarrassment, but the dignitary's polite and composed reaction transformed it into a positive and human moment. This episode reinforces two essential lessons: the importance of preparation and the necessity for flexibility and composure when facing the unexpected.

2. The statue that could not be unveiled in time

At a ceremony to unveil a statue, a well-intentioned gardener planted flowers around the monument on his own initiative, unaware that clear access was required to remove the ceremonial flag. At the critical moment, no one wished to step on the newly planted flowers, and the

unveiling could not proceed as planned.

This seemingly minor incident highlights a universal truth in protocol: internal communication is as important as technical accuracy An event may fail not because of inadequate rules, but because teams are not properly aligned.



Invitations, Preparation, and Timing: The Foundation of Success

Formal invitations should be issued three to four weeks in advance, using clear language and a consistent visual identity. Telephone invitations should be reserved for situations with limited time or for very small events.

Managing confirmations - ideally up to three working days before the event - allows organizers to adjust seating arrangements, movement flows, and staffing requirements, minimizing last-minute improvisation. Preparation is not merely logistical; it is a fundamental expression of respect toward both guests and the hosting institution.

Organizing Ceremonies in Auditoriums

Events held in auditoriums require specific considerations:

- Defining the place of honor, usually to the right of the central axis.
- Positioning that ensures good visibility between the speaker and the principal guest.
- Language support through an interpreter when necessary.
- A seating plan available at the entrance
- Clearly identifying seats by name.
- Special attention to the tribunes of honor.
- Reserving at least two front-row seats for unexpected or unconfirmed guests.

Each detail contributes to order, comfort, and coherence - three elements essential to a positive institutional image.

Conclusion

A simple ceremony is one in which everything is understandable, logical, and dignified. Sobriety allows the essential to stand out: values, mission, history, and the people who embody the institution.

When applied with rigor and good judgment, military protocol becomes a powerful instrument of leadership and institutional communication. It is the meeting point between tradition and modernity, ensuring that each ceremony honors the past while projecting confidence into the future.

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