

José Domingos Nogueira da Silva

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Insights on Protocol, Events, Leadership and Institutional Relations

Every event tells a story about an organisation. It reflects the values, its culture, and its ability to build meaningful relationships. In a world where institutional image is forged through every interaction, events have become powerful tools of strategic leadership.

Behind every successful event stands a factor that is often invisible to attendees, yet essential to its impact: Protocol.

When properly understood and applied, protocol goes beyond ceremony and formality, becoming a leadership tool that creates trust, demonstrates respect, and enhances organisational credibility.

Even today, there is a common perception that protocol is limited to rules of precedence, reserved seating, or official ceremonies. However, those who lead events understand that protocol is far more than a set of formalities. It is a management, communication, and institutional relationship tool that transforms an event into an experience of credibility, respect, and trust.

Protocol as a leadership tool

Leading an event is not simply about ensuring that the programme runs on schedule or that logistical arrangements function smoothly. It means creating an environment where every participant feels acknowledged, valued, and appropriately accommodated.

Institutional protocol fulfills precisely this role. Through rules, procedures, and best practices, it ensures that interactions between individuals and institutions take place in an atmosphere of harmony, respect, and professionalism.

Whenever an organisation welcomes guests, gathers partners, signs agreements, or hosts a public ceremony, it is communicating messages about its values, culture, and leadership capacity. These messages are often conveyed through seemingly small details of protocol.

A carefully organised reception, the correct management of precedence, or thoughtful attention to attending dignitaries all contribute to strengthening trust and institutional reputation.

When a small mistake leads to major consequences

Throughout my military career, I witnessed a situation that clearly illustrates the impact a protocol error can have.

During a ceremony bringing together representatives from the various branches of the Armed Forces, as well as several high-ranking civilian authorities, one of the invited dignitaries realised shortly before the event began that their protocol position did not reflect the office they held and the institution they represented.

The reaction was discreet, yet significant. The individual left the venue before the ceremony started and later contacted the event organiser. The message was simple and direct:

"I will never come to your parties again!"

To an outside observer, the incident might appear to be a matter of personal pride or excessive formalism. The reality, however, was quite different. The issue was not the chair or the seat assigned. It was the institutional recognition owed to the role being represented.

That moment demonstrated that when protocol fails, it is not only the organisation of the event that suffers. Institutional communication breaks down, the image of the organising entity is compromised, and relationships built over many years can be weakened.

It was a lesson I never forgot and one that remains relevant to all professionals responsible for designing and leading events.

An event leader is also a relationship manager

The best event leaders do more than coordinate teams and manage schedules. They are managers of institutional relationships.

They understand that every detail carries meaning. They know that the way an organisation or individual is received, introduced, or integrated into a programme communicates messages of consideration and respect.

In this context, protocol functions as a silent language. A language that communicates recognition without the need for words.

When properly applied, protocol allows organisations to:

- Strengthen their image and credibility;
- Demonstrate respect for authorities, guests, and stakeholders;
- Prevent unnecessary embarrassment and conflict;
- Foster an environment of trust and cooperation;
- Enhance the overall participant experience.



Effective event leadership therefore depends on the ability to anticipate expectations, understand institutional sensitivities, and ensure that every participant is treated appropriately according to the role they represent.

Far beyond public institutions

Although protocol is often associated with government bodies, municipalities, or military organisations, its relevance extends to all types of institutions.

Companies, universities, foundations, associations, and third-sector organisations face daily challenges related to representation and institutional relations. In such contexts, protocol plays a fundamental role in building reputation and trust.

A corporate conference, an inauguration ceremony, an academic event, or a meeting with strategic partners are all clear examples of situations where event leadership requires protocol awareness and sensitivity. The most successful organisations understand that event excellence depends not only on available resources but also on attention to the details that make people feel respected and valued.

Conclusion

The success of an event is rarely remembered because of its logistics or décor. It is remembered because of how people felt during the experience.

For this reason, leading events is, above all, about leading human and institutional relationships.

Protocol does not exist to create unnecessary formality or barriers. It exists to ensure respect, order, and recognition between individuals and institutions. That is precisely what makes it an indispensable tool for any event leader.

Because, in the end, protocol is not simply about where people sit in a room. It is about building relationships of trust, preserving institutional dignity, and strengthening organisational reputation.

And that is a responsibility that no leader can afford to place in the background.

BY JOSÉ DOMINGOS NOGUEIRA DA SILVA

