

# Proper Protocol

Webster's describes Protocol as a code prescribing strict adherence to correct etiquette and precedence (as in diplomatic exchange and in military services).

Our Chef de Chemin de Fer and other National Officers have already begun their travels around the country. Therefore, many of you will be involved with protocol, as it applies to La Societe during the visits of your National guests.

While most Voyageurs are polite and knowledgeable about etiquette there have been examples of poor taste and lack of protocol during past visits of your National dignitaries.

While such errors in judgement can be the result of many things, they are more than likely the result of poor planning, a lack of communication or a lack of knowledge about the customs, habits, likes and dislikes of our Forty & Eight personalities.

Exercising "visitor courtesy" effectively requires that we be at least familiar with the basic aspects of protocol. We will therefore discuss some of them.

First and foremost is "communication." After your guest (s) has accepted your invitation (send to Voiture Nationale Headquarters), the chairperson should give all the details about the event, when requested. Be specific and complete in the information you send to the guest, and above all, avoid vague terms.

Do not describe attire as "informal." Use definite descriptions, such as: business casual (suit), gold coat-tuxedo shirt, black dinner jacket, evening gown, cocktail dress, etc. Over time, attire changes. If possible, tell the guest (s) what you and your lady will be wearing.

A complete description of the event (s) is imperative. Advise what normal weather situations may be. Make sure the guest (s) have telephone numbers and addresses of your local contacts. Lastly, confirm their travel plans, as you understand them, including flight numbers and arrival/departure times. Above all, do not assume anything!

Meeting your guest (s) properly and punctually is your next step. When meeting your guest (s) at the airport, you must guarantee immediate recognition as soon as they clear the security area (or the gate) if possible, not the baggage area, main lobby, or any place else.

If your guest (s) do not recognize your face, they will certainly know the chapeau, a large Forty & Eight emblem, or a sign. Nothing is more distressing or embarrassing to a traveler than to

arrive for a function and find no one at the meeting place. Technology has afforded us the opportunity to keep track of flight status through the use of airline websites and APPS so there is no excuse for this. The plane was early/late, the weather was bad, the traffic was congested, etc.; these things can be determined ahead of time and changes and allowances made.

When possible, it is nice to have a colleague, or someone who has served with the guest (s) to meet him/her. Circumstances may preclude this, but in any event, try to have as knowledgeable a Voyageur as possible to function as a driver. While your guests will be comfortable with any Voyageur, someone who is familiar with details of the event and local 40/8 activities will add greatly to the enjoyment of the trip.

Do not forget that your guest (s) may have been traveling for hours before you met them and if the car trip is lengthy, be sure to include an adequate comfort stop on the route.

If your guest is driving to your city, he/she should be met at the hotel (motel). Be sure to be there waiting for them. You should plan to be at the hotel before their estimated time of arrival in case they should get there early. Registration and room assignment should be done before they arrive, and the room should be the best available. Always provide two keys. (if signatures are required, they can be obtained later).

The room should reflect comfort, hospitality, and your careful planning. A modest arrangement of flowers as a token of appreciation is certainly in order. Fruit and/or snacks, especially if your meal function is much later, may also be provided. Other suggestions include the local newspaper, copy of the program of events, etc.

As soon as possible after arrival, give your visitors a chance to rest. Let them determine the amount of time they require... to ignore them for several hours because nothing was planned would be rude. Set a definite time for someone to call for them, so they will be ready for scheduled events.

Next comes the main event itself and the challenge of seating arrangements at the head table. A primary rule of seating places the two most important persons (the chairperson and the principal guest) at the center of the dais, with the guest at the right of the chairperson.

If a podium is used it should be set between the two, with the rest of the seating delegated according to the importance of the assignment as well as the office held in the chain of authority. If there is insufficient room at the head table to honor everyone you wish, then a lower table or group of tables in front could solve the problem. Place cards should be used, and any tickets required should be provided for your guest (s) long before the server requests them.

Now you have everyone seated and you are ready for the meal. You may find it difficult to offer deluxe food service at your function, due to the prohibitive costs, and occasionally paper or

plastic-ware is used...That's O.K., so long as whatever the menu, serve your guests the same food in the same manner as everyone else.

However, should your guest have dietary restrictions or a religious conviction which requires special diet, it is essential you provide for that situation. While it is the guest who has the responsibility to make such restrictions known, it is the welcome committee who has the responsibility to act on that information and provide special food ahead of time. Never wait until the program is underway to make such arrangements.

Now you are ready to introduce your guest, an honor that is often given to the highest-ranking member in attendance and not necessarily the chairperson or master of ceremonies. The reason for giving him/her this task is that it is a means of giving them an honor and involving him/her in the program.

Forty and Eight functions usually include some type of fundraising activity as a raffle and or fines. While the head table is considered fair game, you should not approach your special guest directly. If they desire to participate, they will make this fact known.

When it comes time to show your appreciation to your guests, remember that the very best way is to simply thank him/her. Many Voitures give a gift and when this is done, the emphasis should be more as a memento or token of appreciation, rather than an item of major monetary value. If your guest is flying, you should avoid bulky items that could make travel difficult or offer to ship it home for him/her at no cost to the guest.

If possible, some local sightseeing should be planned. After all, the visit may be the only time your guest will be in your area of the country. What may be an everyday attraction for you may well be a "once in a lifetime" opportunity for your visitors. The guest's spouse may have even more time to take in the sights but give them both an opportunity to express their wishes.

Never wait until the event is over before informing your guests of your departure plans for them, and do not embarrass your guests by obtaining transportation or discussing your arrangements in their presence. Inform them when they should be ready, and do not plan on too tight a schedule. Always assume there will be heavy traffic.

Checking out of the hotel should be accomplished without incident. Forty and Eight policy dictates that the host is responsible for accommodations for the guests at official functions, but if everyone involved, including the hotel is not aware of this, there could be problems at checkout time.

No matter how heavy the traffic, or how difficult the parking is, it is rude to drop your guests at the airport and drive on. You should arrange to have a small delegation stay with them until departure time or until it is time to proceed to the gate.

This period before departure could also be used to go over the event, and it is an opportunity for the guests to get names and addresses of those they may want to thank by note. It could also be an opportunity for a light breakfast or snack. Whatever you do, remember that your goodbye should be just as gracious as your welcome.

Also remember that the courtesy shown to your principal guest should also be given to your other visitors. Whether they play an active role in your event or simply grace your tables with their presence, they deserve the respect of their position and an appreciation of their interest in your event.

Last, but not to be forgotten, is saying "Thanks." Thank you notes are simply good manners. Your guests will send you and your committee expressions of their appreciation, but they also deserve a message of thanks from you. Be sure to include in your correspondence any photos that were taken.

This communication is the last stop in the process of protocol and being nice. It is the proper conclusion to your event and ties a ribbon on the whole package.

**REMEMBER, PROPER PROTOCOL WILL MAKE YOUR EVENT MORE MEMORABLE FOR BOTH YOU AND YOUR GUEST AND REFLECTS ON LA SOCIETE AS A WHOLE.**